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# Staff Member Perceptions of a Behavior Student Support Team Approach

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# Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

The implementation and sustainability of a positive behavior student support team (SST) were identified as a problem in a rural junior high school due to the number of discretionary alternative discipline placements that had occurred for students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration regarding the use of a behavior SST to address discipline concerns in the classroom before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement. Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Support provided the conceptual framework for this qualitative case study. Its research questions focused on faculty, staff, and campus administrators' understanding of the key elements of a behavior SST, the use of a behavior SST, and beliefs about the use of behavior SST. Data were gathered from 6 faculty, 2 staff, and 1 campus administrator through focus group interviews. Their responses were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis. The results indicated that while faculty, staff, and campus administration were interested in using the process, they felt they were not sufficiently trained in the behavior SST process and lacked the time to collaborate as a team. The prime recommendation derived from the findings was that faculty, staff, and campus administrators need professional development on the key elements of the behavior SST process and behavior strategies that are used in a collaborative learning environment, such as a professional learning community. Implications for positive social change include improved teacher collaboration in a support team and ultimately improved student behavior and achievement.

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# Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my parents, Raymond Howard Batto, Jr. and Mattie Elizabeth Butts Batto, and my sister, Marie Antoinette Batto. Their constant support and understanding of my desire to obtain my doctorate has kept me going through many trying times, missed family events, and moments when I just wanted to give up. You three are truly the "wind beneath my wings" and I do not know where I would be in this life without your unwavering love and support.

To my uncle, Victor Strickland, my aunts, Camille Iness and Genie Strickand, and my many cousins, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your continued support, love, and understanding.

To my extended family and friends, you have been a tremendous support in my endeavor by giving me words of wisdom and advice, prodded me (sometimes kicking and screaming) to keep moving forward, and dried my tears when I became frustrated with the process of writing my study. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything.

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My Committee Chairperson, Dr. Pamela Harrison…Thank you for stepping in as my first chairman and seeing me through to the end. Your words of wisdom have helped more than you can ever imagine!

My second Committee Member and University Reviewer, Dr. Donald Poplau and Dr. Dawn DiMarzo…I appreciate your assistance seeing me through the final steps of my study.

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# Section 1: Introduction to the Study

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, PL 108-446, advocates the use of proactive strategies to identify and facilitate student success using the Response to Intervention (RtI) process (IDEIA, 2004). In 2005, the faculty, staff, and campus administration in this study began implementing RtI along with its school Student Support Team (SST) approach to identifying students in need of additional services. It was not until a few years later that the district's schools entered into a grant to implement School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) into its discipline system. A critical next step for the school was to integrate a behavior SST—one that served the total child—and thus meet the behavior concerns of students before these concerns resulted in discretionary alternative discipline placements. For purposes of this study, discretionary alternative placements are placements that remove the child from their regular classroom setting such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and discipline alternative education programs. In addition, discretionary offenses and placements are those that do not involve a direct violation of law.

## Problem Statement

At a small, rural junior high school in Texas, the behaviors of student with disabilities that were handled in the traditional manner resulted in discretionary alternative placements that were beyond the limits set forth by the Texas Education Agency ( PBMAS Manuals, 2014). This school had not implemented a behavior SST process which advocates the use of early intervention strategies for problematic behavior before the behavior results in an alternative placement (M. Aragon, personal communication, August 1, 2011). Students with disabilities disciplined for severe behaviors at this small rural school were placed in discretionary alternative

settings without benefit of a behavior SST to address the behaviors before they became problematic (Texas Education Agency, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). These students were placed in alternative discipline education settings in substantially higher numbers than students without disabilities, as outlined in Tables 1, 2, and 3 (Texas Education Agency, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). Typically, students with disabilities have an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting after four discipline referrals; these students should also have a Functional Behavior Analysis/Behavior Improvement Plan (FBA/BIP) in place. When the student receives an eighth office referral, the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process must be repeated and the FBA/BIP must be adjusted to address the behavior or any new behaviors before the student can be referred to the Discipline Alternative Education Program (DAEP), in-school suspension (ISS), or off-campus suspension (OCS). However, the proportion of placements of students with disabilities, as compared to the general education placements, continues to remain constant. The problem affects the special education department's overall performance rating on the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) report in the areas of DAEP, ISS, and OCS placements.

The 2006-2013 PBMAS reports contain information regarding the number of students with disabilities as compared to students without disabilities for each district in the state of Texas. Each district's discipline data for students with disabilities is measured by a set of standards that have been predetermined by the PBMAS and compared to data for students without disabilities (Texas Education Agency, PBMAS Manuals, 2014). Table 1 represents the total number of incidents reported to the state by the district for ISS. Table 2 represents the total number of incidents reported to the state by the district for OCS. Table 3 represents the total

number of incidents reported to the state by the district for DAEPs. In most cases, the district has exceeded the acceptable PBMAS standard allowed by the state as shown in the tables. Table 4 represents the total student population and students with disabilities population. It is important to note that the discretionary placements to DAEP, OCS, and ISS in the PBMAS report include students in grades K-12. However, for the purposes of this study, only the junior high campus was studied since the reports cannot be broken down by campus. This qualitative case study used current and archival data to determine if the implementation of a behavior SST, which specifically looks at early intervention strategies, can address student behavior effectively and thus reduce alternative discipline placements for students with disabilities.

Table 1

2006-2013 Total Incidents Reported to the State for Discretionary In-School Suspension Placement Rates

| Year | Total placements | Students with disabilities placements | Students without disabilities placements | PBMAS standard | Students with disabilities rate | All students rate | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | 1774 | 355 | 1419 | 16.0 | 136.5 | 91.7 | 44.8 |
| 2007 | 1199 | 290 | 909 | 16.0 | 117.4 | 63.5 | 53.9 |
| 2008 | 917 | 207 | 710 | 10.0 | * | * | 51.4 |
| 2009 | 1520 | 258 | 1262 | 10.0 | 139.5 | 80.1 | 59.4 |
| 2010 | 1081 | 161 | 920 | 10.0 | 86.1 | 56.3 | 29.8 |
| 2011 | 974 | 114 | 860 | 10.0 | 71.7 | 50.2 | 21.5 |
| 2012 | 731 | 57 | 674 | 10.0 | 36.1 | 38.3 | -2.2 |
| 2013 | 779 | 89 | 680 | 10.0 | 53.6 | 40.2 | 13.4 |

*Note:* *No data reported. Adapted from Texas Education Agency 2006-2013 Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Reports.

Table 2

2006-2013 Total Incidents Reported to the State for Discretionary Out-of-School Suspension Placement Rates

| Year | Total placements | Students with disabilities placements | Students without disabilities placements | PBMAS standard | Students with disabilities rate | All students rate | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | * | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| 2007 | * | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| 2008 | 150 | 56 | 94 | 12.7 | 8.0 | 27.1 | 19.1 |
| 2009 | 267 | 84 | 183 | 13.0 | 14.1 | 45.4 | 31.3 |
| 2010 | 323 | 63 | 260 | 6.0 | 16.8 | 33.7 | 16.9 |
| 2011 | 259 | 44 | 218 | 6.0 | 13.4 | 27.7 | 14.3 |
| 2012 | 200 | 20 | 180 | 6.0 | 10.5 | 12.7 | 2.2 |
| 2013 | 250 | 44 | 206 | 6.0 | 12.9 | 26.5 | 13.6 |

*Note*: *Not measured by Texas Education Agency. Adapted from Texas Education Agency 2006-2013 Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Reports.

Table 3

2006-2013 Total Incidents Reported to the State for Discretionary DAEP Rates

| Year | Total placements | Students with disabilities placements | Students without disabilities placements | PBMAS standard | Students with disabilities rate | All students rate | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | 67 | 18 | 49 | 1.0 | 3.5 | 6.9 | 3.4 |
| 2007 | 50 | 22 | 28 | 1.0 | 2.8 | 8.9 | 6.3 |
| 2008 | 59 | 13 | 46 | 1.0 | 3.1 | 6.3 | 3.2 |
| 2009 | 64 | 16 | 48 | 1.0 | 3.4 | 8.6 | 5.2 |
| 2010 | 81 | 13 | 68 | 1.0 | 4.2 | 7.0 | 2.8 |
| 2011 | 66 | 10 | 56 | 1.0 | 3.4 | 6.3 | 2.9 |
| 2012 | 78 | 9 | 69 | 1.0 | 3.9 | 6.3 | 2.4 |
| 2013 | 61 | 12 | 49 | 1.0 | 3.1 | 7.2 | 4.1 |

*Note:* Adapted from Texas Education Agency 2006-2013 Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Reports.

Table 4

2006 - 2013 Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Population Rates

| School year | Total population | Students without disabilities | Students with disabilities |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | 1935 | 1675 | 260 |
| 2007 | 1887 | 1640 | 247 |
| 2008 | 1886 | 1679 | 207 |
| 2009 | 1897 | 1712 | 185 |
| 2010 | 1921 | 1734 | 187 |
| 2011 | 1940 | 1781 | 159 |
| 2012 | 1907 | 1749 | 158 |
| 2013 | 1940 | 1774 | 166 |

*Note:* Adapted from Texas Education Agency 2006-2013 Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Reports.

The second area of concern for the successful implementation of a behavior SST is that of school leadership and leadership's support of its implementation. RtI is primarily used to address academic problems within the school and not for behavior problems. In addition, campus leaders have not used the RtI and/or SWPBS process as a means to address student behavior and have not advocated for its use with their faculty and staff (M. Aragon, personal communication, July 1, 2011).

In prior years, the school has chosen to implement RtI and SWPBS as separate processes to address student needs in the areas of academics and behavior, respectively. Therefore, the intent of this qualitative case study was to determine if a behavior SST, that used early intervention techniques, could reduce the number of discretionary discipline placements of students with disabilities and whether campus leadership had a significant influence on the SST.

## Nature of the Study

This qualitative case study was designed as an "empirical inquiry" (Yin, 2009, p. 18) which sought to examine a problem in greater detail. According to Yin (2009) and Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), a case study is often undertaken in order to provide insight into a problem within a particular environment by interacting with the participants of the study on their level; this is especially so when the reasons for the problem are not evident to the researcher or participants. Yin (2009) stated that case studies are often one of the most difficult to do since the nature of the case study is to understand the reasons individuals and groups perceive and solve concerns.

A focus group approach was used to examine why the 39 members of the faculty (four content areas), support staff, and campus administration (including a counselor, a transition coordinator, teachers, and interventionists) of a small rural Texas junior high school were hesitant to use a behavior SST before the behavioral concerns resulted in a discretionary placement.

The first step of this qualitative study was to solicit focus group members from the staff of a small rural junior high school. An e-mail was sent to all members of the faculty, staff, and campus administration, with the following attachments: the electronic response form indicating willingness to participate, and a consent form. Candidates responded electronically to the informed consent or else they manually signed and returned the informed consent to me. The data collected from the focus group interviewees were used to determine areas of strength and weakness in behavior SSTs that needed to be considered in order to implement and sustain a successful behavior SST on the campus.

Additional data for this study were gathered from the district's Pupil Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to determine the discretionary placement rates for students in sixth through eighth grade at the beginning and end of the study. Data were collected on all students. Additional demographic data were gathered about the alternative discipline education placements of specific disabilities that are reported through the PEIMS system. The purpose of collecting demographic data was to determine the frequency at which students with disabilities are placed in discretionary alternative discipline education placements. All collected data followed FERPA rules about confidentiality and no identifiers were used in the reporting of the data.

The sample for the focus group were the 39 professional teachers from the site school's four content areas, support staff, and campus administration. I conducted pre and post interviews with the focus group to identify any changes in the participants' perceptions of a behavior SST as a result of receiving training about and implementing a behavior SST to address student discipline problems. The goal of this study had two goals: (a) to determine whether faculty, staff, and campus administration saw behavior SSTs as a viable tool for handling student behavior concerns; and (b) to learn the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration about campus leadership's support for the behavior SST process. In addition, student discipline referral data were used to determine whether the referral rate for alternative discretionary discipline placements changed during the period under study. Additional information on study specifics are found in Section 3.

## Research Questions

The following four research questions were used to guide this qualitative case study:

1. Do faculty, staff, and campus administration understand the key elements of a behavior SST and how to implement it?
2. How do faculty, staff, and campus administration view the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior concerns?
3. What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration regarding campus leadership support for the use of a behavior SST?
4. What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration after using the behavior SST approach in terms of usefulness of dealing with student problematic behavior in the classroom?

## Purpose of the Study

The processes of SWPBS and RtI, and the beliefs behind them, form a structure that supports procedures and techniques to keep students from falling into school failure by the use of early intervention techniques (Education Service Center, Region 20, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty and staff on the use a behavior SST to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement. Included in the study was an examination of the key elements of SWPBS and RtI – universal or whole group interventions, classroom or small group interventions, or individual or intense interventions.

The goal of the study's research questions was to learn how faculty, staff, and campus administration understood the key elements of a behavior SST, the use of a behavior SST, and the beliefs about the use of behavior SST. This qualitative case study used a focus group approach to better understand (a) the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration

about a behavior SST, before and after implementation, and (b) the role that leadership played within the campus setting before and after a presentation on the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior. A focus group approach was used because it was assumed that in a group discussion format participants would feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) about the faculty, staff, and administration's approaches and beliefs about the handling of discipline concerns.

## Conceptual Framework

The RtI and SWPBS models provided the conceptual framework for the study. Both are similar in their approach to helping students be successful academically or behaviorally. For example, both operate at three distinct tiers. Tier 1 is generally described as the universal tier, where all students receive the same general interventions, whether academic or behavioral. The interventions at Tier 2 are targeted to the students who were not successful at Tier 1 and needed an extra level of support to address the academic or behavior concerns. Tier 3 provides still more intense support. RtI and SWPBS will be defined in the following paragraphs.

Renaissance Learning (2009) stated that RtI is based on providing academic and behavioral instruction and interventions that are of the highest quality based on a student's strengths and weakness and monitoring the student's progress with data to determine if instruction and interventions need to be adjusted to meet the student's needs through a multitiered approach. Sprague, Cook, Wright, and Sadler (2008) stated that a student that exhibits behavior that is disruptive to the learning environment can be evaluated, receive behavioral support, and be monitored to reduce undesired behavior in the same fashion as an academic concern with a student. Similarly Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, and Horner (2009) suggested

that positive behavior support (PBS) like RtI is a process that strives to organize the supports "needed to achieve basic lifestyle goals while reducing problem behaviors that pose barriers" (p. 3). Sugai and Horner (2009) stated that schools have traditionally relied on reactive measures to handle discipline rather than proactive approaches that lead to positive behavior choices.

Similarly, SWPBS is based on the applied behavior analysis (ABA) model, which seeks to address unacceptable behavior by teaching an acceptable replacement behavior (Safran & Oswald, 2003). According to Tincani (2007), SWPBS is a distinctive application of ABA, which "applies basic behavioral principals to solve human problems by producing meaningful and durable outcomes" (para. 5). SWPBS is an approach that emphasizes building behavioral foundations for the social and academic success of the entire school by using a three-tiered method of behavior supports and data analysis of behavior incidents (Association for Positive Behavior Support, 2008).

In keeping with the push to improve schools, IDEIA 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law 108-446), advocated the use of RtI. In order to improve student success in school, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ([NCLB], Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425, 2002) emphasized the use of behavioral programs and interventions and academic programs and interventions which are scientifically based. RtI is built on the same premise as the SWPBS model. At their base tier, all students receive the same academic and behavior instruction. Those students who need additional academic and behavior support are moved into Tier 2 where they receive intense targeted interventions. At Tier 3, students still in need of academic and behavior support receive individualized intervention instruction.

Additionally, both RtI and SWPBS rely on a collaborative team approach to address the needs of the struggling student at each tier of intervention.

Brown-Chidsey (2005) argued that by providing collaborative environments, where decisions are made based on a problem-solving approach, that it is possible to contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes. These collaborative environments are where RtI and SWPBS team members come together to make decisions on interventions that can be applied to help the struggling student achieve success in today's classroom. Within these collaborative environments, team members must be able to make suggestions on strategies and other educational measures without fear of retaliation from other staff members. Without the support of strong leadership, these teams will often flounder, are of little help to the struggling student, and result in reactive rather than proactive discipline measures

For many years, schools across the United States have employed a reactive form of disciplining students when they violated codes of conduct that did not employ the use of behavior SSTs (Schachter, 2010). According to Schachter (2010), zero tolerance policies have been in force in U. S. schools for over 15 years, causing the number of school suspensions and placements in alternative settings to multiply. Because they are considered reactive in nature, the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies in dealing with problematic behavior is being questioned by many (Schachter, 2010). Sugai (2009) noted that 40 states are now implementing programs to handle behavior concerns that are proactive in nature. According to Sprague, Cook, Wright, and Sadler (2008), schools that use the traditional methods of discipline without a system of positive behavior supports and rewards will contribute not only to higher discipline referral rates but also to academic failure.

## Definition of Terms

*Discipline Alternative Education Program (DAEP):* A discipline alternative setting other than that of the student's regular classroom that is in an off-campus setting and requires that the student receive instruction in the four core areas and self-discipline (Texas Education Code §37)

*Discretionary placements:* Placements that are not considered mandatory (violations of law) and general violations of the school's student code of conduct (Texas Education Code §37)

*In-school Suspension (ISS*): Alternative discipline setting for students who violate the campus' Student Code of Conduc*t* (Texas Education Code §37)

*Mandatory placements:* Discipline placements that are considered to be in violation of law (Texas Education Code §37)

*Off-campus suspension:* Disciplinary placements that require removal of the student from the home campus for a period not to exceed three days (Texas Education Code §37)

*Response to Intervention (RtI):* School-wide system for identifying and providing intervention to students falling behind their grade-level peers in the core academic subjects. It has been researched mainly in reading but could be applied to writing, math, and even behavior (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law 108-446).

*School discipline:* Method used to discipline students for infractions of the Student Code of Conduct and/or the Texas Education Code §37. Infractions may include but are not limited to possession, use, or distribution of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco; drug or tobacco paraphernalia; fighting; weapons of any kind; gang related offenses; graffiti; truancy; persistent misbehavior; or leaving class or school grounds without permission (Texas Education Code Chapter 37: Discipline, Law, and Order, 2009).

*School support team (SST):* Multidisciplinary member team that meets to address student and school concerns in academic, behavioral, and emotional areas (Johnson & Ginsberg, 1996)

*School wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) or Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS):* Emphasizes building foundations for social and academic success for the entire school, stressing the prevention of misbehavior using a three-tiered continuum of behavior supports, and analyzing data to make effective decisions (Association for Positive Behavior Support, 2008).

*Student discipline records:* Those records that are kept on individual students for the district and reported to the state in PEIMS student data management system (Poteet Independent School District, 2009).

## Scope

The scope of this qualitative case study on perceptions about the use of a behavior SST was limited to the faculty, staff, and campus administration of a small rural school district in Texas. These participants were professional employees who worked with students in grades six through eight. They may or may not have had a working knowledge of SSTs. An invitation to participate in this study was sent to all professional employees via school e-mail.

The study was limited to alternative discipline placements of students with disabilities, students without disabilities, and those with specific disabilities. It did not take into account any other demographic information nor any other factor that could influence discipline.

## Assumptions

I was guided by the following assumptions:

1. That the focus group is a valid means to collect information from faculty, staff and campus administration on the use of behavior SSTs;

2. That the individuals participating in the focus group answered the questions honestly and professionally;

3. That the data entered into the PEIMS data collection system was entered accurately.

## Limitations

This study suffered from the following seven limitations:

1. Teachers' overall knowledge and understanding of RtI, SWPBS, and SSTs.

2. Campus administrators provide initial staff development in regards to the processes, but they cannot control the level of comprehension that an individual has on what they have been told.

3. Teachers' lack of initiative to refer students to a problem-solving team. Faculty, staff, and campus administration can be informed of the process, but only they can decide to use it.

4. The overall participation in the study by faculty, staff, and campus administration may not be adequate to present a valid finding.

5. The study will be limited to the responses given by the participants during the focus group interview.

6. Once selected as a participant, the participants will complete both focus group interviews.

7. Due to the fact that the initial intent to participate is online, staff members that do not have internet access at home may have been excluded from showing interest in participating if they did not take advantage of the use of school computers.

8. The presence of an administrator within the focus group interview will not hinder the participation of the other participants.

## Delimitations

The initial participation invitation was sent to all professional employees via school email. Some possible delimitations were:

1. Due to the fact that the initial intent to participate is online, staff members that do not have internet access at home may have been excluded from showing interest in participating if they did not take advantage of the use of school computers.

2. The study was limited to the study of alternative discipline placements of students with disabilities, students without disabilities, and specific disabilities. It does not take into account any other factor that may influence discipline or any other demographic information.

## Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it gave school faculty, staff, and campus administration insight into why the behavior support team process is not widely used on the school campus. Specifically, it gave campus leadership valuable information about the opinions and needs of teachers that could help them develop a behavior SST process that would be advantageous to all involved and reduce the amount of time students would spend in alternative disciplinary settings for behaviors that could be addressed in the early stages—before they reach the point of disciplinary action. It was expected that teachers would become more versed in the behavior SST process as well as in behavior strategies that are easy and quick to implement with students in order to curtail potentially disruptive behavior before it resulted in an office referral.

By using the RtI and SWPBS processes as a unified method of addressing student behavioral difficulties, faculty, staff, and campus administration could begin to recognize other, more positive methods of handling discipline rather than the traditional punitive measures. In combining the processes, faculty, staff, and campus administration could begin the collegial, collaborative conversations that would benefit not only the school, but also their students' overall school experience. Once students could see that there are expectations for everyone's behavior, they could adapt their behavior so that their behavior was less disruptive to the learning environment and met school standards.

Therefore, it is expected that this study will provide (a) additional information that will be valuable to all parties by adding to the knowledge base of teachers, staff, and campus administrators; (b) knowledge gathered from faculty, staff, and administrators about current disciplinary practices and how they are handled at the campus level in order to develop a basis for recommendations that are valuable to the campus; positive recommendations on what is needed at the campus in order to implement a successful and productive behavior SST that begins to meet the needs of only the students, but also those of the faculty, staff, and campus administration.

Because there is limited research on the use of the process professional application of this study is important to the study site as well as to the study of behavior SSTs in schools. While there is an abundance of information on behavior strategies, the information on behavior SSTs is limited. With the passage of IDEIA 2004 and NCLB of 2001, most schools implemented RtI teams, but these teams primarily address academic concerns and lack the knowledge to implement scientifically researched behavior strategies; they even lack a good working

knowledge of the process of implementing behavior strategies (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009). This study will give administrators valuable information on which to build a foundation for implementing behavior supports that will benefit all campus stakeholders.

## Implications for Social Change

**S**tudent misbehavior in the classroom and other school settings has led many teachers and administrators to believe that by simply punishing the student for the misbehavior, they are correcting the problem and it will not recur. But in order to impact social change for both students and the school community that will help the student develop a more positive means to interact in the educational setting with others, educators must provide behavior supports and strategies that address problematic student behaviors. Simply using an alternative discipline placement setting does not teach students to control the disruptive behavior nor does it teach them how to handle their behavior outside of the school. By providing teachers, staff, and administrators with an avenue to address student behavior, teachers and staff will begin to realize that a productive environment, in which learning can take place free of the distractions of inappropriate behavior, will not only benefit their students but others within the school system; it will also help develop skills to use in the world outside of school (Green, 2009). If teachers work collaboratively on behavioral issues and on strategies to improve them, student behavior and achievement will improve as the result.

## Summary and Transition

A small rural Texas junior high campus had a significant overrepresentation of students with disabilities in alternative discipline settings. Many of these placements were discretionary in nature and could best be handled through a multi-tiered approach that clearly outlined general

conduct expectations for all students at the universal tier. Should more intense interventions be needed, a multi-disciplinary team would be able to address these concerns by using a collaborative problem-solving approach.

Section 2 presents a review of the literature on RtI, SWPBS, leadership, and discipline. The intent of the literature review was to provide a strong foundation for the use of a combined process to address student behavior concerns before they become problematic within the school system. The literature review also took a look at the role of the administrator or of the leadership component within the multi-disciplinary team and its function within the school as a whole.

Section 3 contains the research design, instrumentation used, and the data analysis. Section 4 consists of the data analysis and interpretation of the data as it relates to the research questions and hypotheses. Section 5 summarizes the material presented and offers recommendations for social change.

Section 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

The implementation and sustainability of a behavior SSTs were identified as problems in a rural junior high school due to the number of discretionary alternative discipline placements that occurred for student behavioral infractions. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration on the use a behavior SST to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and resulted in a discretionary discipline placement. The research questions in this study centered around how the faculty staff, and campus administration understood the key elements of a behavior SST, their use of a behavior SST, and their beliefs on the use of behavior SST. The following literature review investigates various aspects of students' behavior support teams, including but not limited to, the foundations of SSTs, leadership qualities, and discipline.

The following databases were used to locate literature for this study: Education Research Complete, Teacher Reference Center, Google Scholar, and Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection. The following search terms used: *Response to Intervention, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports,* and *leadership theories*. While conducting research on RtI and SWPBS, two central concerns became apparent. One concern was that of leadership and its importance to the success of behavioral SSTs held at the campus level. The other concern was teachers' perceptions about what behavior could be handled in the classroom without the need for administrative intervention.

## Background Information on RtI and SWPBS

The sections below will give a brief overview of RtI and SWPBS models and their roles in determining the tiers of support that are offered to students. While both models operate on the same premises of providing support to struggling students, the first, RtI, is more geared to academic needs while the other, SWPBS, specifically looks at behavior.

### Response to Intervention

Multitiered systems of behavioral and academic prevention were in existence before RtI was considered a practical choice for offering interventions to students who were struggling within the school setting (Kratochwill, Volplansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007). IDEIA (2004) and NCLB (2001) do not identify RtI as the model to use when identifying children who struggle academically and behaviorally. However, both acts suggest that improved student performance will occur when scientifically based research interventions are used to address student academics and behavior (Education Service Center, Region 20, 2007). The practice of RtI allows school districts the flexibility of using another method with which to identify students who are struggling academically and behaviorally and to address the concern early before it becomes problematic (Education Service Center, Region 20, 2007).

During the 1980s practitioners in education became increasingly displeased with the current trends in special education. As a result, implementation of interventions that were collaborative in nature were introduced to support teachers and students in the learning process that were having difficulty (Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005). These particular collaborative approaches carry various names but are considered multi-disciplinary approaches. Burns, Vanderwood, and Ruby (2005) stated that the earlier concepts of the problem-solving model are

closely aligned with the RtI model that has become prevalent today. They further advocated that a critical part of the RtI process is that of interventions designed and implemented by the team members being monitored for effectiveness. Progress is monitored and documented in order to determine which strategies are working, which ones need to be adjusted, and which ones need to be abandoned altogether.

RtI is just such a process that involves the use of documented change in either academics or behavior resulting from the utilization of a scientifically researched-based intervention over a period of time (Sprague, Cook, Wright, & Sadler, 2008). The intervention is based on instruction and support that is tailored to the student based on the results of assessments. Students who make significant progress are returned to the regular classroom instruction while those who make only nominal progress are retained at the current tier of intervention and interventions are adjusted or changed to meet the needs of the student in a small group setting. Students who continue to show little or no progress are moved to the next tier of intervention with more concentrated instruction that is usually delivered in a one-on-one fashion.

**School Wide Positive Behavior Support**

SWPBS is an intervention model for behavior, much like RtI, that operates at three tiers. Tier 1 (universal) interventions works on the premise that all students receive the same instruction on behavior. Tier 2 (group) interventions are delivered to students with similar behavioral needs in small group settings or the classroom. Tier 3 (individual) interventions are delivered to individual students at a more intense level. It is important to note that at Tiers 2 and 3 when SWPBS is used in tandem with RtI students will have more access to the general curriculum in the regular classroom setting when behavior is monitored and adjusted to decrease

interferences (Sailor, Zuna, Choi, Thomas, & McCart, 2006; Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2008). It should be noted that SWPBS is now commonly known as Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) and that the terms are commonly interchanged, but it is still the same process.

Sandomierski, Kincaid, and Algozzine (2008) advocated at Tiers 2 and 3 the use of research-based interventions with supports that are individually designed to the student's needs along with monitoring of the interventions to determine progress or lack of progress. At both of these tiers, the campus administrator is responsible for ensuring the fidelity of the interventions, as well as appropriate monitoring of the team for effective decision-making. Prior responses to problem behavior have been to react to specific student misbehavior by using punitive measures such as "reprimands, loss of privileges, office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions" (Association for Positive Behavior Support, 2008). However, the inconsistent use of these measures, along with the lack of positive behavior strategies can lead to increased instances of problem behavior. According to Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS), SWPBS is an approach that emphasizes building foundations for social and academic success for the entire school, stressing the prevention of misbehavior using a three-tiered continuum of behavior supports, and analyzing data to make effective decisions (APBS, 2008). SWPBS is further defined by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) (2004) as consisting of strategies that are based on broad individual and system wide approaches aimed at improving student educational and behavioral outcomes (OSEP, 2004).

SWPBS is based on the premise that everyone within the school, students and adults, are involved and that universal standards for behavior are enforced across all school environments (APBS, 2008). The main goal of this phase of SWPBS is that expected standards for behavior are taught and reinforced consistently and incidents of misbehavior are handled in a consistent fashion. For those students who continue to present at-risk behaviors, secondary prevention strategies to correct the behavior are introduced in a group fashion with students that present the same or similar misbehaviors. If a student continues to present at-risk behavior after universal and group interventions, the student then moves on to tertiary measures that include intense individual strategies.

## Leadership in RtI and SWPBS

John F. Kennedy once said, "participate…in the solution of the problems that pour upon us, requiring the most sophisticated solutions to complex and obstinate issues" (Schon, 1983, p. 6). This quote certainly applies to the administrator in the implementation of RtI and SWPBS. During the initial implementation planning stages, modifications to current practices and ideas must be willing to be changed by the person in authority on the campus (Ogonosky, 2008). The leader must be willing to adjust her thinking in order not to become fixed in their thoughts on RtI and to accept other stakeholder's perspectives (Ogonosky, 2008).

Lambert et al. (2002) wrote that learning is not something that follows a specific path rather it is molded around the learner and reflects their experiences and attitudes. This is very true of the students involved in RtI and SWPBS process. Administrators cannot arbitrarily set interventions without looking at all of the variables within their student body such as needs, culture, socio-economic status, and others that affect student learning. They must look at each

student as an individual in the problem-solving process and determine the interventions that best suit that student.

Lambert et al. (2002) further wrote that the actions of leaders are based on the intentions and behaviors that create an environment in which participants are willing to embark on new avenues because there is a mutual trust between all involved. Lambert et al. (2002) went on further to say that those who are in a leadership capacity should possess qualities such as ethical behavior, a purpose, be able to enable groups to move toward meaning within their environment, be able to observe previous learning and help transform it into new learning that fits the environment, understand how change affects an environment, be able to understand situations and draw upon them for future learning, be able to let others take the lead, and the courage to be a risk taker. Brown-Chidsey (2005) wrote "by promoting collegial and collaborative environments where the decision making is based on the implementation of a problem-solving paradigm…it is possible for administrators to create nurturing, caring, and positive environment that contributes to the improvement of educational outcomes for all students and the instructional practices of teachers" (p. 298). She further wrote that leaders should consider beliefs by which their teams function within the organization. Brown-Chidsey(2005) outlined the principles that Smith and Stodden (1998) introduced as a way in which school leaders could help teams function more efficiently. These nine principles are: have a common vision, give members encouragement to actively contribute, share in decisions made by the team, validate collaborative discussions, allow for multiplicity in thinking, include all team members affected by the change, aid in the growth of team members, work within the normal setting of the team, and act in an adaptable and energetic manner.

With the passage of NCLB of 2001, the Reauthorization of IDEIA of 2004, and the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education of 2002, administrators have been asked promote a more collaborative environment that includes regular and special education teachers working together to design and implement programs that are of the highest quality and open to all students regardless of learning capacity (Brown-Chidsey, 2005). Administrators are now being challenged to use scientifically researched-based interventions and effective strategies that will promote successful outcomes for their students who are struggling with the use of a problem-solving approach that promotes collaboration and shared inquiry. It is important to note that administrators who use this approach to problem-solving will be relying on having an open discussion of student abilities as well as a good understanding of the supports needed to implement the strategy and the resources that it requires (Brown-Chidsey, 2005).

RtI and SWPBS teams are similar multi-tiered approaches to addressing the needs of the struggling student. The leadership skills of the campus administrator play a tremendous role in the success of these RtI and SWPBS teams. Ogonosky (2008) stressed that the successful campus leaders have a good grasp on helping all students meet educational needs and have accepted that change is inevitable. Therefore, one can conclude that effective RtI and SWPBS teams must include a leader that embraces the thought that the implementation of RtI and SWPBS is not something that happens quickly, but rather takes time to develop and must be nurtured.

Research on RtI and SWPBS as an integrated process is very limited as is the research on effective problem-solving teams and the leadership roles within these teams. Most of the researchers point to a distributed form of leadership within the problem-solving team. Brown-

Chidsey (2005) asserted that successful leadership within the problem-solving teams needs to move to a more collaborative process that supports the effective use of evidence-based interventions. Brown-Chidsey (2005) went on to say that schools need to be a positive environment in which student success will grow. One way this can happen is for administrators to make the change from the role of the traditional administrator to that of an instructional leader who empowers teachers to take on a more active role within the problem-solving team. Portin (2004) defined instructional leadership as one that the integrity of instruction is preserved by modeling effective practices in teaching, curriculum, and resources“ (Rafoth & Forska, 2006, p. 133). However, Rafoth and Foriska (2006) also point out that the more government entities and school districts prescribe what happens in schools and curriculum, the less likely the administrator is to provide instructional leadership.

In order to lead effective school reform, Marzano (2003) stated that school leaders must consider three leadership principles and three leadership characteristics. This is especially important to consider when implementing RtI and SWPBS within the school system. The first principle Marzano (2003) outlined for effective change is that a small group of educators that can effect change in a positive manner if they have a leadership that is willing to work with them to effect change. Traditionally schools have thought that the leadership of the school should reside solely with one person. However, for the processes of RtI and SWPBS to work effectively in the schools, teachers and others who work with students on a daily basis must be involved in the decisions that affect the daily lives of all in the school. Marzano (2003) stated in his second principle that the leaders of the team must have respect for all members of the team while still guiding the team to its goal. The RtI and SWPBS teams need to ensure that all members of the

school that their opinions and views as professionals are important and will be taken into consideration when the team reflects on all possible solutions to a situation. The team leadership, including the administrative leader, must be attentive to the concerns of the teachers, approachable, and actively engage in the collaborative process with non-team members. Teams that exclude and disrespect the opinions of the non-teams will not receive the support needed to make the RtI and SWPBS process work. Principle 3 further states that interpersonal relationships among teams are directly related to effective leadership behaviors (Marzano, 2003). Effective leaders of RtI and SWPBS teams must be able to establish a personal relationship not only with team members, but also with non-team members as well in order for the processes to be successful.

Marzano (2003) stated that the characteristics that will build a successful personal relationship between the team and non-team members are optimism, honesty, and consideration. In any successful venture, optimism is essential in any process that involves changing beliefs and attitudes that have been in existence for years. Optimism not only provides hope that a reform will be successful, it helps increase the self-esteem of everyone involved and motivates non-team members to try new ideas strategies. Honesty is another important characteristic of an effective leader and team. In order for the RtI and SWPBS processes to enhance student learning and behavior, the leader and team members must be completely honest with all other staff members about the successes and obstacles the team faces as it begins the implementation and evaluation processes. Purposefully omitting or withholding information from others will only serve to undermine the success of the RtI and SWPBS processes. Finally, consideration is given to all aspects involved in the processes. Those involved in the processes must not discriminate against

any idea presented to the team or the purpose bringing the idea to the team. Discriminating against any idea presented would hamper the team's efforts to put the necessary changes into place.

## Traditional Versus Proactive Discipline

Sprague, Cook, Wright, and Sadler (2008) reported that schools that use traditional methods to discipline students contributed to a higher rate of discipline referrals and academic failure because they did not have a proactive system of discipline in place that incorporated behavior expectations along with the teaching of positive behavior attributes. With the execution of a multi-tiered behavior and academic intervention plan that identifies potential problems early, coupled with interventions that will address the problem directly, the desired result could remove potential obstacles that can lead to the student being unsuccessful. Schools should use universal interventions that are taught and used in the same manner with all students so students will know exactly what is expected of them, thus keeping problematic behavior from arising (Sprague et al., 2008). With the use of the multi-tiered behavior and academic model, the school is better equipped to monitor students who are in need and provide earlier intervention. By intervening early in the process, school personnel can assist the student to identify the problematic behavior, its antecedent, and one or more of variety of ways the situation can be dealt with so that a positive result happens.

Today's schools face a multitude of problems that were not evident in years past and must make a shift in how discipline is handled. Osher, Bear, Sprague, and Doyle (2010) stated that schools have typically responded to discipline by issuing punitive measures such as referrals, alternative education placements, and corporal punishment. Such measures are only short term in

nature and do not address the underlying problems. Many of these reactionary punishments were the result of zero tolerance policies that were implemented in the mid 1990s by the United States government to combat the rising numbers of violent incidents in schools. However, Booker and Mitchell (2011) have stated that these policies are under scrutiny because they have now included not only behaviors that are considered punishable under the law, but behaviors that are considered inappropriate and discretionary in nature. Allman and Slate (2012) stated that these measures are used by schools despite known lack of success in dealing with the underlying concerns.

In recent years, SWPBS has sought to shift this thought process to a more proactive approach. Clonan, McDougal, Clark, and Davison (2007) stated SWPBS focuses on an approach that uses the acknowledgment of positive behavior and where teachers and staff spend time actively teaching the behavior expectations for all students. Clonan et al. (2007) stated that student misbehavior in the classroom contributes to a tremendous depletion of the amount of time spent on instruction because teachers and staff bring to a standstill any instruction or learning that maybe taking place to deal with the misbehaving student. Sugai (2009) stated that all students need to be exposed to a curriculum that fosters social skills that are preventative as well as positive and that mirrors the goals and mission statement of the school. Hawken, Adolphson, Macleod, and Schumann (2009) point out that 10-15% of the students, even though exposed to a SWPBS system, are still going to have misbehaviors that result in more intensive measures at Tier 2.

Sugai (2009) suggested that this is where the misbehaviors result in students being removed from class so that instruction can continue. Most teachers will handle these types of

situations by sending the student to the office so that it becomes someone else's problem and the student's behavior is not reshaped but continues along a negative path that will lead to alternative placements that remove the student from the instructional setting. Netzel and Eber (2003) stated that if alternative placements were truly successful then why would students want to be placed in the same situation and that while it was an effective deterrent for some students that this was not the case for all students placed in alternative disciplinary settings.

## RtI, SWPBS, SSTs, and Behavior

Sugai and Horner (2009) concluded that IDEA (1997, 2004) looks to "scientifically based interventions and supports" in the prevention stage to aid in the needs of children who have not only academic challenges, but also behavioral concerns (p. 226). RtI is the multi-tiered approach that lends itself as the vehicle to implement the strategies necessary to struggling students (Sugai and Horner (2009) and Rudebusch (2007). Rudebusch (2007) stated that RtI provides the framework for the three areas that RtI is designed to impact: prevention, intervention, and identification. SWPBS framework lies in the multi-tiered supports, much like RtI, in which student behavior is analyzed, monitored, and supported through a series of interventions, monitoring, and revising involving not only individual students but the entire student body (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010).

Bohnan and Wu (2012) have compared SWPBS (PBIS) and RtI and found that both are similar in their approaches to helping students become successful in school by the use of common starting points, interventions, and monitoring of progress. However, Coffey and Horner (2012) asserted that without school leaders supporting the processes and teacher buy-in that the processes are less likely to be implemented and have a commitment to the overall process by

teachers and staff. O'Connor and Witter Freeman (2012) concluded that while many schools have implemented programs that address student success through interventions, they lack the support of district school leaders to sustain the process for any length of time. Bambara, Nonnemacher and Kern (2009) found that the lack of the elements of support, understanding, and acceptance by school leadership of the process is a major obstacle in sustaining any SST process within the school, even if there is district support.

Teachers are overwhelmed by the demands of the RtI, PBIS, and SST process and often do not know how the process should work or fit within the school system. Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009) added that many teachers cited lack of resources, parental input, and time as part of the reasons for not fully implementing or using RtI and SWPBS appropriately. Lee-Tarver (2006) further suggested that teachers noted the lack of training necessary for SSTs prior to implementation so that they are better able to support and implement the process.

McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, and Sugai (2010) stated that without consideration of training before implementation and continued and sustained training for current staff and incoming staff, that programs will lack the fidelity that the programs need to continue. In another study conducted by Bradshaw and Pas (2011), it was noted that developing a sound base for implementation and sustainability of these types of programs was a necessity. Therefore, it could be concluded that schools who rush into such programs will often meet with teacher resistance because the proper training and implementation have not taken place and are not continued as new staff enters the school system.

Ehren (2012) stated the term prevention is normally used at the elementary level and secondary teachers may not be familiar with how to implement prevention activities at their

level. Fairbanks, Simonsen, and Sugai (2008) suggested that most teachers have ready access to primary level classroom management techniques to handle the general secondary population of students just as their elementary counterparts. However, when it comes to select groups of students or an individual student in need of behavior support, secondary teachers need to adopt a shift in thinking about what goes on in the traditional classroom with behavior and how discipline is handled. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) explained that teachers need to have at their disposal strategies when data indicates that a child is not progressing as expected. However, Fairbanks, Simonsen, and Sugai (2008) cautioned that the strategies that are implemented must be backed up by data and a strong primary level of support for students.

## Teacher Efficacy in RtI, SWPBS, and SSTs

Ross and Horner (2007) described teacher efficacy as the "ability to encourage student learning and positive behavioral change (Aston & Webb, 1986)" (para. 9). Nunn and Jantz (2009) further stated that it is a teacher's ability to control student achievement with "support, structure, and efficiency" (para. 4). However, when teachers are not trained in behavioral strategies or classroom management and do not have the support of administration, they lack the ability to affect positive student behavior. Rankin and Aksamit (1994) asserted that secondary teachers felt that by referring a student to administrators would cause fellow teachers to view them as ineffective in the classroom.

Ross and Horner (2007) noted when a teacher's desired level of efficacy in the classroom is challenged by a student's behavior that they either see it as a small hurdle to overcome or a problem that is far greater than they want to deal with. Rankin and Aksamit (1994) stated in order for teachers to believe that they could be effective in bringing about changes in behavior in

their students they needed to feel they were a part of the solution rather than just being told what to do. School leaders need to recognize that merely forcing teachers to use a problem-solving approach without giving them adequate training, allowing time to meet and collaborate with other teachers or staff who are knowledgeable in behavior strategies, and to be given the means in which to implement behavior strategies does not ensure that teachers will be effective in regards to efficacy in handling discipline in the classroom. Rankin and Aksamit (1994) asserted that teachers who feel like they are part of the solution will regard handling discipline as a less stressful event.

## Literature Related to the Conceptual Framework

The basis for this study revolves around the effective implementation of RtI and SWPBS within the school system. Over the years, there have been many theorists who provided the framework and guidelines for the activities of effective school leaders that guide these processes. I will outline some of the primary theorists that have been instrumental in guiding the development of effective school leaders. The works of Covey (1989, 1991), Marzano (2005), Sergiovanni (1992, 2005), Lambert (2003), and Deming (Lunenburg, 2008) will serve as a basis for leadership attributes within RtI and SWPBS teams.

The work of Covey (1989), although not designed specifically for the education realm, has been vastly important in helping educational leaders become successful in their positions. Covey (1991) identified seven habits of highly effective leaders that will generate helpful results in most situations. The habits of highly effective leaders are: be proactive in controlling your environment, begin with the end in mind by always keeping the vision and goals of the organization in mind, put first things first by focusing on those things that are important to the

vision and goals, think win-win so that all members of the organization are involved and will benefit, seek first to understand and then to be understood by establishing a good line of communication that takes into account the needs of all involved, synergize the group so that more can be accomplished, and sharpen the saw by learning from past mistakes and expanding stakeholder skills, so repeats do not occur.

Covey (1991) built on the seven habits mentioned above as the basic operating principles of effective leadership. However, it is important to point out that Covey emphasized that leaders need to have a robust personal sense of purpose and strong ethical principles that guide them on a daily basis. Covey (1991) indicated that leaders believe in others, do not react excessively to negative comments, keep up with the world around them, maintain a healthy lifestyle, work well with others in groups, see life and the situations around them as adventures, regularly practice continual learning, service orientation, radiate positive energy, believe in others, lead balanced lives, look for adventure, become a change catalyst, and find ways to renew themselves. Covey (1991) further stated that educators should begin the process with the end in mind. The leaders create a vision statement that outlines all of the variables that would strengthen the reform process.

While Covey presented a dim view of education in the areas of trust and communication, he blames this on administrators and other team leaders for not sharing their vision, thus allowing individual stakeholders to work on their own agendas. Covey (1991) went on to state that the vision to which teachers and other educators need to contribute is one in which they work towards assisting students toward empowerment. He also believed that once teachers are not limited to their own knowledge and act as facilitators of the learning process that they are

better able to meet the needs of their students and can inspire them to become more accountable for their own learning.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), over a period of three decades, have reviewed 69 studies looking for specific behaviors related to principal leadership. They have identified 21 categories of leadership responsibilities that have a significant effect on student achievement. Marzano et al. (2005) identified the 21 school leader responsibilities, their correlation with student academic achievement, and the two traits that seem to bring about the 21 responsibilities, first-order and second-order change.

Marzano et al. (2005) found that two factors, first-order and second-order change, seemed to have underlying factors in the 21 responsibilities. Marzano concluded that first-order change was incremental and thought of as the next step to take in the process of becoming an effective leader. Second-order change, on the other hand, required new ways of thinking and acting and was a striking departure from what was expected.

Sergiovanni (1992) agreed that leadership is important in the improvement of our schools. He claims that this is accomplished when a new leadership practice is invented that morally centers on purpose, values, and beliefs. “The Head, Heart, and Hand of Leadership” developed by Sergiovanni (1992) helps educators better understand new practices in the way of thinking. He believed that the heart shapes the head of leadership and drives the hand. In turn, reflections on choices and actions restructure the heart and hand. In other words, a leader may have to put much of what they have learned from previous leadership training aside and take on more modern methods and practices.

Sergiovanni (1992) believed that in order to be a successful leader, one must build a system that empowers others in the decision making process and the implementation and monitoring of the process. As group members begin to see how their ideas boost a situation, they will begin to take ownership of the idea and share in its development and nurturing. Early on the leader may take on the role of the authoritative figure in helping develop the ideas, but once the group begins to bond, the leader moves to a moral leadership position. At this point, monitoring of the group is not as close because the group members are now taking ownership of the situation and functioning independently of the leader.

Lambert (2003) asserted that while teachers are the heart of true leadership, the principal still holds a special capacity. While a principal's major role is to work with teachers to provide purposeful learning for the students, principals are there to build an environment where staff members meet to discuss the implementation of policies and practices in a non-threatening manner and trust in one another (Lambert, 2003). Lambert's work centered on capacity-building principals. These principals believe that teachers and other staff members have the ability to serve as leaders in the school. Lambert (2003) offered a list of 15 skills that a principal must have in order to build capacity in their schools that ranged from clarifying values to establishing common goals, visions, and norms.

Deming's Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management approach in which the members of an organization have an intrinsic need to improve the organization they are a part of and that the people in management strive to continually improve the system for all (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2004). While TQM is traditionally assumed to be applied only to for-profit organizations, it has found its way into the educational realm. TQM provides a support system

for such developments as team teaching, site-based management, cooperative learning, and outcomes-based education. Deming's 14 principles can be used to transform schools and their way of thinking by helping school leaders to focus on strategies that will bring the stakeholders to a common goal or vision by promoting trust and collaboration.

Morrissey, Bohanan, and Fenning (2010) stated that today's schools are in a constant state of change. According to Schachter (2010), most urban schools went to zero-tolerance policies after the occurrence of violent crimes rose. They now doubt the effectiveness of these policies since they seemed to have little effect on the discipline referral rate. School climate in many schools became more unreceptive to student needs as a result of these zero tolerance policies.

A thorough review of the literature supports the practices of SWPBS for all students in order to set general and consistent behavior guidelines for all students. Safran and Oswald (2003) stated that SWPBS is based on a framework that is holistically designed and is mutual and affirmative. This framework is designed to be a more proactive approach that works toward preventing the behaviors before they happen. Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, and Young (2011) believed that these proactive approaches have produced school climates that are "supportive, corrective, and assistive in deescalating behavioral issues with youth rather than reverting to punitive methods (Medley, Little, and Akin-Little, 2008. Chitiyo, May, and Chitiyo (2012) stated that it might take two or more years for effective implementation of SWPBS in a school, and one crucial element must be in place—"consistent administrative support" (p. 19). Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun (2008) stated that in order for programs to be successful that the

school leadership needs to be invested in SWPBS so that it can be implemented with fidelity and sustainability.

In addition to administrative support, another essential factor, that the literature emphasizes, is teacher training and buy-in of RtI, SWPBS, PBIS, and SSTs methods. Utley and Obiakor (2012) stated that in order for the implementation of RtI to be effective it is must be supported by professional development that provides teachers and staff with the skills necessary to effect change within the RtI process, have resources that are supportive of the process, employee teachers and staff that have the skills needed to implement RtI within their classrooms, have staff members that are willing to have their roles as teachers and staff redefined in order to bring about effective change, and have ample time to adjust current practices so that RtI becomes a part of their normal classroom practices.

McIntosh et al. (2013) found that schools that held to a regular meeting schedule, were adept at data decision making skills, and had strong administrative support where schools that had strong SSTs and were able to sustain their use within the schools. McIntosh et al. (2013) concluded that the mere fact that schools funded SSTs did not necessarily mean that they would sustain themselves, rather it was capacity building measures in the form of effective training of team members that sustained the initiative within the school. McGill, Bradshaw, and Hughes (2007) found when staff increased their knowledge and skill levels in working with students in a positive behavior support system they more likely they were to be more willing to work with students with behavior difficulty due to an increase in the confidence level in working with students who presented behaviors that were disruptive in the educational setting.

## Literature Related to Methodology

The study proposed will use the traditional case study design. The case study approach was chosen because I felt that it would be the best avenue to discover the reasons why educators are hesitant to use the SST approach when looking at student behavior. Yin (2009) maintained that case studies help the researcher understand the overall dynamics of a group in relation to a particular situation. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) further point out that the case study allows the researcher to study the situation that is happening in real-life by the interaction of the researcher and the study participants in their own environment and allows for verbal feedback from the participants.

Yin (2011) explained that doing a qualitative case study allows the researcher to understand everyday situations within real life constraints. In addition, Yin (2011) stated that doing qualitative case study research can help the researcher delve into a topic without people fearing that what they want to say about a particular topic is not confined to a pre-determined set of standards that may inhibit them from freely expressing themselves. Merriam and Associates (2002) support the belief that qualitative research helps the researcher understand the participants' relations within the setting in which they work or associate thoroughly.

Merriam and Associates (2002) further clarified that often the researcher chooses the qualitative case study approach because there is minimal research on a particular field or topic. This allows the researcher a base in which to build a theory base as to why a particular situation may be occurring by observing and interacting with participants who are in the field. However, Yin (2011) asserted that the researcher must still have a basic working knowledge of the topic of the study from previous research to prevent reporting false findings. Thus, to accurately

represent the situation being studied, it is essential that the researcher present the findings of their study in a non-biased manner.

## Literature Related to Different Methodologies

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, administrators face a challenge in the implementation of RtI and SWPBS. Brown-Chidsey (2005) implied that in order to for today's school leaders to convert today's schools into places where students with disabilities are given positive support and research-based instructional practices are utilized by the teachers they must lead by example of what is expected. No longer are they just the manager of the school. They must now become the school's instructional head as well as playing a crucial role supporting problem-solving methods of working with students (Brown-Chidsey, 2005). School leaders who are willing to share their leadership role with other team members will promote a shared sense of purpose among the staff members which in turn will promote a problem-solving approach that benefits the total student and not just parts of that student.

Section 3 will provide information related to the proposed method to be used in this study. This section will include information on the research design and approach, additional data collection, population and sample, research questions, and the role of the researcher. The section will include how the data is to be collected and handled during the study. Reliability and validity will be discussed.

# Section 3: Research Method

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty and staff on the use a behavior SST to address concerns about student classroom discipline before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement. I was guided by the research questions as I explored teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the behavior SST process, their current professional development strengths and weaknesses, and their attitudes and perceptions about administrative support in handling discipline.

This section describes (a) the research design and approach that was used to conduct this study; (b) the instruments used to conduct the research study, (c) how the population and the sample were selected, (d) how the data was collected, (e) how the data were analyzed, (f) data validity, and (g) a summary of the findings.

## Research Design and Approach

This qualitative study used a case study design. In considering this choice, the five areas of qualitative research were used to determine the approach that would be appropriate in seeking to describe the reasons teachers and staff were hesitant to use a behavior SSTs to address student discipline in the early stages. According to Yin (2009), most people still believed that case studies were beneficial only during the stage of exploration of the problem. Two major considerations were my determining factors for choosing this method.

1. I wanted to explore and develop an understanding of teachers' reasons for not addressing student behavior within an SST that allows for collaboration among the participants, and

2. I wanted to explore the collaborative process of the campus and how it works at solving concerns involving student behavior.

Other qualitative study designs were considered, but they were excluded because of their limitations. Because I was not looking to gather information on the experiences, but rather to understand how the process worked or why it didn't work in the school under study (by examining teacher attitudes and perceptions), phenomenological research would not have worked because it gathers information on participants' lived experiences in a situation (Creswell 2007). Creswell (2007) described narrative and biographical research as the process of capturing "the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals" (p. 55). For this reason, narrative and biographical research were rejected because they require the recording chronological and historical events and this study sought to understand teacher's perceptions and attitudes regarding their experiences not a series of events. Grounded theory was rejected because, as the researcher, I was not looking for a design that would conclude with a single explanation of why teachers do or do not use the behavior SST process. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that grounded theory involves the researcher looking for a theory that is grounded by comparing it to the data studied and developing a single theory to explain why something is happening. Ethnographical research was ruled out due to its study of a culture and the understanding of why things happen within that culture. Yin (2007) described it as a process of understanding how people gather knowledge and use that knowledge in their day to day life. In this study, I was not seeking to understand how participants gathered their knowledge base, but rather why the behavior SST was or was not being used. In addition, quantitative research was dismissed, because I was not looking to determine the mathematical

reasons why the participants did or did not use the process, but rather to understand the reasons why in their own words. Gall et al. (2007) pointed out that quantitative studies rely heavily on statistical data analysis to determine the answers to the research question and this would not have been an appropriate method to determine the reasons why participants felt a certain way about the process. As the researcher, I wanted to capture in their words the reasons why.

After the first focus group interview, teachers were given a presentation on SSTs that include the history, rationale, and application of the process. The post focus group interview was used to allow teachers to voice their concerns and thoughts on the use of an SST. The use of a tape-recorder to record the focus group interviews allowed me to observe the participants as they speak so that I could note the nonverbal messages that might come across. While non-verbal messages can often be misinterpreted, they proved valuable in the interpretation of the data.

## Research Questions

The predominant qualitative research question for this case study was: What are the reasons teachers and staff are reluctant to use a student behavior support team to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement? Secondary questions were:

1. Do faculty, staff, and campus administration understand the key elements of a behavior SST and how to implement it?
2. How do faculty, staff, and campus administration view the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior concerns?
3. What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration regarding campus leadership support for the use of a behavior SST?

4. What are the beliefs of faculty, staff, and campus administration after using the behavior SST approach in terms of usefulness of dealing with student problematic behavior in the classroom?

## Setting and Population Sample

The setting for the study was a small rural junior high school located in South Central Texas that encompasses sixth through eighth grade. The school curriculum included core content areas, electives (athletics, agriculture, physical educatioon, art, music, careers, teen leadership, technology, and health). The school's special programs included English as a Second Language, Reading Recovery, Gifted and Talented, IDEA, Section 504, and Dyslexia services.

The campus population was approximately 386 students in the 2012-2013 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Student population statistics indicate that 48.6% were female while 51.4% were male (Texas Education Agency, 2011). The ethnic make-up rates were: 10.4% White, 88.6% Hispanic, 0.3% African-American, and 0.5% Native American (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Over three-fourths of the student population qualified as economically disadvantaged (79.8%). The special population identification rates were: Limited English Proficient - 2.6%, students with disabilities – 8.5%, Gifted and Talented – 7.0%, and At-Risk – 46.1% (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Approximately 137 (31.1%) of the total student population had one or more discipline referrals that resulted in an alternative placement (Texas Education Agency, 2011). All student data from the campus were used in the study.

The faculty, staff, and campus administration included 39 teaching and non-teaching professionals. Teaching professionals taught in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and electives (athletics, computers, agriculture, physical education, art,

music, careers, teen leadership, technology, and health). The campus staff make-up included two campus administrators, five professional support staff, and six para-professionals. Staff ethnic rates were 29.1% White, 3.8% African-American, and 67.1% Hispanic (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

All 39 members of this population were contacted by me via electronic mail to determine potential participants for the focus group. If they wanted to participate, participants were asked to respond electronically to me by returning an electronic response form and the informed consent form. (See Appendices A, B, and C) Upon receipt of the response form and informed consents, I selected potential focus group members. Participants were asked to submit two forms of contact information such as a school or personal email address.

I obtained the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certificate of completion on protecting human research participants, as required by Walden University, to make certain that I understood the ethical protection of participants while conducting my research study and how to properly conduct a research study. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-31-13-0020797.

## Ethical Protection of Participants

As the researcher for this study, my primary responsibility was to protect the participant's confidentiality in the study as well the confidentiality of the study site. Gall et al. (2007) pointed out that all participants should be informed at the beginning of the study who will have rights to the study data. For this reason, to protect the identity of the study participants, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in the study.

While participation in the study was voluntary, before participation in the study could be presented to potential participants and consent given to conduct the study, all study parameters were given to the campus administrator for approval to conduct the study at the site. Once a letter of consent was secured from the campus administrator and approval by the Walden Institutional Review Board was secured (Approval #10-31-13-0020797), all campus faculty, staff, and campus administration, were provided with an informed consent form that included the following:

1. Description of the study
2. Background information
3. Procedures
4. Voluntary nature of the study
5. Risks and benefits of being in the study
6. Payment
7. Privacy
8. Contacts and questions
9. Statement of consent

Participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were contacted for participation in the study via email and personal contact, as needed.

As the researcher, I recorded and transcribed all interviews. Pseudonyms and coding the study data were used in order to secure the confidentiality of the study participants and site. In addition, notes taken during the interview were used to support me in the recording and

transcription process. Participants were informed that I would be taking notes during the interviews as a means to ensure the accuracy of the study data and that they will remain in a locked storage box along with the recordings and transcriptions. When the digital recorders were not in use they were kept in a secure locked box in my home. In addition, the focus group interviews were transferred to a USB flash drive for use when transcribing and the USB drive was kept in the same secure locked box along with the microcassette recordings. All study data, recordings, transcriptions, and interviews notes will be kept in the locked storage for a minimum of five years after study completion.

## Role of the Researcher

As the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System Director who reviews district data in the areas of special education, gifted and talented, bilingual/English as a second language, career and technology education, and No Child Left Behind, it is my responsibility to serve as an internal auditor for the district's special programs. I had no authoritative power over any of the participants in the study but rather serve in a role that analyzes the district's data and pinpoints possible problem areas that a multidisciplinary team will review and use in developing a campus improvement plan. In this study, my role was merely to seek information that could help the campus team formulate a plan of action based on the information gathered from the faculty, staff, and campus administration on discipline on their campus. Therefore, I saw my role as a researcher as one of information gatherer so that the campus personnel could make informed decisions on a plan of action that would benefit the campus in regards to positive behavior interventions that will decrease the discretionary discipline placements.

The data were collected by me and were kept in a secure locked filing cabinet that only I had keys to. Data were also coded in such a way that confidentiality was maintained for all participants in the study. The use of a pseudonym system was used to identify the participants in the study to retain the anonymity. The interview questions were developed, analyzed, transcribed, and interpreted by me. At no time did my opinion of behavior SSTs become a factor in the interviews.

## Criteria for Participant Participation

The participants in the study were selected based on the study topic and their knowledge of the presenting problem that student behavior handled in the traditional manner was resulting in discretionary alternative placements that are beyond the acceptable limits set forth by the Texas Education Agency. An additional criterion for selection was that all participants were certified as educators with the State of Texas and were members of the campus faculty, staff, and campus administration of the small rural junior high school in South Central Texas being studied.

## Qualitative Interview Participant and Interviews

All 39 campus faculty, staff, and campus administration were invited to participate in the focus group interviews via email. Of the 39 invitations emailed, nine campus personnel indicated a desire to participate with twenty-one either declining or not responding. The focus group interviews were set-up as to not interfere with the instructional day and were conducted after the school day in the school conference room. The room was secured with a do not disturb sign so that the interviews could be carried out without disruption. Participants in the focus group interviews were selected based on a representative cross section of the campus. If additional

content area personnel wanted to participate in the study, names were placed in a hat and drawn for the slot. However, due to the small number that volunteered to participate, after the drawing of the initial person, consideration was given to the additional volunteers and they were allowed to participate to have a greater knowledge base based on experience in the teaching field.

Interviews were conducted with participants who indicated that they would like to participate in a focus group on the research topic. The focus group consisted of a cross section of the faculty, staff, and campus administration representing grades six through eight and specialties. The focus group met pre and post implementation of the behavior support team to see if there was a shift in thinking about the use of the approach. Interview questions were changed slightly from the first focus group to the second to gain a better insight into participants' perceptions and attitudes on behavior support teams (See Appendices D and E).

The use of the focus interview in this study was an integral part of the study to determine overall perceptions of the campus personnel on the use of SSTs for behavior. Participants were allowed to answer interview questions in their own words thus allowing them to express their attitudes and beliefs more openly than responding to a questionnaire that often does not probe deeply enough to elicit a thorough response. A potential drawback, of conducting a focus group interview, is participant digression into other areas. However, if the interviewer provides a structured approach to the interview digression can be controlled (Nardi, 2003).

## Data Collection Method

A focus group interview was used to collect data for the study. Gall et al. (2007) stated that the use of focus groups allow for the interaction of participants that might not ordinarily express themselves should the interviews be conducted on an individual basis. Establishment of

the focus group members occurred after receiving the intent of the participant to participate and the informed consent had been returned. Focus group participants were selected to represent a cross-section of the faculty, staff, and campus administration from those who showed an interest in participating in the study. The cross-section was determined by representation from core content areas, electives, and support staff. Hoepfl (1997) referred to this as maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to capitalize on the weaknesses of the group and turns them into strengths by finding patterns that are captured from experiences that are central to the program. If more than one participant from each content area wished to participate in the focus group, the names were placed in a container and a name drawn by a non-study participant with the researcher present so that no partiality was shown to anyone person interested in participating. After the initial participants were chosen, consideration was given to the remaining volunteers as to their participation in the study. I felt that the addition of the additional volunteers was valuable to the study based on other factors such as years of education experience, subject area representation, and knowledge base. Participants were volunteer participants. The focus group was repeated after a presentation on behavior support teams and implementation of the program. The focus group was asked a set of questions in the pre implementation and a set of questions was used for the post implementation group sessions. Focus group meetings occurred on the site school campus and were conducted after school hours in the school conference room. Each focus group session was approximately one and half hours in length.

All interviews were taped using two digital audio recorders and a microcassette audio recorder. The digital recorders were a Sony Digital Flash Voice Recorder and a Yamaha

PocketTrak W24 Recorder and the microcassette recorder was a Sony M-2020 Microcassette Dictator/Transcriber. In addition, I manually took notes during the interview to record points of clarification from participants and additional questions asked by the participants and solely facilitated the group so as to minimize potential confidentiality issues. Furthermore, non-verbal cues and body language were noted, but later proved to not of useful need as the participants would voluntarily clarify their reactions, etc. in later statements.

## Data Analysis

The data analyzed derived from the focus group that was selected for the initial electronic communication. The interview questions were developed and presented to the group during the focus group interviews at the onset of the study (See Appendix D). Probing questions were used to elicit a deeper understanding of the interviewees' answers to the questions if it was unclear as to what the participant meant in their statements. A follow-up set of questions were given to the focus group at the end of the study to determine the faculty, staff, and campus administration perceptions of the student behavior support team (See Appendix E).

The focus group interviews were tape recorded so that they could be transcribed by the researcher and coded according to common themes that arise. The codes were generated prior to the focus group interviews based on the research questions and major areas of interest in the research questions. Shank (2006) stated that coding “is an act of selective attention” (p. 147). With this in mind, after the transcription, I reviewed the data looking for recurring themes that needed to be revisited in the final analysis of the data. The revisitation of recurring themes was done by working with a peer group who has experience in behavior support teams and

additionally with a trusted peer who did not have knowledge of the setting's issue to determine if the findings were correct and believable (Merriam and Associates, 2002).

## Additional Data Collection

Archival student data for this study were gathered from the school's Pupil Education Information Management System (PEIMS). These data were used to describe the discretionary placement rates for students in the sixth through eighth grades at the beginning and end of the study. Data were collected on all students, including students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Additional demographic data were gathered in regards to the alternative discipline education placements of specific disabilities that are reported through the PEIMS system. The purpose of collecting demographic data was to examine the frequency at which different disability categories are placed into alternative settings. All information collected followed FERPA rules in regards to confidentiality of information and no identifying information was reported.

## Reliability and Validity

Reliability is described as the use of measures to ensure the accuracy of the information (Shank, 2006). Shank (2006) said that there is probably not one simple means to determine the reliability of a study. Thus, the focus group interviews were conducted pre and post implementation of the behavior support team presentation to see if participants may have had a shift in thinking or if it remained the same. In addition, the focus group interviews were reviewed by several individuals to determine the reliability of the transcription of the interviews and to ensure that all items were coded correctly for themes. To further ensure the reliability of the data taken during the focus group interviews, follow-up or probing questions were asked if the

researcher did not completely understand the response from the focus group members and to clarify statements made by the participants. Yin (2011) stated, “a valid study is one that has properly collected and interpreted its data” to ensure that the findings mirror what is happening in the actual setting (p. 78). For this reason, I planned to implement three methods to ensure validity in the study, which were member-checking, thick descriptions, and an outside auditor.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) and Merriam (2002) stated that member checking is a technique in which the study participants are afforded the opportunity to review the data to check for correctness in the information reported. Stake (1995) stated “participants should ‘play a major role directing as well as acting in case study’ research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). Member checking was used in this study to check for accuracy of statements contained in the study. Each participant was asked to read the transcriptions of the interviews for correctness so as to avoid inaccurate statements that could affect the validity of the study. Yin (2011) affirmed that sharing your findings or data with participants in the study to gain their insight might leave you with the question of what to share. He continued by stating that the researcher can address this issue earlier in the study and incorporate it into the design of their study, but the researcher must be willing to adapt as needed to the initial design of the study.

Thick descriptions were used to allow readers of the study to use the findings and conclusions in their own settings. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) described thick descriptions as those that provide the reader of the study with a sense that they were or could be a part of the initial research. The researcher provided detailed information about the setting, population, and other elements so that the reader could transfer the information “as if they are living the experience" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 107). Merriam (2002) stated that member checking

allows the participants to comment on the researcher's interpretations and determine if they are correct and valid. I have spent many years in the field of behavior and SSTs, and that experience has laid a basis for the findings. Allowing member checking determined if my findings were valid and without bias.

The use of an external auditor was employed before completion of the study to determine whether or not the research questions were answered, to ensure the accuracy of the findings, and whether or not the data support the findings. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) pointed out that by using colleagues to check coding of the interviews after the research has been coded to determine if inconsistencies arise, thus allowing the researcher to reconcile the differences. Merriam (2002) suggests that the researcher keep a clear audit documentation trail to record "problems, issues, and ideas" that might arise during the research process and help with the checking of information (p. 27). The external auditor found that the data presented in all instances was accurate and represented the campus' needs for future development of behavior SSTs.

## Summary

Section 3 included an introduction to the study and the procedures that will be used for the study of behavior SSTs. All study elements were outlined in this section and a rationale given for each element. Participants in the study were volunteers from a rural junior high school faculty, staff, and campus administration representing grades six through eight. The instruments used were described and are shown in the appendices.

# Section 4: Results

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration about the use of a behavior SST to address concerns about classroom discipline before they became problematic and resulted in a discretionary discipline placement. In this section, I will discuss how the data were gathered and the processes used to record and secure them; I will present demographic information on the participants and discuss the noted patterns and themes, along with the quality of evidence.

## Participant Data Generation, Gathering, and Recording

At the time of the study, the campus had 39 professional staff members: 14 core content teachers, 14 remedial and elective teachers, 9 instructional and counseling staff, and 2 administrators. Midway through the first semester of the 2013-2013 school year, all staff members were sent an invitation to participate in the study along with an electronic response form (see Appendices A and B). Table 5 below offers the relevant data on the nine who agreed to participate.

Each candidate received, via e-mail, a consent form (Appendix C). Those who agreed with it were to sign the consent form with "I consent" and their initials, either electronically or handwritten and return it to me. Once all consents were received, a focus group interview was scheduled. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities: P1, P2, P3, etc.

Table 5

Participant Data

| Participant | Grade level | Area of expertise | Years of experience | Highest degree held |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SP 1 | 7th | English Language Arts | 5 | Bachelor's |
| SP 2 | 7th | English Language Arts | 16 | Bachelor's |
| SP 3 | 8th | Science | 2 | Master's |
| SP 4 | 6th | Mathematics | 5 | Bachelor's |
| SP 5 | 7th | Mathematics | 5 | Bachelor's |
| SP 6 | 6th – 8th | Electives | 9 | Bachelor's |
| SP 7 | 6th – 8th | Electives | 8 | Bachelor's |
| SP 8 | 8th | Social Studies | 1 | Master's |
| SP 9[a] | 6th – 8th | Support Staff | 35 | Master's |

Note: [a]Did not participate in the second interview.

Each participant received, via email, an informed consent form (Appendix C). Each participant was to read the form and reply to the email with "I consent". Once all consents were received a focus group interview was scheduled with all participants. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity in the study. The pseudonyms were identified as Staff Participant (SP) 1 to SP 9.

The first focus group interview was held prior to school being released for the Winter Break. The second focus group interview was held in mid-January. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to gather data from the participants in regards to their perceptions regarding a behavior student support team approach and the identified research questions.

Upon responding to the informed consent form, all participants understood that their information would be strictly confidential, that all interviews were recorded for later

transcription, and reviewed by the focus group participants and me. The focus group interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and I transcribed interviews using Dragon Naturally Speaking. To ensure the validity of the interviews, each focus group interview was made available for each participant to review through the process of member checking. The first focus group interview was held prior to the Winter Break; the second interview was held in mid-January.

## Data Security

All interviews were taped using two digital recorders and a microcassette recorder. The digital recorders were a Sony Digital Flash Voice Recorder and a Yamaha PocketTrak W24 Recorder and the microcassette recorder was a Sony M-2020 Microcassette Dictator/Transcriber. When the digital recorders were not in use, they were kept in a secure locked box in my home. In addition, the focus group interviews were transferred to a USB flash drive for use when transcribing and the USB drive was kept in the same secure locked box along with the microcassette recordings. Both focus group interviews were listened to multiple times to ensure the accuracy in transcription. Member checking was used to ensure validity of the transcribed material as well as accuracy in transcription by providing each participant with a copy of the transcribed interview to check for accuracy of statements. The transcriptions were kept in a secure binder along with the electronic response forms and reply emails that indicated consent. I also employed the use of a calendar to keep track of when consent was obtained as well as to schedule the interviews and member checking sessions.

## Findings

This qualitative case study was driven by the research questions. Through the use of pre- and post-focus group interview questions as well as the prompts, the perceptions of the

participants unfolded. While conducting the focus group interviews, I noted themes that were recurring and made note of them in a notebook. After the focus group interviews, I coded the interviews for recurring themes and patterns were noted and placed in the correct coded category. Saldana (2009) indicated that the coding of data is to categorize the data into groups that share commonalities and allows the researcher to make sense of the data. Coding of the interview responses was based on the research questions and were pre-determined based on those questions.

The codes used were developed to reflect the research questions and the interview questions that were used in the study. I also developed the codes based on the information that was given during the focus group interviews presented by each of the participants. The codes were kept to the structural method of coding. Saldana (2009) describes structural coding as a method used to relate to a specific research question used to frame the interview. Saldana (2009) also further asserts that this type of coding is "probably more suitable of interview transcripts" (p. 88) as it acts as labeling and indexing device for the data.

While the majority of the focus group had no more than 5 years of experience, all had received training in basic classroom management, CHAMPS: A Proactive & Positive Approach to Classroom Management, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training within the last 3 years. While these programs or the number of years in the classroom do not guarantee successful classroom management skills, they do give the teachers a background in how to manage a classroom and some basic strategies to use.

The initial interview with the nine focus group participants consisted of a series of open-ended questions. The first two questions were designed to get a working knowledge of the

participants' backgrounds and their familiarity with a behavior SST. The next set of questions in the first interview were to determine the way the participants handled discipline in their own classrooms and to determine at what level they felt supported from those outside the classroom when dealing with discipline. It is important to note that an administrator was among the original participants which caused the other participants to be somewhat guarded in their responses during the first interview. The second interview consisted of only eight participants from the original nine. For the second interview the administrator was not present due to a scheduling conflict; the administrator chose not to participate in the second interview. During the second interview, I made note that participants were less guarded in their responses to the interview questions due to the administrator not being present and tended to be more open in their responses to the questions. I had noted in my limitations that I felt the participants could openly discuss the subject at hand with administration present as campus personnel seemed to be responsive to administration and openly conversed with them about concerns involving the campus. I had not anticipated what took place during the first focus group interview and was unaware of any tension between the participants at the time of the first interview.

## Research Question 1

Research question one read as follows: *Do faculty, staff, and campus administration understand the key elements of a behavior SST and how to implement it?*

The themes related to research question one were: staff development on SSTs and how to implement behavior strategies effectively. The information on each study participant is found in Table 5 above.

### Theme 1: Staff Development on SSTs

Interview Question 1 from the Pre Study Interview (Appendix E) served as the catalyst for the framing of this theme**.** After reviewing the data from the first focus group interview, all nine original participants indicated that they have had generalized training in classroom management such as CHAMPS, Capturing Kids Hearts, and PBIS, but not formalized training in regards to a SST approach that deals with behavior. All participants had extensive training in RtI but only in the academic realm. The participants agreed that their limited knowledge of the behavior SST and how to document patterns of behavior and strategy implementation would need to be addressed by the campus in order for the process to develop and grow. SP2 summed up the group's current staff development needs in regard to behavior:

> My only background would be regarding the student and behavior in the classroom and just providing input at meetings regarding their behavior and progress in class.

SP7, a first year teacher in the Texas school system, complemented that statement by saying:

> Previously, in my other state, we did not do a whole lot of training with RtI and behavior. We would do some classroom management as well as training in professional development, and they would usually do that once a year.

After analyzing all the groups statements in regards to staff development, it was clear that all participants felt that the need for specialized training in the support team process and behavior strategies would be essential for a successful implementation of the program and fidelity in implementing behavior strategies for each individual student that is seen by the team. The participants also felt that all stakeholders on the campus needed to be involved in the staff development activities so that all would be able to not only implement the interventions, but also

to convey the results to others that directly worked with the student and to ensure fidelity when documenting behavior strategy documentation. Each participant agreed that in order for the process to be a success it is important to have buy-in for the process and that cross-curricular volunteers needed to be sought as well as administration and support staff to serve on the team. SP4 stated:

> I think that all teachers need to have buy-in and to present a unified front. I would like to have more strategies on how to deal with these kids in the classroom. What can we do in the classroom so that they don't miss instruction time?

All participants pointed out that teacher time was definitely an issue when starting a new program. SP9 summed up the group's perceptions on time in regards to implementation and sustainability:

> I agree with all the people about volunteers because time is a big commodity around here and I know it hard and with us not having the extra period during the day to do that so everything becomes after school unless we set aside time during the day.

Theme 2: Effectively Implementing Behavior Strategies

Each participant in the focus group interviews was asked specifically in the Pre-Study Qualitative Interview Question 3 how they felt the implementation of a behavior SST would be a method that they felt would impact behavior on the campus. All participants felt that the implementation of the process would better equip teachers to deal with problematic behavior in the classroom. SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4, SP6, SP7, and SP8 were all in agreement that identifying behavior concerns early through an RtI behavior approach would not only benefit the student in

need, but also other students in the classroom that are also affected by the disruptions. SP3 pointed out that

> They already had one (behavior plan) in place so that we knew how to handle them, how to approach them, and what the goals were.

SP7 pointed out that, as a teacher or teachers dealing with a behavior student, the thought of:

> What do I do? What will I do? You, know, feeling they are at a loss. I think it will be a positive impact relief for both teachers and students knowing that there is something that is in place and this team will be able to shed some belief that there are other resources and avenues for them to take.

SP8 stated that

> I don't think it is just an impact on teachers and students. I think it's also going to be some on the parents of the students as well. We bring parents in here for parent-teacher conferences, and we see the frustration on their faces and we hear it in their voices. And it's almost like they're grasping for anything else as well because it's not just the behavior that's impacting or occurring at school, it's also the behavior that is mirrored at home as well.

The lone administrator in the group, SP9, felt that the implementation of a behavior SST on the campus would have "an impact on me too because if we figure out how to deal with the behaviors then I see less of them."

When asked about implementing behavior strategies after team implementation, most felt that the strategies sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. All agreed that sometimes the strategies that were given to the committee were difficult to implement because of lack of

training on behavior and how to implement the strategies. SP5 stated that "lack of knowledge" contributed to the strategy being difficult to implement. SP7 stated that

> They [the strategies] are helpful. Some work. They are hard to implement if it's not a team effort. You have to work as a team to make some of the strategies work."

SP2 countered with:

> We share our ideas and how we approach different students. We try each other's strategies, and sometimes they work for some teachers and sometimes they may not work for you, but I think that we try them.

SP8 stated,

> I do try out the strategies if they work, fine. I understand is not a cookie-cutter approach, and each child is different and you have to tailor the strategies to each individual and each individual issue that comes along.

## Research Question 2

Research question two read as follows: *How do faculty, staff, and campus administration view the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior concerns?*

Understanding how to effectively use a behavior support team, what exactly are discretionary offenses that may or may not warrant an office referral, and how teachers feel they are supported by administration when dealing with a behavioral student are the themes present in research question 2. The questions from the Pre-Study Interview Questions that were used to answer this question were Interview Questions 4,5, 6, and 7.

### Theme 1: How to Effectively Use a Behavior Support Team

All of the participants were in agreement that they really did not understand how behavior was addressed within a RtI framework or for that matter an SST. All indicated that they understood the process in regards to academics, but they recognized that often the behavior of a child needed to be looked at beforehand to determine if the child was misbehaving to cover up an academic deficit or just a behavior problem. SP5 pointed out "…you have the kids that keep their grades up, but they're still a constant disruption."

SP4 agreed that implementing a behavior support team would be beneficial to the campus to help identify students that were being disruptive in the classroom. She continued:

> At some point, we have to ask ourselves is it academic or just behavior. I have some students that are struggling academically but are they really struggling with the content or are they just wanting to mess around and misbehave and act so to speak not smart. So I think this would help identify whether this a behavioral problem or not.

SP6 agreed that a process such as behavior SSTs would be a good thing to help identify students that are in need of interventions. SP6 further commented that

> There are behaviors out there that are not being identified and need to be specifically identified and an assessment needs to be done where they find out why these behaviors are occurring, where is it coming from and try to go in that direction. Unless you know where it is coming from it is hard to stop it.

The other participants further commented that there are behaviors that are not being identified because the campus has not developed a process to identify problematic behavior and how to intercede. SP9 felt that using a committee and hearing some of the concerns of the students would help teachers understand how to handle the situation and by "working together we might

help everybody be more successful." They commented further that the behavior SST could help everyone understand the student and the behavior because:

> A lot of time we come to school with a preconceived idea of what things ought to look like and by having a committee and hearing some of these issues these kids truly have it will maybe open up the eyes of people. So I think by working together as a group, we might could help everybody be more successful – the student and the teacher.

SP1 pointed out that the behavior support team cold help with the discipline issues that they currently have on the campus. They added:

> I think that is a campus if we came together and started a RTI behavior and we then implemented it, that at least there would be a plan for the student with behavior issues when they started in six grade. Then when he came to me in seventh grade that at least we would know that there is a plan in order and we would know how to address the student.

**Theme 2: Discretionary Offenses**

Most of the participants had a good understanding of what discretionary offenses were and tried to handle the minor problems in their classroom before using an office referral. SP 1 stated:

> I know in my classroom, you have to do a lot before I send you out of my classroom. But to get out of my classroom or to be sent out, you have to be a constant in disruption in the class. And this means after redirecting several times, after contacting parents, if you're still doing what you're doing, you are going to get a referral. I try to handle everything in my classroom before I have to send a referral.

SP3 added:

> It is very hard to get a referral in my class. However, if there is cussing, especially if it is at me, they definitely get a referral. Fighting, of course, continued non-compliance, even after repetitive redirection and they just keep not doing what they are asked, if it continues over multi-day period then they usually end up with a referral from me.

Some participants, like SP7, pointed out that it was important to set classroom expectations early with the students so as to minimize the need to send students to the office on a referral for minor behaviors. SP7 pointed out that

> My students by the first, second, or third day they knew the expectations I have in the classroom. So setting those expectations right away. I also tell them that I want my classroom to feel like a safe environment, so that is very important to me when I send someone to the office.

SP2 complemented this statement with the reason they would send a student to the office after setting clear expectations for behavior in their classroom. They stated:

> It is behavior that is keeping me from teaching class that day. I am good at ignoring certain behaviors, redirecting, giving lots of warnings, but where it comes where I cannot teach the class, that's when they go to the office.

However, when it came down to what they actually sent students to the office for they were still sending for discretionary offenses but only after numerous attempts to correct the problem behavior in the classroom. SP1, SP2, SP3, SP7and SP8 indicated that it took a lot for a student to be sent to the office, but that they would send a student with a discipline referral for acts that totally disrupted the class even after multiple redirections and parent contact or any act

that concerned safety or foul language. SP9 felt that most students "have learned that if they push the button to get out out of some teachers' classrooms that they don't want to be with" that they will get sent to the office.

When noting how they handled the minor disruptions from students in the classroom or the office task behaviors, most reported the use of lower level discipline techniques with the student. SP1 gave a few of the techniques that she used when dealing with disruptions in the classroom:

> Basically I use proximity control, tap on the desk, move to a different seat, phone call. But they know that tapping on the desk and all of these are warnings in between to say "come on let's get back to work" and so on. And then there's the phone call and even after the phone I give one more warning and then finally will you are out of here.

SP3 and SP5pointed out a system that is evidently used in two grade levels on the campus. That technique is that of a conduct folder. SP4 stated,

> In the sixth grade, we have a grade level system procedure system that involves the use of a conduct folder. When the behavior does not respond to basic redirecting techniques, the behavior is noted in the conduct folder by each teacher that experiences misbehavior in their classroom. The conduct folder goes home to the parent each day and parents sign off on it. If the behavior continues, the parents receive a phone call from the teacher or are asked to come in for a team meeting.

SP5 pointed out at their grade level that the folders were ineffective with the students. She said, "The conduct folder were ineffective. The kids weren't paying any heed to them. So we went to a lunch detention process."

**Theme 3: Administrative Support in Dealing with Problem Behavior**

All participants felt that administration supported them in dealing with classroom behavior that disrupted the classroom in such a way that teaching could not continue. SP4 statement on administrative support was echoed by all participants. They stated, "I can't even think of a time that I did not have support. I try not to, I know they're busy the office, so I try not to have to call them but if I have to they have always been there." SP5 added that even when the administrators were not able to come to the room that either the counselor or another office staff member came down to help remove the student. SP6, SP7, and SP8 felt supported by not only the administration, but other support staff as well. They felt that the different counselors (regular and grant) and coaches supported their efforts in the classroom by working with students that showed problem behavior by providing some added incentives for the students to adhere to the classroom expectation set by them as teachers. SP5 pointed out the following:

> I have made use of school counselors by sending them an email or seeing them. I will stop and talk to them about stuff going on.

SP6 concurred with:

> We do have good support with our administrators and support staff. We have emailed the counselors and the special education co-op counselors. They come and help with our behavior students. I will email them that so and so is doing this and this is what is happening and they usually come that day or the next day to work with our students.

SP9, however, felt that teachers sometimes think that nothing is done to the students they send to the office and stated that:

> For me, I sometimes get the feeling that, and I have to look at it from a little different avenue than you do, but I sometimes get the impression that you might not feel like anything is being done for a particular individual. It bothers me a little bit but at the same time I think that sometimes we don't always understand what is going on for some kids. What has happened prior to that or what happened before they got to school? A lot of times, you send a kid that's angry and ugly in your classroom and by the time they get to me they are bawling and crying.

However, in reviewing the statements of all the participant, not one indicated this or they may have been hesitant to voice this opinion due to the fact that SP9 was a campus administrator.

## Research Question 3

Research question three read as follows: *What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration regarding campus leadership support for the use of a behavior SST?*

The theme prevelent in research question three is campus leadership support. Interview questions 6 and 7 from the prestudy- and interview question 1 from the post-study were used in developing the following themes.

In the previous discussion on the interview participation of the administrator, it was noted that the interviewees were a little guarded in their responses with the administrator present. However, it is important to note that generally teachers felt that administration did support them when students were sent to the office on discipline referrals or asked for assistance in the classroom in dealing with disruptive students. A further discussion of administrative participation will occur in Section 5.

### Theme: Campus Leadership Support

When asked if the focus group participants felt that they were supported by their administrators in dealing with discipline the responses were generally an affirmative. Most of the participants indicated that they tried to handle the discipline in their classroom before getting administrators involved. SP4 stated,

> I can't even think of a time that I did not have support. I know they're busy the office, so I try not to have to call them but if I have to they have always been there.

SP2 felt that any time support was needed that the administrative staff was there to discuss the concern and how best to handle it. SP6 also felt supported by not only the administrative staff but also the support staff. They stated,

> I will email them that so and so is doing this, what is happening and they usually come that day or the next day to work with our students.

SP7 & SP8 were new to the campus this year, and they concurred that they felt supported by the administrative and support staff. Both indicated that they have gone beyond the administrative and support staff to help with students who are displaying behavior problems. SP7 indicated that there were times when even after being given a strategy that they would sometimes have to tweak it to fit the situation, but overall was supported in whatever needed to be done to help the student be successful in the classroom. SP9 indicated:

> I've utilized all the administrative and support staff. I've talked the counselors when I've had specific issues with students that have concerned me. I've even used the coaches for the athletics or the person that is involved with Student Council.

In asking the other participants about the use of other staff that work with the campus's students, all indicated that try all avenues to reach the students early on before things become unmanageable and felt that supported by them.

## Research Question 4

Research question four read as follows: *What are the beliefs of faculty, staff, and campus administration after using the behavior SST approach in terms of usefulness of dealing with student problematic behavior in the classroom?*

Themes that arise in research question four are perceptions of teachers after they have been exposed to a behavior support team process and their belief that it will help in dealing with the child that presents behavioral challenges in the classroom. Post study interview questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were used in the development of the following themes.

### Theme 1: Perceptions of Teachers After Exposure to a Behavior Support Team Process

All participants agreed that the process was a proactive approach to handling difficult student behavior, but all believed that the student behavior support team had to be used consistently and that a more simplified documentation trail might need to be considered. SP1 pointed out:

> Once we get started and the student is at a better place we kind of like drop the system and we don't ever go back to it because when it starts the behavior again you get, "well so and so was on the behavior plan once…

SP2 concurred and stated, "the process allows you to discuss really specific issues for these kids and it gives you an alternative to just writing them up for this chronic behavior." SP7 spoke of the inconsistency that might occur within the process if all did not commit to it. SP7 stated:

> It is not to be good if everybody is not doing their part and there is a breakdown in that process and some others can get lost in the cracks. So you just run that risk of something will breakdown in that process if there is not consistency of effort.

SP6 concurred with all of the above but she pointed out that it is important to know where the students are coming from and what might be sparking the inappropriate behavior. The participant pointed out that:

> Sometimes when you start this process the behaviors get worse before it gets better. Sometimes instead of trying to work through it we drop the ball and we don't follow through with their plans.

SP8 concurred but felt that the paperwork necessary to do a behavior support team was often daunting and "a little bit of a deterrent" from using the process. All participants agreed that proper training needed to take place and a possible streamlining of the process be considered. SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4, and SP6 felt that documentation was essential, but that it needed to be a part of the student's plan year after year and carried on to the next campus to prevent further behavior disruptions and to help the student be consistently successful during his school career. SP1 said:

> I just think if we are going to do and it is going to stay with that one student that it needs to keep on going and not just stop because he is getting better. Look at the folder all the time. Look at the process. See where he has been.

SP7 added,

> My first impression was it is a very long documented process but in the end I do see the benefits. I would use it again as long as I can see that it is successfully being

> implemented and I personally have that support for me with any questions that I have in that process when I'm completing the paperwork.

SP6 pointed out that they felt the process was an essential element in helping the behaviorally challenged student, but they pointed out:

> It is good to know the students and why they behave the way they behave and what is causing the behaviors. I think teachers if they were aware of where we were earlier, what is happening with this child, maybe we can be more empathetic about it and come up with some kind of a solution. So the RTI process will become a step to where the behavior is on a positive track…but it just that the wheels turn slow and things don't get passed along.

**Theme 2: Benefit of Behavior SSTs**

All participants felt that the behavior SST process would be beneficial to all parties involved. SP5 said that

> I'm glad I was part of the SST because it gave me some insight into the student and it really helped me to understand how his life was at home, which was shocking. It caused me to cut down a little bit and to approach it in a different way and so I did. And then as I started using different strategies and tools to help him be successful. I found that when I took them away because he really wasn't supposed to use them and I saw the frustrations and then when I gave it back I saw him calm down more so it can be some good insight into the student.

SP8 felt that when they could see the strategies employed were working with the student as well as other students noticing the behavior change with praises for the student then the

process was not only beneficial to the student, but also the classroom environment. They also pointed out the following:

> We try to get everybody in and everybody is invited to the meetings where we talk to the parent and the child. And if we can't make it, we are asked to provide input. So for not there a voice can still be heard by proxy. I definitely like that process.

SP3, who admitted he was big on processes, felt that:

> It has you look at the student from different angles and come up with strategies that work across the board for that student. So, yes, I think it can be very beneficial.

SP4 further added that:

> I know that it [is behavior] changes the whole dynamics of your classroom. When they are absent, it is a sigh of relief. The whole class just changes. So I think that anything, any process, which can correct that, and I am thinking as a teacher, to make it easier in the classroom to get your material across would be beneficial.

SP6 added:

> Even just meeting with other teachers who are having the same problems in trying to come up with some solutions or strategies that could help that student would benefit the whole school.

## Additional Data Collection

In an effort to see if the implementation of a behavior support team approach had any effect on the number of placements to alternative disciplinary education placements, I have compiled a table with the data. The pre-study data reflects discipline placements entered into the

PEIMS system prior to October 31, 2014, and the post-study data reflects discipline placements from October 31, 2013, until June 4, 2014.

Table 6

2013 - 2014 Campus Discipline Counts Pre and Post Focus Group Interview

| | ISS Placements* | | | Out of School Placements* | | | DAEP Placements | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total students | SPED students | % | Total students | SPED students | % | Total students | SPED students | % |
| Pre-Study | 38 | 14 | 36.8 | 11 | 6 | 54.5 | 4 | 1 | 25 |
| Post-Study | 175 | 20 | 11.4 | 53 | 22 | 41.5 | 11 | 1 | 9 |

*Note:* *Includes full and partial placements. Taken from Poteet ISD Pupil Education Information Management System Report for 2013-2014.

The data above indicate that the campus placement rates are still above the acceptable rates that are allowed in the PBMAS system of 10.0 for ISS, 6.0 for OCS, and 1.0 for DAEP placements.

## Evidence of Quality

Nine focus group participants were the primary source of information for this qualitative study. I used interview guides for both the pre and post focus group sessions that contained open-ended questions that were not predisposed to certain answers from the participants. Yin (2011) stated that the use of open-ended questions allows for the participation of the interviewees by allowing them to use their own experiences and words. I used the method of member checking to ensure accuracy in the reporting of the data. The interviews, after transcription, and findings were shared with the focus group participants in order to elicit changes or edits that might be

needed in their statements as well as a check for accuracy and completeness of the reporting of the data. Participants were asked to let me know if any information did not accurately reflect what they had said or if they felt the findings did not adequately reflect the case study questions. Yin (2011) and Gall et al. (2007) both pointed out that member checking is a means to have participants check for completeness of statements and check to make sure statements given are reported factually. Participant's confidentiality was maintained during this phase by the use of a pseudonym for each of the participants. In addition, a trusted peer was enlisted to check the data for accuracy of presentation. Gall et al. (2007) and Creswell (2007) both stated that peer review or editing is a means in which to check the data for accuracy and plays the "devil's advocate" when reviewing the data with the researcher. Both member checking and peer review were done soon after the interviews were completed and during the interpretation phases. This was done so that the participants still had a fresh account of what had transpired and my recollection was still intact.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration on the use a behavior SST to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement. There were four research questions that helped to guide the study process. A focus group approach was used to gather data that would answer the research questions through the use of a pre and post interview questions. Themes were derived from the research questions. Section 4 presented the findings of the study.

Section 5 will present an interpretation of those findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and a personal reflection on the study as a whole.

# Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Overview

In this study, I chose a qualitative case study approach to examine how teachers at the study site perceive the usefulness of a behavior SST approach. A focus group interview was used to gather information on teacher attitudes and perceptions on a behavior SST. During the pre- and post-interview process open-ended questions were used to elicit responses from the participants in their own words. The interview questions were developed to obtain answers to the four research questions:

1. Do faculty, staff, and campus administration understand the key elements of a behavior SST and how to implement it?
2. How do faculty, staff, and campus administration view the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior concerns?
3. What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration regarding campus leadership support for the use of a behavior SST?
4. What are the beliefs of faculty, staff, and campus administration after using the behavior SST approach in terms of usefulness of dealing with student problematic behavior in the classroom?

A careful analysis of the answers to the interview questions led to the development of the themes, as presented in Section 4. The themes helped me to develop an understanding of how the

teachers perceived a behavior SST process on their campus and how beneficial they felt it would be to teachers and students in dealing with a problematic child in the classroom. Teachers felt the process would benefit not only the problematic student, but also the teachers, other staff, other students, and the students' parents of the campus. The focus group members felt that some staff development was needed and that it had to be comprehensive, consistent, and implemented with fidelity. The participants interacted with each other and often shared similar ideas—both positive and negative—about student behavior and about how behavioral infractions were handled on the campus.

## Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration on the use a behavior SST to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement. The sample for this study included nine current staff members of a rural junior high school; they represented a cross-section of the campus staff. The educational experience of participants was broad. It ranged from 1–35 years of either classroom or administrative experience. The focus of the study was the experiences participants had in dealing with discipline, both discretionary and nondiscretionary. On the whole, teacher's perceptions of a behavior SST approach to handling behavior were similar in regard to many of the themes discussed, as explained in the following paragraphs.

### Professional Development and Staff Training in Behavior

The first research question asked: *Do faculty, staff, and campus administration understand the key elements of a behavior SST and how to implement it?* One of the themes that emerged from the focus group responses was that professional development would be needed in

order to help faculty, staff and campus administration implement a successful behavior SST. In 2001, the Texas Legislature enacted Senate Bill 1196 (SB 1196), which outlined training requirements for Teas school districts in regards to behavior (Ruiz, Ruiz, & Sherman, 2012). The goal of SB 1196 was to enhance teacher effectiveness in dealing with behavior that is disruptive in the classroom. One of the most important aspects of implementing effective classroom discipline is the establishment of classroom rules and practices. Polat, Kaya, and Akdag (2013) recommend that beginning teachers during pre-service instruction need to be provided with a variety of strategies that will help them be successful from the onset of their careers. However, Young, Caldarella, Richardson, and Young (2012) state that in order for teacher training to be successful it must be aligned with teacher goals (p. 54). Along with this Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, and Crnobori (2011) point out that teachers often lack effective training in how to implement behavior strategies once they are given to them to use (p. 3). Valela (2012) indicated that often teacher professional development is implemented with no real connection to what the teachers are doing in the daily classroom environment (p. 17). In order for teachers to fully understand how their training will impact student behavior in their classroom, they must be shown the links to student outcomes and teacher goals in relation to the overall student learning process. Simply showing teachers how the number of discipline referrals has decreased over time with the implementation of a behavior SST may not be enough to show how a support team can impact what goes on in the classroom. However, showing teachers how the reduction of disruptive behavior in the classroom on instructional time might be a better way to show teachers the impact it is making.

The second research question asked: *How do faculty, staff, and campus administration view the use of a behavior SST to address student behavior concerns?* This question is best addressed by staff development that is meaningful and effectively put into place within the school system. Faculty and staff must view the view the staff development and behavior student support training as viable avenues to help them be productive in their classroom. Thibodeau (2008) pointed out that effectively implemented professional development must be rooted in the scope of job in order for teachers and staff to actively learn how the processes work as well as how implement them into their normal routines. MacNeil and Prater (2010) noted in their study on school discipline that school leaders and teachers need to work collaboratively in order to come to an understanding on the school definition of discretionary discipline and what should and should not warrant a discipline referral. The new learning that is provided through the staff development should also be data driven, collaborative in nature, and supported by research. In addition, teachers and staff need time to implement, review, reflect, and collaborate on the processes being implemented. Varlas (2010) added that one of the easiest ways to build this collaborative process is for teachers to take the lead in developing their own learning through "building bridges from existing approaches to new ones, they may be uniquely positioned to get local buy-in" in a way that school leaders are unable to do (p. 4). In addition, Flannery, Fenning, Kato, and McIntosh (2014) found that staff members should be acknowledged for their progress by commending teachers involved in the processes and recognizing their efforts toward school goals.

Smith (2012) pointed out that merely giving teachers a copy of a framework or other article related to a process was not going to ensure that it would lead to implementation or even

becoming established as a change agent. DuFour (2014) pointed out that "effective staff development" must be a continual, mutual, related to job duties, and student learning linked approach in order for teachers to sustain the professional development over time and ensure consistent fidelity of implementation (p. 31). Buffer, Mattos, and Weber (2012) believed that in order for students to achieve at higher levels that campus teams must use a mutual approach of shared knowledge and skills of the entire staff in order to meet the needs of today's student. DuFour (2012) calls this process "professional learning communities" in which learning is done a collaborative team effort that shares a common missions and goals (p.18).

DuFour and DuFour (2003) and Buffer, Mattos, and Weber (2012) both pointed out that in order for professional collaborative learning to be successful that all stakeholders must share a common mission and goals that will affect student success. In addition, each member takes collective responsibility for what is being learned and works together to resolve any divergences that may arise throughout the process of learning. Teague and Anfara (2012), through their research of professional learning communities, found that there were four common elements to a successful school implementation that were worth noting. They are conditions that were supportive of working conditions for teachers, goals and values that were shared among the stakeholders, collaboration among the stakeholders, and a genuine focus on student learning.

Dever and Lash (2013) expressed that school leaders are taking the initiative and moving away from professional development where staff members receive information in a passive manner and are refocusing their efforts on professional development that allows school staff to actively participate in collaborative learning that allows teachers to apply what they have learned to real life situations and collaborate with their colleagues on the outcomes. Dever and Lash

(2013) pointed out that this type of collaboration allows for shared responsibility for success of school programs. However, it is important to remember that in order for this collaborative process to occur that teachers and staff must be given time in which collaborate with other stakeholders in the process. It is important to remember that teachers who are given time to work collaboratively also gain new knowledge about topics from their colleagues thus fostering in them a sense of being part of the solution rather than feeling isolated and not part of the school vision.

Another important element of building a successful learning environment through the use of professional learning communities is that of setting norms for the team. DeFour and Eaker (1998) identified four areas that a professional learning community must address to operate efficiently. These included setting norms on how the group will operate, a set goals that they want to accomplish, how they will address their effectiveness, and addressing of conflicts that arise. Lujan and Day (2010) further pointed out that when a professional learning community while discussing an issue comes to a point of conflict that they must be willing to engage in a discussion that allows all members to come to a "shared consensus" on the point of contention through a supportive environment that fosters collegiality (p. 14). Without this professional learning communities will develop into groups that are mistrustful of each other and promote a community of confrontation among its members.

**School Leadership**

The third research question asked: *What are the perceptions of faculty, staff, and campus administration on campus leadership support for the use of a behavior SST?* A common theme that emerged was faculty and staff felt supported when they needed an administrator to step in to

help with discipline that was hindering the learning process. They felt that school administrator's supported their efforts in the classroom, but were keenly aware that school administration recognized that learning was not able to take place when student disruptive behavior was present in the classroom and learning cannot take place by all students. Today's schools according to DuFour and Marzano (2009) need learning leaders who focus on learning rather than being the traditional instructional leader. The learning leader focuses efforts on collaborative efforts of teachers and other professional staff in activities that promote a collaborative environment that builds capacity among the group as they work toward establishing student learning that is meaningful to the student and is free of behavior disruptions. Instead of focusing on general teacher activities that focus on basic learning skills, school leaders should focus on collective goals with their staff that will produce results that meet the needs of the student as well as action research into possible new strategies that will enhance student behavior and learning.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) pointed out that not only do school leaders have to respond to what is right before them, but they must also be aware of the undercurrents that are happening within the school community or team. The school leader must be willing to meet with the teams to discuss concerns that arise and be willing to provide the necessary training and support that is needed to help the team meet the shared vision and goals that they initially developed. Basically put, it means that the school leader is more allied with student learning rather than the actual act of teaching.

School leaders, according to Ogonosky (2009), must become the agent for change in regards to implementation of RtI within the schools. Therefore, schools leaders and school leadership teams must have a solid basis of understanding of what a behavior RtI entails in order

to implement the process effectively on the campus. School leaders should invoke the vision of a behavior RtI while inspiring the campus community and team to "step up and take part in the change of attitudes" (Ogonosky 2009, p. 11). School leaders need to encourage teams to look at all elements that are crucial to the implementation of a behavior RtI process while they delve into the logistics such as financial and curriculum supports.

Petty (2007) stated that school leadership can effectively impact the introduction of new processes on their campuses by allowing teachers to be part of the decision making process in regards to professional development. In addition, Petty (2008) pointed out that school leaders need to provide more time for teachers to meet with their colleagues for planning and discussion purposes. Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) further stated that school leaders need not direct every action of the professional learning community in order for the group to build a successful group, but rather build community where each feels a part of the process by supporting and commending staff on their learning.

In order for leaders to effect positive change within their school system, they must be willing to look deeper into the organization's weaknesses and strengths and hold meaningful collaborative conversations about these areas. Gialamas, Pelonis, and Medeiros (2014) stated that the main role of the school leader is "to inspire individuals in the learning community to embrace change and to mitigate their fears by creating a professional community in which risk taking is permitted and encouraged, and which allows for failure --which is seen as integral to the learning process" (p. 76). In doing this, the leadership expects the members of a team to work in a manner that is collaborative and is focused on the vision of the school. Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, and Young (2011) found that when stakeholders are allowed to demonstrate their

leadership skills in a collaborative environment that the perceptions of school leaders produced a productive environment in which members of the team felt supported and better able to take on leadership roles within the team.

The fourth research question asked: *What are faculty and staff's beliefs after using the behavior SST approach in terms of usefulness of dealing with student problematic behavior in the classroom?* This question can best be answered by using an approach that makes the implementation of behavior SSTs a mutual agreed upon decision by all stakeholders involved and that the decision for implementation is supported by all and not just a portion of the stakeholders. Lambert et al. (2002) stated that the actions of leaders are based on the intentions and behaviors that create an environment in which participants are willing to embark on new avenues because there is a mutual trust between all involved. Marzano (2003) believed that, in order to create an environment that is conducive to collaboration, leaders must have respect for all members and their insight into situations. Behavior SSTs strive to improve the conditions for all involved in handling discipline that is disruptive to the learning environment. Sullivan, Klingbell, and Van Norman (2013) found that teacher professional development in the areas of classroom management and behavior strategies is essential to teach the skills necessary to address the behavior challenges of today's classroom. Barnes and Harlacher (2008) pointed out that this professional development should include the components of a shared belief and vision, being able to transfer into everyday practice the learned knowledge base, and the knowledge on how to interpret the data once collected. Leaders must be willing to provide an environment that stimulates collaboration among the parties involved that is free of negative elements that inhibit the participants from sharing and constructing relationships that are beneficial to the process.

Without this, the teams will become stagnant, develop an overall distrust for the process, and not reach the desired goal of helping students and teachers be successful in the learning environment.

## Implications for Social Change

In Section 1 the major points for conducting this study on behavior SSTs was presented. Section 4 presented the finding of the study from the focus group members collected through an interview process and Section 5 offered up an interpretation of those findings. The following will provide a description of the social change implications of this case study's results for all stakeholders.

Findings from this study indicated that professional staff involved with the day-to-day task of managing student behavior in the regular classroom environment was often disrupted by chronic student behavior that was disruptive that resulted in an office referral. The disruptions often led to classroom instruction being halted so that they teacher could address the behavior. Professional staff often felt like they were not adequately prepared to deal with disruptive student behavior and lacked proper training in behavior strategies. With the effective implementation of behavior SSTs that are supported by consistent and collaborative staff development in behavior student support processes and behavior strategies, professional staff will be better equipped to handle student behavior so that it does not disrupt the educational process. In addition, by providing teachers and administrators with an avenue such as a behavior SST to address student behavior in a collaborative manner, they will begin to realize that a productive environment in which learning can take place free of distractions of inappropriate behavior that will not only benefit their students but others within the school system as well as developing skills to use in the world outside of school (Green, 2009). The social change impact will not only guide students

in developing maintaining acceptable behavior inside the school walls, but will benefit all aspects of society by teaching students how to behave appropriately in various situations including post-secondary education, work, and career paths as well as private lives.

## Recommendations for Action

The basis for this study was to determine what teacher perceptions and attitudes were towards a behavior SST approach that addressed chronic disruptive student behavior. As a result of the investigation of this topic there existed concern of the teachers of this small rural Texas middle school campus that behavior SST training and classroom behavior strategies were lacking in regards to teacher knowledge about how to handle disruptive behavior that impeded other student's learning in the classroom. Although, the information gathered was from a small sample it was a representative cross section of the school's professional staff.

Based on the findings of this study, the information will be shared with the building leadership in order to effect meaningful change that will benefit all concerned. The information will be presented to the campus leadership in the form of a brief handout outlining major points and recommendations designed so that meaningful conversation can occur between all stakeholders on how disruptive behavior is handled.

The recommendations are:

1. Develop a professional learning community environment within the campus system so that all cross sections of the campus have an equal voice in the process of handling behavior.

2. Utilize current staff that have a background in behavior and discipline to aid the behavior SST in developing behavior strategies and plans that meaningful not only for the students, but the campus community as well.
3. Campus administration should survey the campus community to determine areas of need in regards to behavior and staff development needs.
4. Campus administration should support the campus community in developing realistic behavior and discipline goals that mirror the needs of the campus and monitor those goals to ensure sustainability and fidelity.
5. Encouragement for the development of a campus discipline and behavior culture that is proactive instead of one that is reactive and punitive in nature for all involved.
6. Encouragement of open and honest communication between faculty, staff, and campus administration that is productive and proactive in leadership style rather than a traditional type of leadership that exists in most schools.

## Recommendations for Further Study

This study researched a small cross section of a small rural Texas middle school campus which consisted of nine professional employees. While this study represents the perceptions and attitudes of only this staff, it could be replicated in other schools to determine the climate of the school in regards to behavior and discipline as well as the means used to address both on a campus. The outcomes of the study, if conducted by other schools, could help the schools take a proactive look at their behavior and discipline practices as well the means in which they address both.

It is also recommended that the current campus studied, or any campus employing the use of the study, further study the reactions to staff development implemented and its effectiveness as perceived by a representational cross section of the campus community. During the course of the interviews for this study, it was noted that teachers while they may receive the same staff development often do not carry it beyond the staff development venue. My investigations on the topic revealed that professional staff is often sent to professional development for behavior and discipline that is not followed through with consistently once the teachers return to the classroom setting. Therefore, it is recommended that any campus employing this study method continually survey and solicit teacher input on the implementation of behavior and discipline staff development as well as teacher needs in regards to implementation of a behavior SST process to ensure fidelity and consistency of implementation.

Additionally, it would be wise for any campus conducting a similar study to interview faculty and staff separate from school administration. Conducting the interviews separately would allow faculty and staff to openly discuss their perceptions and attitudes in regards to behavior SSTs without fear of repercussions from administration. Faculty and staff need to feel that their attitudes and perceptions can be openly shared without fear of retaliation from administration. School administrators need to be aware that without this open and honest communication, change will not happen in a positive manner, and any initiative will not have the support of all stakeholders.

## Reflection

At the beginning of my study, I wanted to know why faculty, staff, and campus administration were hesitant to use a behavior support team approach when handling discipline.

However, I found that it was not necessarily about not wanting to use the approach but rather about understanding the process, different behavior strategies that were out of the norm, and how it affected them within the classroom. The notion of "one more thing added to my plate" was not as prevalent as I had originally thought it was. Rather, what I found were faculty, staff, and campus administration that wanted to do what was best for the students in their school and wanted more information on how to do this within their classroom. One thing I did become keenly aware of during the two focus group interviews was that all teachers were hesitant to really open up about their feelings when school leadership was part of the group. This raised questions in my own mind about the dynamics of the school leadership on teachers and staff and one that I want to look into further after completion of the study. Initially, I had not believed that there was a problem with faculty and staff being open and honest in their discussions with campus leadership as this had not been an issue in the past. However, in hindsight I might have received richer and more detailed answers to the interview questions in the first focus group interview had the interviews been conducted separately.

While conducting this study, I was able to interview my professional colleagues in a non-threatening environment that gave me tremendous insight into how they viewed themselves as part of behavior and discipline aspect of the school. While it was difficult for me to set aside my biases on a behavior SST, I was able to do so and in the process developed a better understanding of how the focus group participants view the campus discipline structure and how leaders at the school were viewed in the process.

In addition, my relationship with the interview participants was one in which I already had a trusting relationship. However, I had to further gain their trust in the reporting of the data

by allowing them to review the material at various stages of the process including the study findings. While there were only minor discrepancies found in the transcription, many were amazed at how their responses were woven together to present the general consensus of the group on the behavior SST process. Also, allowing a trusted peer to review the data after the transcription and findings were put together allowed that person and I to dialog on what the true issues were on the topic. As a behavior coach, I have longed believed that students needed proactive behavior training rather than reactive retraining. However, I realized during the interview process that many of the participants had behavior training that was generalized and were not given the opportunities to put the learning into place in the classroom and then come back together to talk about their experiences. Prescriptive professional development rather than collaborative professional development was hindering how the teachers approach handling disruptive students. As a result, I want to personally further investigate staff perceptions and attitudes after the process has been reintroduced in a professional learning community setting and teachers are allowed to collaboratively work together to develop a behavior SST process that is reflective of the campus's needs.

## Conclusion

For many school personnel, RtI seems to be another thing added to their already full plate. In addition, most teachers go through the routine of professional development and then quickly place it on the shelf only to return to again at a much later point. My study looked at the attitudes and perceptions of teachers in regards to implementing a behavior SST process. School personnel who participated in this study were generally eager to investigate the process, but felt that they lacked the necessary training to implement effectively on the campus. It is my belief,

that teachers who are given the opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning on RtI are more likely to embrace the concept of a behavior support team, if they share a common vision and goals on the process. In order to achieve this, professional learning communities need to be established so that the campus community can explore the rationale behind RtI and how it relates to a behavior SST. It is also important for the school leadership to provide the campus community with the opportunity and time to investigate and design a behavior SST process that mirrors the school's vision and goals as well provides opportunities for professional staff to continue meaningful professional development in the behavior SST process.

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## Appendix A: Cooperation Letter

**POTEET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

Manuel Aragon, Principal | Sharon Neumann, Assistant Principal | Bernie Batto, Counselor

September 30, 2013

Ms. Elizabeth B. (Bernie) Batto
Student, Educational Administration
Richard W. Riley College of Education
Walden University

Dear Ms. Batto:

Based on my understanding of your research topic, I give permission for you to conduct your study, "Staff Member Perceptions of a Behavior Student Support Team Approach" at Poteet Junior High School. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct the focus group interview sessions on behavior student support teams in order for you to conduct your research study.

Participation of the staff will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time, if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Manuel Aragon

Manuel Aragon, Principal
Poteet Junior High School
PO Box 138
Poteet, Texas 78065

# Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear Poteet Junior High School Administration and Staff:

You are being invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Ms. Elizabeth B. (Bernie) Batto under the direct supervision of Dr. Aaron Deris, professor at Walden University. The intent of this research study is to examine staff perceptions regarding a Response to Intervention (RtI) Behavior Student Support Team process and the role that leadership plays in the implementation of the process.

The initial phases of the study include an invitation to participate in the study and an informed consent from all participants. Those who elect to participate in the study will be asked to give basic demographic information in regards to grade level and teaching assignment.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the electronic response form and return it me electronically at the email addresses provided below. In approximately two weeks after the electronic email, focus group members will be selected from the returned emails and they will be sent an informed consent for participation in the study. The focus group will meet after school for approximately one hour and will be guided by a script. All participants will be given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Participation in the focus groups is completely voluntary. Participants may withdraw from participation at any time during the study. All participants in the study will be allowed to check their responses before finalization of the student to ensure validity of statements and information. All information is confidential and the only persons that will have access to the data are: Dr. Aaron Deris, chairperson, Dr. Albert Kocher, methodologist, and Elizabeth B. (Bernie) Batto, researcher. Return of the informed consent and your voluntary participation in the focus group indicates that you are a willing participant in the study and understand the perimeters of the research.

To indicate your willingness to be a possible participant in the study, please complete the information on the attached response form and return it to the researcher either electronically or by hand delivery.

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation in it at batto.bernie@gmail.com or elizabeth.batto@waldenu.edu. A summary of the results will be available at a later date.

Appendix C: Electronic Response Form

Yes, I, _____, am interested in participating in the "Staff
(faculty/staff name)
Member Perceptions of a Behavior Student Support Team Approach" Research Study.

Demographic Information: All information will be kept confidential and will only appear in the study as basic demographic information to denote the make-up of the focus groups. You will be identified only by a pseudonym to protect your identity. This information will only be used to report on the make-up of the focus group. No actual names will be used in the study.

Printed name: _____

_____Male _____Female

Highest Degree Held: _____Bachelors _____Masters _____Specialist _____Doctorate

Grade Level You Currently Teach: _____$6^{th}$ _____$7^{th}$ _____$8^{th}$ _____$6^{th}$-$8^{th}$

Subject Area You Currently Teach: _____ELA _____Math _____Science _____History
_____Elective _____Special Education/Intervention

Years of Teaching Experience: _____0-5 _____6-10 _____11-15 _____16-20 _____20+

Appendix D: Informed Consent to Participate in Focus Group

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of Behavior Student Support Teams: A Case Study of Faculty and Administration Perceptions and the Role of Leadership in the Process. The researcher is inviting professional middle school educators to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Elizabeth B. (Bernie) Batto who is a doctoral student in the Richard W. Riley College of Education at Walden University. You may already know this doctoral student as a professional counselor with Poteet Junior High School, but this study is separate from that role.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of faculty and staff regarding the use a behavior student support team to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement.

In addition, the study seeks answers to the following:

1. Do faculty and staff using the process understand the key elements and principals of a behavior support team
2. How do they preceive it will effect discipline in regards to disciplinary placements.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Meet with the researcher twice to participate in a focus group interview for approximately one hour.
- The first meeting will be to gather information about faculty and staff perceptions regarding the use of a behavior student support team. The meeting will be conducted after school at the campus that is being studied. A tape recorder will be used to collect the information from participants.
- The second interview will be conducted at the end of the study period to gather information on the participant's perceptions of the use of a behavior student support team after the program has been implemented for a three month time period. This meeting will be approximately one hour in length and will be tape recorded.
- Transcripts for each session will be provided to you to read for correctness in statements after they have been transcribed.
- In addition, before the final study is published you be given a draft copy to review for correctness.

Here are some sample questions that will be asked during the focus group interview:

- What types of misbehavior do you as a teacher or staff member refer students to the office for?
- How do you feel about implementing a Response to Intervention Behavior Student Support Team on this campus?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Poteet Junior High School or Poteet Independent School District will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as loss of planning time after school for the two meetings. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The benefits of the study are to help school leaders understand the perceptions of faculty and staff regarding the use a behavior student support team to address student classroom discipline concerns before they become problematic and result in a discretionary discipline placement such as ISS, OCS, and DAEP.

**Payment:**
The researcher nor Poteet Junior High School will compensate study participants for participating in the study.

**Privacy:**
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using a pseudonym in place of the participant's real names. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, in a secure locked cabinet.

In addition by consenting to participate in the study, participants agree that any information disclosed during the focus group interviews will be kept confidential and not discussed with outside parties not part of the focus group.

**Contacts and Questions:**
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone at 210-347-1834 or email at elizabeth.batto@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-31-13-0020797 and it expires on October 30, 2014.

**Statement of Consent:**
Please reply to the consent email with the words “I Consent” to affirm your participation in the study. You may print or keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

## Appendix E: Pre-Implementation Focus Group Questions

Introduction: First, let me start by saying that I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study on Response to Intervention Behavior Support Teams. In participating in this study, please understand that there are no wrong or right answers. This interview will be taped and all information will be confidential. Your names will not be used and you will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used to report the results.

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. Please keep in mind that this is not a debate session, but rather a session to gather your thoughts, feelings, and insights into the RtI Behavior Support Team Process.

Thank you. Now we will proceed with the interview questions. But before we begin do you have any questions or concerns?

1. What is your teaching experience?

2. What is your background regarding Response to Intervention Behavior Student Support Team? Please indicate what types of trainings you have been to, if any.

   Probing Question: (If unclear what the training pertains to) Please elaborate on the type of training for clarification purposes

3. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about implementing a Response to Intervention Behavior Student Support Team on this campus? Please include in your response the impact you believe it will have on teachers and students on this campus.

4. What types of misbehavior do you as a teacher or staff member refer students to the office for?

5. What are the steps you take when a student is misbehaving in your class?

   Probing: Can you please explain in detail a little more your steps such as reason, rationale, etc?

6. Do you feel that you have access to administrator, support staff, or any other service when dealing with students who are misbehaving in your classroom? Please explain in detail.

7. What do you feel needs to happen for an RtI Behavior Support Team to be implemented on this campus? Please think of leadership, strategies, professional development, etc.

8. Is there anything that you would like to add that you feel might be beneficial to the study?

Thank you for your time in participating in this study. I appreciate your thoughts and insights. A copy of the entire transcript of this session will be provided to you at a later date to read. You will be allowed to make changes to your statements by letting me know after you receive the transcript. Again, thank you very much for your participation.

# Appendix F: Post-Implementation Focus Group Questions

Introduction: First, let me start by saying that I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study on Response to Intervention Behavior Support Teams. As I explained before there are no wrong or right answers to the questions. This interview will be taped and all information will be confidential. Your names will not be used and you will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used to report the results.

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. Please keep in mind that this is not a debate session, but rather a session to gather your thoughts, feelings, and insights into the RtI Behavior Support Team Process after it has been put in place.

Thank you. Now we will proceed with the interview questions. But before we begin do you have any questions or concerns?

1. The Behavior Student Support Team process was presented to you during a faculty meeting. If you used the process, describe the pros and cons of the process that you experienced. If you did not use the process, please give the reasons why you did not use it to address student behavior.
2. How many students did you refer to the team and what were the reasons?
3. Where you included in the team meeting?
    a. If yes, how did you feel being a part of the team?
    b. If no, why were you not included? Was it your choice to not be included?
4. Did the team provide you with strategies to use in dealing with the student or students you referred?
    a. If you were given strategies were they helpful or not? Please explain
    b. Did you have difficulty implementing the strategies? What did you think needed to be changed in order to make the strategies more successful? Did you implement your changes and record the outcomes to present to the committee at the next meeting?

5. In answering this next question, please consider the following questions: What are your impressions of the process? Would you use the approach again? Do you feel it is a process that can benefit students and/or teachers in deterring further misbehavior?
6. Has the process helped you in your classroom deal with students who are having the same type of misbehavior concerns? Please explain.
7. Would you or would you not use the process again to deal with student misbehavior? Please explain why or why not.

Thank you for your time in participating in this study. I appreciate your thoughts and insights. A copy of the transcript of this session will be provided to you at a later date to read. You will be allowed to make changes to your statements by letting me know after you receive the transcript. Again, thank you very much for your participation.

Curriculum Vitae

**Elizabeth Bernadette (Bernie) Batto**

**Professional Work Experience**

**Poteet Independent School District** – 1991 to present
P. O. Box 138; Poteet, Texas 78065
**Campus assigned to:** Junior High School
**Position:** Counselor and Summer School Facilitator
**Duties:** Counseling, Career and College Readiness, Student Records, LPAC Committee Member, Special Education, Campus Testing Coordinator, ACE After-School Culinary Teacher
**Previous Positions:** Director of Special Programs, Director of Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System, Elementary and High School Assistant Principal, Elementary Counselor
**Previous Duties:** Special Programs Director for District, Performance Based Analysis System Monitoring, Discipline Alternative School, Discipline, textbooks, various committee assignments, communications with parents, students, and community, tutoring program, attendance issues, supervision of students in various settings, teacher appraiser, counseling services in the areas of classroom guidance (weekly lessons with 26 PK-2 classes), individual, and group; LPAC representative and language proficiency testing in English; Special Education referral process and multidisciplinary team member; Gifted and Talented placement committee; site-based decision making committee at campus and district level; drug-free club sponsor; scheduling of students into classes; Title I School Support Team member; technology presenter, TELPAS Rater Trainer, Positive Behavior Support District and Campus Coach, Bilingual/ESL, Gifted and Talented, Homeless Education, DEIC committee member, Campus Testing Coordinator

**Cotulla Independent School District** – 1988 to 1991
P. O. Box 699; Cotulla, Texas 78014
Campus assigned to: Cotulla High School
**Position:** High School Counselor
**Duties:** Counseling services in the areas of academic, personal, social, testing, and other facets of the total student, assisted in the planning and completion of the student scheduling process, various seminars and presentations to students in regards to college, military, etc.; and directing the secondary testing program.

**Pettus Independent School District** – 1984-1988
P. O. Box D; Pettus, Texas 78146
Campus assigned to: Pettus High School
**Position:** High School and Junior High Business and Journalism teacher

**Duties:** teacher of business education and journalism classes; school newspaper sponsor; UIL coach; and class sponsor.

**Other Work Experience**

**Southwest Texas State University** – 1981 to 1984
School of Education; San Marcos, Texas 78666
**Position:** Student Secretary

**First National Bank of Bandera (Now Bandera Bank) –** 1977 to 1988
P. O. Box 1596; Bandera, Texas 78003
**Duties:** Secretarial, Teller and Bookkeeping

**Poteet Independent School District Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE)** – 2011 to present
P. O. Box 138; Poteet, Texas 78065
Center Assignment: Junior High School
Position: After School Instructor
Duties: Preparing menus, shopping for supplies, and instructing a culinary class for grades 6-8

**Southwest Texas State University** – 1980 to 1984
San Marcos, Texas 78666
Position: School of Education Student Secretary
Duties: Preparing student degree plans and general secretarial work

**Education**

**Walden University** – 2008 to present
Doctorate of Education (in progress)
Administrative Leadership
Coursework: 54 hours in administrative leadership, research, teaching and learning, foundations

**Walden University** – 2004 - 2005
Master of Education
**Major:** Integrating Technology into the Curriculum
**Coursework:** 30 hours of technology integration into the curriculum, collaborative action research, learning styles and multiple intelligences, habits of mind, teacher as professional

**Texas A and M University – Kingsville** – 2000 –2001
Certification courses
**Major:** Educational Administration

**Coursework:** 30 hours toward principalship certification in the areas of theory, leadership, principalship; supervision; school law, finance, special program, curriculum, educational administration, and a 150 hour internship
**Southwest Texas State University** – 1985-1987
Master of Education
**Major:** Guidance and Counseling
**Minor:** Elementary Education
Coursework: 45 hours in counseling theory, group and individual counseling, school psychology; individual testing; marriage and family; research; elementary counseling; and a 300 hour internship at the SWTSU Counseling Center

**Southwest Texas State University** – 1979-1984
Bachelor of Science in Education
**Major:** Business Education
**Minor:** Guidance Associate

**Bee County College** -- 1985 and 1987
Coursework in microcomputers and Spanish Certifications

**Bandera High School** – 1975-1979

**Texas Education Certifications**

Principal
Generic Special Education
School Counseling – professional
Business Administration, Secretarial Business, and Guidance Associate – provisional

**Other Endorsements and Professional Memberships**

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Counselor
Behavior Coach Endorsement
Capturing Kids Hearts trained through Flip Flippen and Associates
Crisis Prevention Institute Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Trainer
Golden Key International Honor Society
Irlen Institute Certified Screener
Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education
Life Spaces Crisis Intervention
School Specialist and Consultant in Trauma and Loss in Children
TELPAS Rater Trainer

Texas Counseling Association
Texas School Counselors Association
Texas Computer Educator's Association
Trainer for Pre-LAS and LAS-O Language Assessments