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Middle School Administration Personnel's Perspective on Emerging PBIS Status

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Gamal A. Kemp

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Middle School Administration Personnel's Perspective on Emerging PBIS Status

by

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MA, Walden University, 2012

BS, Morehouse College, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

An urban southeastern state school district has implemented the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) framework since 2014. However, campus administrators from six middle schools in the school district faced overcoming the PBIS emerging status as designated by the State Board of Education. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges that urban middle school administrators confront to overcome the PBIS emerging status of their campuses. An interview protocol was used to explore the middle school administration team's perspectives on the PBIS framework in reducing unwanted behaviors throughout the school and implementing PBIS. The study was designed to elucidate how school leaders presented the PBIS framework to the staff, how school personnel used and viewed the framework, and the reasons behind the five schools' emerging status. There were ten participants in the study. The data analysis was conducted based on Lester et al. (2020) seven phases for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The study found evidence that PBIS has been implemented within the schools; however, there are gaps in practice surrounding buy-in, funding, and lack of continuous professional learning about PBIS. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by increasing teachers' and administrators' awareness of the need for a collaborative effort in implementing an initiative like PBIS and may lead to increased collaboration as PBIS continues to be used at the school. This study's results can also be used by other school districts with the same demographics to understand better the challenges, successes, and decision-making processes of implementing PBIS.

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Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this study to all of you who have loved, cared and supported me in my dream of obtaining a doctorate; to the love of my life, my wife Deirdre Kemp, your continuous support, understanding and love have been the fuel that sustained me throughout this dissertation journey. To my daughter, Makayla, thank you for the unconditional love, the sparkle in your eyes, and the joy you bring to me each day. You are the fuel that led me to finish this journey. I hope you have learned from daddy, that when you want something, you do not let anyone keep you from fulfilling your goal. To my parents, Gerald and Latonia Kemp, the first who believed in me when I did not understand the importance of believing in myself. I will forever love you because of the faith, support, and confidence you instilled in me throughout my life. For everything that you have done and continue to do for me, please know that your efforts were not made in vain. To my sister and brother, Taelor and Garius Kemp, I love you both, and I hope I am everything you want in a big brother. I want you always to remember that I will always be there for you no matter what. I also dedicate this dissertation to my in-laws Enoch and Teresa Peters, for their constant push to further my academic achievements and the help along the way in reviewing my work. Finally, to all who are named in this dedication, I sincerely thank each of you for your encouragement, praise, faith, love, support, and belief in me to the very end. This body of work is dedicated to you with my love.

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Thank you, heavenly Father, for your grace and for never giving up on me. It is first and foremost because of you that I have been able to reach this level of success. I would like to acknowledge my Committee Chair, Dr. Rob Flanders and my former Chair Dr. Albert Gonzales. Without your guidance, challenging me, and expertise, I would not be at this point in my academic journey. You provided me with hope when I felt hopeless and encouragement when I began to doubt. I am truly grateful for all that you did to restore my drive and determination to finish the EdD. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Yarosz for providing feedback on my work and encouraging me with every revision, constructive feedback, and a positive mindset.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The federal government has pressed the State Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2016) to promote student learning through the No Child Left Behind Act, followed by the Every Student Succeeds Act, and most recently, the Common Core standards for the primary curriculum. The State Department also focused on student behavior as a focal point due to increased infractions seen in southeastern state's student achievement data. The State Department recommended local school boards to create initiatives such as Love and Logic, Character Education, 7-Mindsets, and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), which is being used across the country to reduce misbehavior in schools (<https://www.gadoe.org/Pages/Home.aspx>).

The local school district adopted PBIS to take on the learning challenges posed by student misbehavior. PBIS practices aim to improve school and classroom environments, including reducing the adverse effects of disruptive or distracting behaviors. When implemented, the research-based program enhances the chances of effective teaching and learning, both for the students exhibiting problem behaviors and their classmates (Foust, 2020). The total number of behavior incidents from the past 5 years from the local school district has either remained stagnant or increased. The data show minimal progress in improving behavior, one of the districts' focal points to increasing classroom learning.

This study's contribution to professional practice focused on implementing PBIS through professional development from school personnel's perspective and its impact on creating a successful program. The local school district's professional learning communities were a crucial indicator of PBIS training's effectiveness. The implications

for positive social change depend on whether school personnel could effectively use PBIS to improve students' social behavior in their respective school districts.

Background

According to national, state, and local discipline data, most classroom discipline problems come from disruptions, defiance, and inattention. Student behavior affects academics (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). During the 2015–2016 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 43% of public-school teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching, and 38% agreed or strongly agreed that student tardiness and class cutting interfered with their teaching. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, an estimated one-third of students fail to learn because of problems that impede their ability to engage in instructional activities. Traditional discipline practices of suspending students who have a high number of referrals in the classroom within the school district have been ineffective in helping teachers reduce inappropriate behaviors to promote learning (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019). Most behavioral management programs focus on the whole child's needs: academic, behavioral, social, and emotional components (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2012). The State Department of Education (SDoE) reported that more school districts turn to alternative solutions to manage student discipline.

PBIS is an evidence-based framework that extends to over 25,000 schools across the country (Horner & Sugai, 2015). PBIS is a three-tier framework program implemented in schools and districts to improve student behavior so that learning can occur in the classroom (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The framework's tiers are divided into

three defined and organized categories to help all students access services (Kittleman et al., 2019). Tier 1 focuses on being proactive by preventing behavior issues through effective instructional practices, teaching behavior expectations, and establishing a sound classroom management routine for all students. Tier 2 focuses on targeting more group-based support for students who are at risk. Tier 3 is individualized support for more severe students who fail to meet the previous tiers' expectations and goals (Eiraldi et al., 2019). The critical component of PBIS is that all students need to learn how to behave well, which requires 1 to 3 years of support from the district in modeling PBIS expectations (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The SDoE reported that research-based interventions of PBIS are saving countless instructional hours that would otherwise be lost to discipline. Findings have revealed positive school outcomes related to administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, consistency, sense of community, and school counselor integration (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Studies have shown that PBIS can be beneficial to schools if implemented with fidelity.

Problem Statement

Despite its widespread implementation and evidenced efficacy, little is known about school administration and its support to sustain PBIS. Further research needs to be conducted with school administration (teacher leaders and school principals) to assess if PBIS supports the enhancement of students' positive social conduct in public schools throughout the county. An urban southeastern state school district has implemented the PBIS framework since 2014; however, campus administrators from six middle schools of the school district faced overcoming the PBIS emerging status as designated by the

SBoE. The total number of behavior incidents from the past 5 years from the local school district has also either remained stagnant or increased. The State Governor's Office of Student Achievement for Discipline in 2014 reported 2,567 behavior incidents in the local school district in 2016, and the district increased to 2,709 incidents. In 2018 the number of incidents went down to 1,972, and in 2019 again increased to 2,218. One local assistant principal has expressed concerns about the increasing behavior incidents because of the lack of consistency with school wide PBIS among the grade levels. A school counselor reported that their school behavior incidents were higher on Fridays and the weeks after calendar breaks. Another counselor felt there needed to be differentiation of professional development between new teachers and veteran teachers. The local school district is in the sixth year of the implementation of PBIS, but the data show minimal progress in improving behavior.

The main focus in the study was to transition the schools out of the PBIS emerging status. Emerging schools are required to participate in SDoE approved training, covering all critical elements of Tier I PBIS. The PBIS team is actively installing PBIS Tier I essential elements. The group also meets monthly, and a school administrator is an active member of the PBIS team. The team has to complete a self-assessment survey (SAS), a Tier I Walkthrough, and a Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI). The school also must obtain a TFI Tier I score greater than 70% and Tier I Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) for all students 0-1 less than 75% in order to transition to a proficient PBIS status. The number of in-school suspensions (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS) must be stable or declining since 2014–2015. Every school that has implemented the PBIS

framework works towards being operational. To obtain the pperational status, schools must score 85% or greater on the TFI. The school must have 85% or more of the school's student population with 0-1 ODRs. Finally, there has to be a constant decline from year to year for ODRs, ISS, and OSS.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the challenges that urban middle school administrators experienced in transitioning their schools out of the PBIS emerging status. The central topic of the study was middle school administration team's perspectives on the PBIS framework in reducing unwanted behaviors throughout the school and the implementation of PBIS. This study should help educational leaders implementing PBIS as a proactive behavior program to enhance students' social conduct. The local school district has implemented PBIS as an initiative to reduce unwanted behaviors in the classroom. However, with the number of disruptive behaviors remaining constant, the local school district middle schools have remained at the emerging PBIS status. This study should help the local school districts and other districts alike to better understand the reasons behinds the emerging PBIS statues.

Research Questions

The study was guided by two basic qualitative research study questions related to the challenges of school administration on their perception of PBIs:

RQ 1: What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging Positive Behavior Intervention Support state status?

RQ 2: What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out of the six middle schools in the district?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study originated in Skinner's reinforcement theory and Bandura's social learning theory, which helped guide the study's specific direction and the relationship between the different themes. Skinner's and Bandura's theories support positive reinforcement and social observation, respectively, of how children learn. Skinner's reinforcement theory supports student behavior in the academic setting (Haberman & Olivero, 1968). Skinner's reinforcement theory supports the foundation for student behavior in the academic setting and its effects on students' educational needs. Based on the reinforcement theory, school personnel responds to specific student behaviors that determine positive and negative outcomes. Skinner's reinforcement theory positively correlates to the PBIS framework that creates a manageable way to achieve desired behaviors when implemented with fidelity.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory describes the psychological processes that govern human behavior such as how behavior develops, how it is maintained, and through what operations it can be modified (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Bandura's theory further supports how PBIS affects a student's behavior when implemented with fidelity. Social learning theory weighs on students' modeling and observational behaviors in the school setting. Theoretically, social learning provides a framework for describing learning environments that influence behavior within the classroom. Social learning

theory supports the use of positive behavior encouragement, which includes implementing evidence-based methods and specific strategies intended to address challenging behaviors (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

The PBIS framework promotes students' idea of being rewarded for following the schools' behavior expectations (Marshall, 2015). Positive behavior and academic achievement among students are imperative for teachers' and schools' success (Correa-Phelps, 2020). Thus, the theories in the conceptual framework are relevant to understanding school administrations' perceptions of the PBIS framework in schools and districts. Each theory helped frame this study to examine administrators' PBIS implementation perspectives by focusing on students' learning socially, interacting with their peers, and positive reinforcements, rewarding the positive behaviors. The conceptual framework helped provide an understanding of the overall purpose of PBIS implementation. Chapter 2 contains further details on the study's conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design for this study. Qualitative research provides the understanding of participants' multiple viewpoints to get a clear perception of their idea of the phenomenon, which is the primary goal of this study (Arghode, 2012). In light of the methodology of the study, I invited 10 school personnel (principals, assistant principals, counselors, and lead teachers) from an urban southeastern state school district to participate in this study. Each school administrator served as a representative for their school, and each interview provided a clear perception of why the school still only had the emerging PBIS state status. The data obtained from interviews with school personnel

came from the six middle schools in an urban school district in the southeastern United States. School personnel were interviewed online through Google Meets due to Covid 19 protocols. The semistructured interviews provided insight into the implementation of PBIS. The interpretive approach captured the reality through the interview data through the participants' experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The data collected from all personnel involved obtaining detailed information from the designed selected interview questions that expounded on the overall feelings, perceptions, and opinions on the relevant local problem.

Definitions

Classroom management: A set of classroom procedures and routines implemented by teachers in the classroom environment for all students for teaching prosocial behavior and preventing and reducing inappropriate behavior (Herman et al., 2020).

Positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS): PBIS is a three-tiered preventive framework (primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention) associated with improved student behavior and academic outcomes (Kittelman et al., 2019). It is also a framework designed to improve and integrate all data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day (PBIS.org, 2020).

Social learning theory: The idea of individuals that try to imitate the behaviors of role models or their authority figures in their school or work environments (Men et al., 2020).

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that are presumed to be accurate, often only temporarily or for a specific purpose, such as building a theory (Molfenter et al., 2019). In conducting this study, I assumed that all participants understood the fundamental aspects of PBIS (behavior expectations, award system, tier levels, and discipline consequences step process). I also assumed that all participants' responses to the interview questions were truthful to ensure the study's validity. Furthermore, I assumed that all participants had a genuine interest in being part of the research. Lastly, my assumption was that this study accurately represented the urban school district's current situation in the southeastern part of the country.

Scope and Delimitations

This basic qualitative study focused on a suburban school district in the southeastern United States. The schools in the district implemented the PBIS framework to reduce behavior issues in the classroom. Locally, over the past 5 years, the data reflect little to no decrease in students' misbehavior in six middle schools. The middle schools have the highest number of student discipline referrals rates than the elementary and high school campuses of the district. Interviews helped me evaluate the problem from the school administration team's perspective. I selected school leaders as participants for this study because no studies I found considered their perspective on why the PBIS framework is not working. There are six middle schools in the district, and each school has five to six members on the administrative team. Looking at the schools' population and similar size, I felt that interviewing two or three administrators from each school

would give me a good representation of the administrators' perspective without over-saturation. Following a qualitative method, interview questions helped me uncover school administration teams' thoughts and opinions related to the problem.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the Covid-19 pandemic that schools are presently experiencing. I completed interviews virtually to keep participants safe. The study was limited to the school personnel from a suburban school district of a southeastern state who would like to participate in the study. The study's number of participants stayed within the parameters as advocated by Ravitch and Carl (2016), which was 10. The participants were chosen to create a more diverse representation from each school and a more accurate perception from schools around the district with different socioeconomic statuses. Another limitation was that I was employed by one of the schools in the study; however, this did not affect the data collection. I interviewed administrators from the targeted five middle schools of the district.

Significance

In this study, the local problem was implementing a new best practices initiative that appears ineffective in a local setting. A program evaluation on the implementation of PBIS helped to determine if the district is effectively implementing the initiative. This study contributes to the existing research on this topic for mid-sized suburban school districts. The research-based PBIS framework promotes positive student behaviors through intervention strategies that uplift students' social and emotional needs while deterring negative behaviors (PBIS.org). This basic qualitative study could also help the

initial training of school personnel, improving pedagogical practices that will reduce the number of discipline infractions and foster a positive classroom environment for both teachers and students. A similar study noted that continuous professional development allows teachers to perfect skills to encourage and acknowledge expected behaviors consistently from students (Wanner & Palmer, 2018). This study helps develop a better understanding of implementing PBIS in schools through professional development, designed for teachers to learn new skills and ensure effective implementation.

This study's potential contribution to professional practice resides in implementing PBIS through professional development from school personnel's perspective and its impact on creating a successful program. This study can help develop a better understanding and implementation of PBIS in schools through professional development, designed for teachers to learn new skills and ensure effective implementation. The implications for positive social change depend on school personnel to effectively use PBIS to improve students' social behavior in the school district. This study's results could be used by other school districts with the same demographics leading to a better understanding of the challenges, successes, and decision-making processes of implementing PBIS.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a background for the study, the problem statement, purpose, and research questions designed to provide insight into the perceptions of PBIS, which was implemented in the local school district. I also discussed the conceptual framework based on Skinner's reinforcement theory (Haberman & Olivero, 1968) and

Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), which helped explore the problem, the specific direction of the study, and the relationship between the different themes of the study. I explained the qualitative methodology with interviews as the study's design. Definitions of critical terms, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance were discussed.

This basic qualitative study of the PBIS program outlined data gathered from interviews for the mid-sized suburban school districts. A sample was taken from administrators from each of the schools to gain their perception of the PBIS framework related to the local problem. These basic qualitative study results could be helpful in the initial training of school personnel, which could improve pedagogical practices that will reduce the number of discipline infractions and foster a positive classroom environment for both teachers and students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In 2014, an urban southeastern state school district implemented the PBIS framework, but campus administrators from six of the district's middle schools face the PBIS emerging status as the SBoE designated. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges urban middle school administrators confront in overcoming their campuses' PBIS emerging status. The literature review for this study focused on PBIS implementation. Schools implemented PBIS to reduce behavioral incidents in students at a southeastern state local school district; however, implementation challenges continue throughout the schools. PBIS is a three-tier framework implemented in schools and districts to improve student behavior so that learning can occur in the classroom (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The following literature review clarifies both conceptual problems and the broader problem associated with the local school district. This qualitative study divided the investigation into five subsections: (a) literature search strategy, (b) conceptual framework, (c) findings in the review of literature, and (d) conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

I used databases and search engines from the Walden Library to conduct the initial literature search. The majority of the research came from Academic Search Complete, Education, Source, ERIC, Scholar Works, ProQuest, and EBSCO databases. The key search terms and combinations used for this research study were related to PBIS implementation. The key search terms used included *positive behavior intervention and support, PBIS, PBIS framework, implementing PBIS, classroom management, PBIS*

program evaluation, PBIS multi-tiered, research gaps in PBIS, school discipline, and school climate. The search yielded studies published between 2015 and 2020. The search process focused on PBIS, implementing PBIS, and the effectiveness of PBIS, which aligned directly to the problem and purpose of the study. I used references from articles to expand my search for additional resources.

Conceptual Framework

Skinner's reinforcement (Haberman & Olivero, 1968) and Bandura's social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977) theories were the conceptual frameworks used to guide this study, explain the problem, frame the study's specific direction, and delineate the relationship between schools emerging PBIS status and the perspective of the school administration teams on the issues (Haberman & Olivero, 1957; Bandura & Walters, 1977). Similar studies have also used these theories to understand the PBIS implementation process and reduce inappropriate student behaviors through positive reinforcement and social learning techniques (Anderson-Saunders, 2016; Gibson, 2018).

Based on Bandura's theory of social learning, behaviors are learned either deliberately or inadvertently through real-life examples, such as parenting or teacher behaviors (Bandura & Walters, 1977). The social learning theory focuses on how learning occurs through modeling and observing others' behaviors (Bandura & Walters, 1977). These repeated learning experiences in the environment contribute to reinforcing those behaviors associated with the PBIS framework. Social learning theory mirrors how PBIS is used in schools to provide explicit examples of correct behavior and allow students sufficient time to practice those behaviors, ultimately improving students'

behaviors. Using the PBIS framework, school personnel facilitate lessons to teach students appropriate behavioral expectations in the school. When students display those appropriate behaviors, they are rewarded for decreasing in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS).

Skinner's reinforcement theory is another appropriate framework for understanding PBIS implementation in the classroom (Haberman & Olivero, 1968). Reinforcement theory posits that individuals' behaviors are a function of their consequences. Applying this approach to students, when students display positive behavior, they are rewarded, and that positive behavior is then more likely to continue. Conversely, negative behavior is punished via negative consequences to minimize the likelihood that those behaviors repeat. Skinner's theory may help clarify student outcomes resulting from their actions. School administrators have to consider the entire PBIS framework to understand the continuous emerging state rating. Like Skinner's study, administrators would measure how students respond to rewards as a result of positive behaviors.

The conceptual frameworks of reinforcement and social learning were used as a lens to understand the implementation of PBIS. Skinner's (1968) and Bandura's (1977) theories specifically relate to (a) rewarding positive behavior to increase positive behavior, (b) punishing negative behavior to reduce negative behavior, and (c) school personnel facilitating lessons to teach appropriate behavioral expectations in school to their students. Each theory helped frame the study to examine administrators' PBIS implementation perspectives by focusing on students learning socially, interacting with

their peers, and positive reinforcements, leading to rewarding the positive behaviors. The conceptual framework helped provide an understanding of the overall purpose of PBIS implementation.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

School administrative teams have implemented evidence-based behavioral programs to systematically obtain a positive school climate, reduce inappropriate behaviors, and decrease disruptions to improve learning (Ogulmus & Vuran, 2016). PBIS is a three-tiered framework that includes a systematic behavior strategy for school-wide attainment of positive social and academic outcomes and eliminating students' potential problems. The PBIS framework aims to create a system that positively reinforces desired behaviors and fosters a positive learning environment.

The following literature review helps clarify the gap in the literature with respect to the local problem of school administrations' perception to why the state rated the local school district's middle schools with an emerging PBIS status. This literature review addresses the following three themes: (a) the effects of disciplinary practices on students, specifically ISS and OSS approaches; (b) evidence-based practices of implementing the PBIS framework and the challenges of implementation; and (c) the importance of school climate when creating an environment conducive for learning.

School Discipline Reform

ISS and OSS approaches to school discipline have raised concerns regarding their adverse effects on student achievement. Recently, the mindset has shifted to the effectiveness of implementing these types of suspensions. Recent studies have shown that

suspending students negatively affects the students' educational goals and achievement (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). As such, researchers like Hannigan and Hannigan (2019) advocated for alternative discipline methods to replace suspensions. Studies have shown students were better served when allowed to learn from their mistakes than being sent home with the expectation of returning to school with fixed behavior (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Research has also found a positive correlation between suspensions and student misbehavior, grade retention, school failure, and dropout (Heilbrun et al., 2018). Further, there are growing concerns that suspensions and expulsions are associated with the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, one study reported students who committed infractions in school were more likely to end up in the criminal justice system (Puckett et al., 2019). More recently, research has demonstrated pressing concerns about school suspension and its associations with increased risk of low academic achievement, school dropout, and contact with juvenile justice (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

Studies have identified school climate as a critical component of reducing school suspension rates (Heilbrun et al., 2015). Despite evidence of potential drawbacks of suspensions, more current research studies have shown school suspensions are still among the most widely used approaches (Gage et al., 2018a). Research studies continue to link suspension with poor student outcomes, such as the increased risk of dropping out. However, schools implementing PBIS with fidelity have significantly fewer suspensions and other positive student outcomes (Freeman et al., 2019), positively impacting school climate (Heilbrun et al., 2015). Research has also shown significantly fewer OSS for students with disabilities and Black students in schools implementing PBIS as well as

overall decreases in OSS and disciplinary exclusions (Gage et al., 2017, 2018a, 2018b). These findings suggest that high-fidelity PBIS implementation could reduce disciplinary behaviors and improve student behavior in school substantially. The following section focuses on school administration team members and their contribution to schools' PBIS framework.

School Climate

Schools categorize school climate by school environment, interactions, and experiences within the school setting. The school climate plays a pivotal role in feeling respected and supported in the school environment (Osher et al., 2020). Schools must create environments conducive to learning and growing. Furthermore, schools must create an environment that supports success for every student, and principals, counselors, and teachers must develop structures within the school that encourage secure relationships (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Schools identified with healthy climates have a high functioning, supportive leadership team, collaboration among teachers, and high expectations for supporting student learning (Kraft & Falken, 2020). A healthy school climate may also help combat common experiences outside of school and in the environment that students may encounter that could be detrimental to their learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018), such as neglect, hunger, homelessness, or community violence (Arrington, 2020). A positive school environment conducive to learning helps strengthen the effects of healing and student learning and behavior (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

State education departments heavily weigh school climate in overall evaluations of school effectiveness (Ngware et al., 2021). State boards urge school districts to identify school-specific structural or cultural weaknesses through feedback data (Kraft & Falken, 2020). School districts often offer professional development sessions from feedback data to strengthen school climates. Specifically, schools receive climate scores on staff and student attendance, teachers, students, parent surveys, state test performance, and safety. Research has shown that schools and school figures attempt to improve these ratings in several ways. Wagner (2017) focused on minimizing classroom disruptions through culturally responsive teacher-candidate pedagogical behaviors. Topics discussed included social interactions between teachers and students to create learning environments, build interpersonal relationships to engage students in activities, and promote effective exchange during the teaching-learning process. Mitchell et al. (2018) suggested the importance of having a team of educators engage in data-based decision making, build a sustainable system to implement programs with fidelity among school staff, and select, implement, and monitor a continuum of behavioral supports. Study findings indicated school teams met implementation standards and observed positive changes in school climate, staff perceptions, and student behaviors when provided with PBIS training.

Stakeholders in PBIS

Stakeholders play an essential role in implementing new school programs or initiatives (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). School-level stakeholders and PBIS teams consist of teachers, counselors, principals, assistant principals, parents, and teachers.

Principals, teachers, and other stakeholders at the school work to develop expertise by working collaboratively (Arrington, 2020). All stakeholders working together allow leadership to be distributed and all school community members the opportunity to contribute to decisions within the framework of school initiatives (Arrington, 2020).

Many schools across the United States in rural districts do not have the resources to fund the expertise of a local PBIS coach. McDaniel et al. (2021) sought to address this barrier to PBIS implementation support. This qualitative study used a teleconsultation model as a substitute for in-person monthly PBIS coaching through semi-structured focus group interviews of PBIS team members who received telecoaching. Coaching tasks rated as most important included attending PBIS meetings, listening to staff concerns, and assisting with team action planning; however, attending meetings was ranked as one of the least critical coaching tasks. Also, participants reported assisting with team action planning, supporting data collection, and sharing PBIS systems were knowledge as important tasks for a coach to complete (Bastable et al., 2020).

Counselors may be important stakeholders for supporting PBIS implementation in schools. Betters-Bubon and Donohue (2016) suggested the use of counselors to support PBIS in schools is becoming more popular due to the vital role of the school counselor in implementing and sustaining PBIS. Their study used the perspectives of elementary and middle school counselors' engagement in implementing PBIS programs to examine how school counseling and PBIS programs' alignment can increase school counselor leadership capacity, resulting in collaborative teaming, data, and systemic school change.

School personnel continues to adapt to students' problem behaviors in school. Problem behaviors have caused researchers, educators, specialists, and politicians to seek evidence-based, and socially and developmentally appropriate, and sustainable interventions to prevent problem behaviors through changes in the school context (Melekoğlu et al., 2017). It is essential to understand how school personnel stakeholders seek to resolve problem behaviors through the PBIS framework. One study reported the role of school personnel in improving student behavior includes five key components: the importance of administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, creating consistency, building community, and school counselor integration (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Individuals on school administrative teams play a vital role in implementing the PBIS framework. Yet, studies have reported a lack of administrative support and insufficient understanding of administrators' roles in the process. Indeed, Correa-Phelps' (2020) qualitative research found inadequate buy-in, resources, and professional training were still areas of need when implementing PBIS.

It is necessary to understand the school administration's role in addressing schools' social and emotional concerns. According to a recent study, administrators and teachers were interested in strengthening administrative practices to address the school's social and emotional problems. Findings demonstrated the importance of administrative roles in implementing the PBIS framework and identifying how to improve staff buy-in and consistency (Correa-Phelps, 2020). The following section addresses the challenges to PBIS implementation and suggests how to resolve those challenges in schools.

Implementing PBIS

The previous section discussed the role of stakeholders in the successful implementation of the PBIS framework in schools. Research has shown success in reducing problematic student behavior upon PBIS framework implementation. Pas et al. (2019) explored the PBIS framework's success across over 1,000 schools in Maryland. Elementary schools that implemented PBIS practices showed significantly lower suspension rates during the last two study years and increased student reading and math proficiency beginning in the first year that continued throughout subsequent years. Findings also showed moderate but steady improvements across all age groups in school discipline, student safety, staff perceptions of student behavior, and suspension and tardiness rates.

Like other behavioral programs, several barriers to successful PBIS implementation and the PBIS framework's limitations exist. This section reviews studies that highlight these challenges and drawbacks. For example, Freeman et al. (2019) found that while many district leadership teams improved outcomes when schools implemented the PBIS framework, many schools continued to struggle to accomplish initial buy-in from students and staff and sustain buy-in after initial implementation. Malloy et al. (2018) conducted a case study on the effects of an implemented PBIS intervention on high school student and teacher outcomes. The researchers gathered reports from school employees on their coaching and training experiences and their perceptions of the program's strengths and weaknesses. Results showed the PBIS intervention improved

student behavior, engagement, and attendance, but school employees reported challenges with scheduling time for the necessary program training and consultations.

Researchers have also identified inconsistencies in PBIS implementation across schools. McIntosh et al. (2016) synthesized data from 3,011 schools with PBIS implementations in place. Using data across a range of years and school populations, the authors evaluated the predictive influence of school characteristics and initial program implementation efficiency on consistent program fidelity after 1, 3, and 5 years. Findings showed significant differences in infidelity and consistency of implementation at the state level. Specifically, student grade level and initial implementation speed predicted the consistency of PBIS practices. The lower grade levels showed higher consistency, while the higher grade levels showed lower consistency.

In addition to implementation inconsistency, research has also reported the tendency for schools to abandon PBIS practices altogether. One study examined the reasons for abandoning school-wide PBIS practices related to state-level training, the fidelity of implementation, and school personnel in schools who had undergone PBIS training (Nese et al., 2016). Findings suggested that schools abandoned PBIS when they were no longer following the initiative requirements, but only 7% of schools left the program. Of all schools, the researcher found urban schools to have the most significant number of schools abandon PBIS. Though few studies have examined factors that influence the sustainability of PBIS, one study did find a substantial relationship between personnel's confidence in using the PBIS model and its sustainability (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Low staff support has been associated with increased barriers to PBIS

implementation and sustainability. According to Tyre and Feuerborn (2017), the nonsupportive staff was concerned about stakeholders' commitment and participation, including staff, administrators, and students. Nonsupportive staff also appeared to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the PBIS framework.

The federal data have shown racial disparities in school discipline (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). Baule (2020) investigated the effects of PBIS implementation on racial differences in middle and high school suspensions in a midsized Midwest urban school district. The implementation significantly reduced inappropriate student behavior (defined as suspensions); however, significant racial disparities in suspensions among Black, multiracial, and White students continued. Successful implementation of PBIS programs should include culturally responsive practices to reduce disproportionality in school discipline referrals and create effective learning environments for all students. Sustaining culturally responsive PBIS programs requires attention to student demographics and school culture (Better-Bubon et al., 2016). One study showed PBIS implementation alone did not address racial disparities among student subpopulations in the absence of addressing racial inequalities (Gage et al., 2017). Further evaluation of PBIS framework benefits is needed to include students from different racial ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and students with disabilities.

PBIS focuses on interventions that fulfill schools' social and behavioral demands with a three-tiered model. The primary aim of PBIS is to ensure students' behavioral success and academic achievement in schools. A review of the literature illustrated a focus on the effectiveness of PBIS practices in schools and an ascending trend in the

application of PBIS in schools (Ogulmus & Vuran, 2016). The widespread use of PBIS across schools in the United States and abroad continues, though more research is needed to sustain the framework over time.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature reviewed in this chapter confirms the validity of Skinner's reinforcement and Bandura's social learning theories as conceptual frameworks for understanding the relevance of the PBIS framework and its role in developing positive changes in student behavior (Haberman & Olivero, 1968 and Bandura & Walters, 1977). PBIS is a three-tiered, evidence-based framework used across the country in schools and school districts (Horner & Sugai, 2015) to improve student behavior so high-quality learning can occur (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The research-based framework has provided relief for schools across the country to reduce problem behaviors in schools. Five key categories were identified in the literature: (a) school discipline reform, (b) school climate, (c) PBIS stakeholders, and (d) PBIS implementation.

The literature findings indicated the PBIS framework must be implemented with fidelity to affect student behavior positively. The implementation process requires administration teams, counselors, and teachers to work together through professional learning. A plan that accommodates the school's demographics must be created through professional learning to support students' cultural disparities. During this time, stakeholders' review and corresponding feedback on the plan should help buy-in when implementing the framework. Sustainability was another factor that strongly determined the success of the framework.

Each district implemented PBIS to improve school climate and students' wellbeing and improve academic progress. However, there are still questions on the PBIS framework failures in sustainability and high-fidelity implementation (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). It is clear from the literature review that administrative support is essential in implementing PBIS; however, there is a lack of research regarding administrators' perspectives on the challenges urban middle school administrators confront to overcome their campuses' PBIS emerging status.

In this study, I examined administrators' perspectives on implementing PBIS in a U.S. Southeastern middle school. My hope was that incorporating administrators' perspectives would contribute to addressing the literature gap on the barriers of PBIS implementation to reduce students' behavioral problems. Chapter 3 discusses the rationale for this study's research design, my role as the researcher, the methodology used, participant recruitment, instrumentation, participant procedures, and data collection. I also describe the data analysis plan and review issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges urban middle school administrators confront in overcoming their campuses' PBIS emerging status. Through interviews with educational leaders, I assessed PBIS implementation as a proactive behavioral program for improving students' social conduct in school. Thus far, behavioral incidents in schools remain a problem. Interview data helped determine whether PBIS has been implemented with fidelity to reduce behavioral incidents at the local district. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design, population, sample size, sampling methods and procedures, research setting, and data collection and analysis methods.

Research Design and Rationale

This study's research questions focused on school administration teams' perspectives on the implementation of PBIS and the barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district for five out of six district middle schools with emerging status. A basic qualitative approach was selected to collect and analyze interview data. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for the study's primary aim: to understand why the state has rated most middle schools as emerging from the perspectives of schools' administration teams. I did not collect numeric data as done in a quantitative approach (Harrison et al., 2020). Instead, I sought to understand administrative teams' lived experiences and interpret their experiences, supporting a qualitative approach (Natow, 2020). Interviews conducted in qualitative research allow researchers to explain systems or interactions directly drawn from participant experiences (Vagle, 2019). This

study aimed to better understand administrators' perspectives of the challenges of specific systems used in schools. A basic qualitative approach was well suited for the focus of this study—the current PBIS frameworks used across all six middle schools in the local district. Through the perspectives of school administration teams, I sought to understand how school administration presented the PBIS framework to the staff, how school personnel used and viewed the framework, and the schools' emerging status. As such, I sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging Positive Behavior Intervention Support state status?

Research Question 2: What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out of the six middle schools in the district?

Role of the Researcher

It is critical to recognize and comprehend the researcher's role in doing high-quality qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I took on the interviewer's role as the researcher conducting this study. As such, I introduced myself to each participant, explained the purpose and importance of the research to them, and described my role as the researcher. As the interviewer, I interacted with many participants and collected a wide range of information. However, I was limited to virtual interview meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, I was also responsible for recruiting participants from each middle school's administration team, explaining my role as the researcher, and reviewing the study's background information with the participants. I invited five out of

the six middle schools from the district to participate in the research study. Participants were recruited from the schools' administration teams, including the principal, assistant principal, counselors, and PBIS coaches. I did not have supervisory authority over these schools or any of the participants.

Because the researcher acts as the primary data collection tool in qualitative research, data are filtered through the researcher's mind (Yin, 2015). The researcher's beliefs and biases must be considered when interpreting and presenting findings. As a school administrator, I remained mindful of personal thoughts concerning the emerging status to minimize data interference and biased interpretation. Efforts to overcome potential biases included presenting the data as accurately as possible and interpreting findings based solely on the data. I also developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure consistency and minimize bias. A number of possible interpretations were explored in the discussion of the findings by using existing literature to substantiate conclusions.

Methodology

This section focuses on the methodology used in this study. I used interviews as my primary data collection method to provide an in-depth analysis of administration teams' perceptions. Open-ended interview questions allowed 10 school administrative staff members (principals, assistant principals, counselors, teachers) from the local district who are key informants involved with PBIS to flexibly respond to questions. My methodology discussion includes participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the data analysis plan. I provide details of each process.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select study participants. Convenience sampling is a purposive sampling method where participants are selected because of ease of access and their willingness to participate (Harrison et al., 2020). Local districts schools were selected based on convenience and their emerging status. Experts have agreed qualitative researchers should employ purposive sampling strategies (Creswell, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2013, 2015). The local school district consists of six middle schools, with one school currently under construction. Each middle school has one principal. The number of assistant principals in each school varied depending on the student population. Two of the six middle schools had three assistant principals, and the remaining three had two assistant principals. Administrators from five middle schools were asked to participate after agreeing to the study's consent form.

Of the six middle schools, five were selected to participate. The selected schools were on the state list as emerging in PBIS. A total of 10 school administrative team members (principals, assistant principals, counselors, PBIS coaches, and lead teachers) were interviewed: three from School A, three from School B, two from School C, and two from School D. Previous research has suggested that a researcher needs a minimum of 10 participants for a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I requested interviews from three school administrators from the larger schools and two from the smaller campuses. Only school principals, assistant principals, counselors, PBIS coaches, or lead teachers with at least 1 year of experience qualified to participate in the study.

Participants also had sufficient experience with PBIS and could therefore provide ample information on experiences with PBIS.

After receiving approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the local school district, I asked the assistant superintendent to send an official email to all district middle schools that approved participation in the study. I then informed potential participants of participation criteria and the study's purpose, and sent them a description of the interview process via email.

Instrumentation

In this study, semi-structured interviews served as the main data collection instrument. The data collection instruments for this study included an interview protocol and the Google Meets platform to interview and record. The participants were asked to answer the two research questions in this study. To minimize my influence on the study results, I used the interview protocols to ensure that the participants were asked the same questions in the same order. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was created for the administration teams (principal, assistant principal, counselor, PBIS coach, or lead teacher). Fullan's Change Theory helped me develop an interview protocol that would give the participants a sense of purpose as to why this study was important and how it would help the district promote social change. The interview questions were developed based on the research questions and cover the middle school administration personnel's perspective on the emerging PBIS status. I conducted virtual interviews on Google Meets due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions to gather data on individuals' experiences, perceptions of PBIS implementation, and associated challenges (Creswell, 2014;

Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2020) demonstrated either unstructured or semi-structured interviews can be used for qualitative data collection. Because I developed the same set of questions for all interviewees, I chose the semi-structured interview format for consistency and significant comparison across interviews (Creswell, 2020). At times additional questions were necessary during interview protocol to capture all relevant information. Yin (2015) explained data passes through the researcher before they are reported. For this reason, researchers must minimize during the data collection phase to preserve the report's integrity. Interviews were recorded through the Google Meets platform and subsequently transcribed verbatim to eliminate personal bias. I also kept a reflective journal during the data collection and analysis process, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The first step for data collection was to obtain permission from the local school district. IRB permission was requested through Walden University and the local school district. A total of 10 participants were provided participation consent forms. Consent forms were emailed to the participants who were asked to print, sign, and scan completed forms back to me. I kept the original form for my records and give participants a copy. The data was collected and recorded through Google Meets virtual interviews. The participants and I agreed on a convenient time to complete the interview. I conducted between one to two interviews each day until all participants had been interviewed. Interviews took between 30 to 45 min to complete and were recorded to ensure accuracy. Participants were emailed to check availability for an additional virtual meeting if a

follow-up interview was necessary. I anticipated follow-up interviews to consist of clarification questions.

Data Analysis

Study data was gathered through interviews, then grouped, analyzed, and reported. Data analysis was conducted based on Lester et al. (2020) seven phases for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: (a) preparing and organizing the data for analysis, (b) transcribing the data, (c) becoming familiar with the data, (d) memorizing the data, (e) coding the data, (f) moving from codes to categories and categories to themes, and (g) making the analytic process transparent. Data was prepared and organized for data analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed and labeled. I recorded keywords and phrases by hand while reviewing interview transcripts. Next, data was examined and coded for themes, assigned numerical values, and then transcribed. I labeled participants' data with a code number for proper identification (Lester et al., 2020).

Identical or similar interview responses were grouped to condense the total number of responses. Grouped responses corresponded to research questions. Specifically, I grouped similar responses to the most significant perceived barriers in implementing and sustaining PBIS and similar responses to the length of time in the role at school. Themes were generated around implementation, limitations, roles of administration teams with PBIS, and the number of years teaching. Once all the responses were grouped from each interview questions, each response was categorized

according to the corresponding research question it addressed. Findings were evaluated against Saldana's (2011) coding protocol methods and personal reflections.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) argued trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation of data, and methods used to ensure a study's reliability and validity. Connelly stated researchers should establish the necessary protocols and procedures for readers to consider a study trustworthy. Connelly also outlined the criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Connelly, 2016). I used the body of literature to facilitate the interpretation of this study's findings. Participants reviewed their transcribed interviews before the study was published to validate the data. Interviews were conducted with precision and consistency through interview recordings and detailed disclosure of analysis methods, so the reader could feasibly evaluate the credibility of the research procedures. The above-mentioned process helped to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

Researchers must present evidence of their study's trustworthiness and credibility for their audience. Researchers use a number of strategies to establish trustworthiness and credibility, including reflective notes, member checking, peer review, and communicating how these strategies will be used to maximize credibility (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Credibility refers to specific research procedures and is considered a central aspect of developing a research study's trustworthiness. The research has established credibility when committee members have reviewed the study, the research

has undergone peer-review, or participants have completed the member-checking process. This study includes literature reviewed within the last five years. Different perspectives on the local problem across participants facilitated credibility through triangulation. As the researcher, I maximized the study's credibility by expanding the inquiry, reexamining the results, triangulation, member-checking, and exploring the descriptions to find patterns and themes (Patton, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which study results are generalizable to other persons and settings (Connelly, 2016). Themes and findings from this study may apply to other school districts with similar demographics. I used four criteria to maximize study transferability: (a) useful and nonbiased data, (b) timely research to support social change, (c) a diverse participant pool, and (d) a systematic approach. These four criteria enhanced confidence in the study's findings and improved transferability to other U.S. school districts.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mentioned transparent data collection and analysis facilitates quality future research in other locations. Interviews with administration teams provided detailed data to help other researchers read and duplicate the study. To maximize transferability, I took notes on participant interactions, detailed accounts of data collection, and sequential procedures during the interview process.

Dependability

According to Connelly (2016), dependability is the data's stability over time and across conditions. I kept an audit trail of process logs, took reflexive notes, and

participated in peer debriefings with a colleague to facilitate dependability (Connelly, 2016). Detailed notetaking and audio recordings of my interviews helped establish uniform interview conditions to ensure transparency throughout the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the validity of study results can be confirmed (need a citation). I cross-checked between detailed notes taken during interviews and interview transcriptions to increase confirmability. The goal of this study was to capture the participants' perspectives rather than rely on researcher interpretation (Amankwaa, 2016). An audit trail or the process of producing detailed descriptions of the research process from data collection to reporting findings was completed to ensure reported data were based on participant responses without researcher influence. I documented the entire coding process and my thoughts and interpretations of the data. I also used a well-maintained reflexivity journal to reduce researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

This qualitative study adhered to all ethical protocols. Bias and confidentiality issues were addressed throughout the study by adhering to clear and consistent research procedures. Qualitative research can present the potential for unethical behavior or researcher bias if proper measures are not put in place (Foust, 2020). Prior to data collection, I submitted an application to Walden University IRB for permission to conduct the study. The application provided a detailed explanation of the research methodology and procedures used in this study. The IRB evaluated research studies for adherence to ethical research procedures and compliance with human research guidelines.

I obtained IRB approval from Walden before receiving county-level IRB approval. Then, I obtained approval from the local school district before collecting data.

Once approvals were granted, all participant interactions followed ethical procedures. Participants submitted a signed consent form before participating in the interview process. The forms were signed, scanned, and emailed directly back to me. The emails also provided information about the study, and participants provided verbal consent at the beginning of each interview session. Consistent with Creswell's (2013) procedures, the consent forms described the voluntary nature of participation, interview procedures, guarantee of confidentiality, participant risks and benefits, and the ability to withdraw consent before starting the study. Participants were treated with respect during interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded participants that all answers are acceptable. Their responses were strictly confidential, and they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Interview data was stored on a password-protected device and remained confidential. All study information is to be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, the methods for conducting the study were described. This chapter detailed the school setting, population sample, and research criteria. Additionally, I addressed data collection procedures, ethical considerations, researcher bias, and trustworthiness. In this study, I examined administration teams' perspectives on why the state department of education rated their schools as emerging in implementing the PBIS framework. My role as the researcher was to identify and recruit participants, conduct

interviews, and then analyze and code the collected data by categorizing emerging themes. In this chapter, I provided a detailed description of my plans for conducting this basic qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews of participants' first-hand experiences provided contextual data. I explained in detail how trustworthiness, and ethical procedures protocols were followed. In addition, I discussed how I obtained IRB approval and school district approval to solicit participants for this research and how I protected the data and ensured the confidentiality of the participants in this study. Chapter 4 builds on this discussion by reviewing the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the challenges that urban middle school administrators experience in transitioning their schools out of the PBIS emerging status. I used semistructured interviews to allow the 10 participants from middle schools within the local school district the opportunity to share their perspectives on the emerging PBIS states at their schools and answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging positive behavior and support state status?
- RQ2: What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out of the six middle schools in the district?

I obtained a more comprehensive understanding of what gaps in practice needed to be addressed in the research setting to promote and move similar districts out of the PBIS emerging status.

In this chapter, I begin with a description of the study setting, followed by the data collection process and analysis. I explain the methods employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness and described how the study was completed according to my research proposal. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Setting

This section presents the setting in which the study was executed. The participants for this study were middle school staff that were part of their school's PBIS team and who were currently employed by the local school district. Participants' eligibility was

determined by their involvement with PBIS at their schools. Only school principals, assistant principals, counselors, PBIS coaches, or lead teachers with at least 1 year of experience qualified to participate in the study. Participants had to have sufficient experience with PBIS and could provide ample information on experiences with PBIS. All the potential participants were sent a blind copy email asking them to participate in a research study surrounding the emerging PBIS statutes. Once I had a sample of 10 participants, with a minimum of two from each school. The consent form was emailed out. The 10 individuals responded affirmatively to the email with a return email of “I consent.” Two principals, three assistant principals, one counselor, one PBIS coach, and three lead teachers participated in the study.

Data Collection

Participation in the study included individual virtual interviews. Participants were given a few dates and times for the interview, and they chose their preferences. The 10 people who expressed interest in the study participated and were interviewed once. Interviews were held via Google Meets, and all were conducted after school hours. The majority of the participants were in their homes during the interviews. Two of the participants completed interviews on their phones in their cars due to personal reasons, which they did not disclose. I was in my home office. As identified in Chapter 3, I collected data using interview protocols. For all interviews, permission was sought to record the Google Meets and store the audio for transcription purposes. The camera option on Google Meets was disabled. I used an audio interview because the interview was recorded, and due to ethical reasons, video interviews were not used. After the

interviews, I transcribed the audio files using Google Docs. I then sent the transcripts to each participant, requesting that they review them for accuracy and contact me with any corrections. No participant requested changes. After each interview, I made notes in the reflexive journal.

Data Analysis

To ensure data were analyzed and organized effectively, I used the seven phases for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data (see Lester et al., 2020). In the first phase, to ensure participants were easily identifiable without disclosing their names or schools, I coded them based on their schools and the order they interviewed in each school. The first participant was interviewed from School A and was coded as SA1; the second participant was coded as SA2. The first participant from School B was coded SB1 and the second SB2. The first participant from School C was coded SC1 and the second SC2. The first participant from School D was coded SD1 and the second SD2. Finally, School E first participant was coded SE1 and the second SE2.

After getting notice from all participants that no changes were needed from the transcript interviews, I read through the interview transcripts to acquire an overall sense of the participants' thoughts and understandings. While reading, I used a highlighter to mark words, phrases, and concepts related to the research questions to identify similarities among the interviews and identify preliminary codes. To help me become more familiar with the data, I listened to the audio of each interview multiple times while transcribing the recording word for word. After listening to the audio, I took some time to reflect on the notes I made as the interview conversations were ongoing. Once I

familiarized myself with the transcripts, I reread and categorized my codes. I searched the transcripts from the interviews to learn how school administrators perceived the emerging PBIS statuses at the target schools. I noted the use of repeated words, sentences, and phrases, such as staff buy-in, funding for training, and lack of resources to reward students. To decode themes, I examined the data repeatedly to identify similarities within the responses.

There were similarities among two or more respondents, so I determined that a theme emerged and coded it accordingly. I then reviewed the themes and matched them to the RQ, which they answered. Thus, themes related to staff not understanding their roles in implementing interventions and the negative feelings towards PBIS related to managing student behavior. Anything related to barriers or why PBIS was not working fell into RQ 2. As I examined the generated codes, I used the open coding approach Saldana (2015) described, which allowed me to explore the coded interview transcripts. I identified eight codes. The most frequent codes were staff buy-in, more training, continued support, belief in the process, staff wanting to take away things, funding for resources, and rewarding staff. I used second cycle coding to search for a relationship between the open codes and data.

I organized these codes into three categories: teacher barriers, staff training, and behavior management strategies. Third-level coding then granted me the opportunity to develop an even richer understanding of school administration's perspectives on the emerging PBIS statuses. I consolidated my three categories into two themes. These themes were barriers to the emerging PBIS status and funding for PBIS training and

support. I reviewed themes considering the phenomenon to better understand the phenomenon by rereading the entire transcripts, searching for discrepant or negative cases, and/reviewing my notes. According to the interview transcripts, teachers felt that staff buy-in and lack of resources were the two most important factors of the PBIS's emerging status.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the challenges that urban middle school administrators experience in transitioning their schools out of the PBIS emerging status. Two research questions guided the analysis of the results of this study. Participant responses are organized in the following sections by research question and include verbatim evidence from the transcripts. The 10 school staff members are represented with a letter S and followed with a letter from A-E, which means the school, and either a number 1 or 2 representing the interview participants from the school.

Results for RQ 1

RQ1 asked, "What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging Positive Behavior and Support state status?" This RQ is associated with school personnel not understanding their roles within the PBIS. To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from interview questions; participants from Schools A, B, C stated that they believe the implementation has been started but not fully implemented at their current schools. The staff understands the purpose of PBIS but do not believe that they know their role in the implementation of interventions. As members of the PBIS teams, most participants felt one of their primary responsibilities was to lead by example. SC1 thought they had

created a positive impact on how and why they recognize and celebrate students and given teachers ways to model and acknowledge the appropriate behaviors for students. Several participants discussed modeling behavior that the committee expects of all staff at the school is very important.

Using everyday language to acknowledge positive behaviors was another idea participants mutually shared that could help emerging PBIS status. SA2 mentioned in their interview that there is a need for more people to take on the leadership role to help model and take some of the workloads off of the PBIS Coach. SA2 discussed their role in their school about PBIS. SA2 stated that they consistently volunteer to help develop ideas for initiatives and rewards for both staff and students. They assist the coach by helping redeliver data to grades-levels. SB2 shared the primary responsibility they felt was important was the accountability component for all staff members. To hold everyone accountable, they run reports to determine who is giving PBIS points, address those who are not giving points, celebrate those who are, and try to make sure we are assigned a PBIS leader to that most staff members will respond positively toward. SC1 also stated they try to lead by example and positively reward students and staff. SE2 felt that the lack of funds plays a significant role in rewarding students and staff, so the team is constantly developing new innovative ways for staff incentives to help promote a positive work environment.

When I asked participants about their thoughts on the role administration plays in implementing PBIS in the classroom, most participants felt that their administrators did a great job pushing staff to use PBIS incentives and strategies. SD1 mentioned that the

administration initially walked around to ensure that the PBIS behavior expectation was posted and visible in every school area, including the classroom. Still, there was no follow-up to ensure that all teachers followed the plan. SE1 mentioned that their school has an assistant principal who works with their PBIS teacher leader to make sure they are following the goal of the county and the requirements of the state. The administrative team outside of that responsibility supports the committee's efforts by incorporating a reward system that celebrates teacher involvement and support. SA1 shared that teachers must have the behavior expectations posted but feel like it is not being used effectively. SB2 shared they see themselves as more of a supporter of the process because much of what teachers require comes from the head, so they do not want to make the PBIS plan seem like just one more thing leaders of the school are making them do. SB2 also mentioned it has worked to their benefit. SA1 gave an example of misbehaving students; teachers do not refer to the behavior when correcting students.

Most participants noted in their interviews that the PBIS data is shared and discussed in monthly meetings. Only SC1 thought that the data was being used effectively to identify areas of the targeted behavior. SD2 believes PBIS is data-driven because its committees meet monthly to ensure that their focus is based on the data they receive, not only from the referrals but also from what the teachers see consistently on their teams. SD2 also mentioned that their school could do a better job with using the data better to help reduce discipline in the classroom. Most participants expressed concerns that they felt data meetings should focus on data to see where changes should occur to promote students' positive behavior. Most shared that time was spent discussing

the negative behavior of students. Participants all felt that the district supports the implementation of PBIS by emphasizing the importance of execution in every school. They all shared similar responses regarding the district requiring every school to have a PBIS committee and ensure they meet PBIS guidelines; the district is sending the message that PBIS should be an essential part of the schools. SA1 shared that their district has fully supported the implementation of the plan and that they have hired someone to lead it, analyze it, and give reviews throughout the school year on how to improve or make adjustments to the plan. SC2 stated that everyone must conduct a survey and a walk-through to determine effectiveness. Feedback is shared at the county level, and they work through that information to make adjustments to the plan.

When it came to the questioning about implementing and sustaining PBIS at the school level, most felt that their schools better understand PBIS. Most think that the implementation needs to be ongoing, slowly implementing programs and strategies so that staff is not overwhelmed each year. SD1 stated that their leadership team does a great job with the training they provide and its impact on the staff's understanding of how to implement fidelity interventions. SB1 feels their school is very knowledgeable about the PBIS plan because they post it throughout the school, review it each day through their news feed, and remind those students who need to be reminded of the expectations throughout their school.

Results for RQ 2

RQ 2 asked, "What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out

of the six middle schools in the district? This RQ is associated with the theme of barriers encountered in the implementation of PBIS. To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from interview questions: 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, and 16. When I asked the question about specific challenges regarding the implementation of PBIS, most participants discussed challenges surrounding when staff does not believe in changing the climate by focusing on rewarding and acknowledging positive more than unwanted behaviors. SB1 mentioned without support from staff; it is challenging to implement new programs that would help engage students. SC2 discussed the challenges of implementing or finding incentives that students will work hard to obtain and finding funding for incentives and rewards. SA2 felt the main concern they have is 100% teacher participation. SA2 mentioned it took a while for everyone to focus more on students' positive behavior than students' negative behavior because they have been conditioned to focus on the negative. Through the PBIS process, they have learned to celebrate the positive and encourage those with negative behavior to change their ways.

When asked how PBIS has impacted their classroom management, SE2 noted that PBIS is a mindset shift. PBIS provides more attention to behavior expectations that we may overthink. Teaching behavior expectations have changed how classrooms are managed as students are taught the expectations and not expected to know only their perception of the rules that may be posted. SD1 shared they work to hold their teachers accountable for the process of the PBIS plan. SC2 asks teachers to make sure they have followed the process before writing a referral, and when they do that, they will see that the classroom management improves. SC2 goes on to share that they support the process

of PBIS and allows teachers to communicate their expectations within the classroom, and allows the student to make decisions based on what they know to be the expectations and whether or not the teacher will hold them accountable to meet those expectations day in and day out.

Most participants discussed the importance of year-round training. PBIS training is necessary to expand how students and teachers can be rewarded. Training allows staff to learn the importance of explicit teaching expectations with content activities as a focus. The PBIS training is more effective when the school PBIS team identifies applying specific strategies and ideas to the school building. SE1 shared that they hoped that the PBIS training would go further than just in schools but would branch out into college classes so that those student-teachers come in with some skills before their first year of teaching. SB2 thinks continued training is necessary and can significantly impact the instructional setting and allow students to have a better opportunity to master the content taught in each classroom.

When asked about their thoughts on PBIS being critical and needed for schools and changing behaviors, SA2 thinks schools must implement some of the PBIS initiatives and personalize them to the needs of the individual schools. The overall consensus was that most of the participants believe that the PBIS programs will help cultivate the climate and culture of schools, but most think that the lack of resources and funding is holding them from getting to that point. The majority of the participants noted training and funding for PBIS would be very helpful. IF funds were specific for PBIS initiatives with rules and guidelines on how funds could be used, it would be beneficial and could

help move their school from Emerging to Proficient. SB1 mentioned that they had wished PBIS was around when they first started. SB1 talked about how teachers get so conditioned to look at various things about kids who aren't doing the right thing that we forget to celebrate those who are. SB1 concluded by saying they would be willing to bet their entire check that every school implementing PBIS appropriately would say there are a much greater number of students doing the right thing than the wrong thing. SA2 shared that if the district continues to focus on celebrating the kids through PBIS who are doing the right thing, they will be able to pull the majority of those other ones over to the side of being good citizens.

When asked about the limitations of the PBIS framework, SC2 mentioned Lack of funding and knowledge limits PBIS. All participants shared their opinions on the lack of funds or resources to promote the stability of PBIS. Many schools mentioned the struggle to reward students, which led to the burnout that most schools experience. It would be easier for schools to administer the incentives and strategies needed to make PBIS successful with the funds provided. Barriers that emerged included limited district support for teachers as they tried to implement PBIS, confusion over the scope of PBIS, and little commitment to the implementation of PBIS. SE2 reported the most significant barrier in their eyes is inconsistency. When they meet with students and have conversations that connect back to the PBIS plan, teacher expectations being clear and understood, and the student's awareness of the plan, they can quickly determine whether or not the program is consistently implemented in that classroom each day.

SD2 mentioned two limitations: gender-based and cultural-based guidance. SD2 stated that some teachers have never understood how to handle the inappropriate behavior of a specific gender and students from different cultures. Culturally, students have different backgrounds, and with those different backgrounds come different ways in which to discipline students at home, which also impacts student behavior at school. Teachers who have no background knowledge of this can sometimes struggle with managing their students. SC1 truly thinks the state should provide example videos that they must review throughout the school year, mainly for classroom management. The PBIS videos should be accessible to each school, mandatory, and not something we tell them to do without making it an accountability focus for each school.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Researchers use several strategies to establish trustworthiness and credibility, including reflective notes, member checking, peer review, and communicating how these strategies will be used to maximize credibility (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Credibility refers to specific research procedures and is central to developing a research study's trustworthiness. I supported the credibility of this study by audio-recording interviews so I could capture accurate descriptions of participants' perspectives, then transcribing these recordings verbatim. I allowed the participants to review the transcripts to depict their perception of PBIS accurately.

Transferability is how study results are generalizable to other persons and settings (Connelly, 2016). This study's themes and findings may apply to other school districts with similar demographics. I used four criteria to maximize study transferability: (a)

useful and nonbiased data, (b) timely research to support social change, (c) a diverse participant pool, and (d) a systematic approach. These four criteria helped enhance my confidence in the study's findings and improve transferability to other U.S. school districts.

Dependability is the data's stability over time and across conditions (Connelly, 2016). I kept an audit trail of process logs in this study and took reflexive notes. In support of the dependability of this study's findings, I kept careful records of my research process throughout the study. I used detailed notetaking and audio recordings of my interviews that helped establish uniform interview conditions to ensure transparency throughout the research process.

Confirmability refers to how the validity of study results can be confirmed (Amankwaa, 2016). I will cross-check detailed notes taken during interviews and interview transcriptions to increase confirmability. The study aimed to capture the participants' perspectives rather than rely on the researcher's interpretation (Amankwaa, 2016). An audit trail producing detailed descriptions of the research process from data collection to reporting findings was completed to ensure reported data were based on participant responses without researcher influence. I documented the entire coding process and my thoughts and interpretations of the data. I also used a well-maintained reflexivity journal to reduce researcher bias.

Summary

In this chapter 4, the setting, data collection, and methods for the data analysis were described. Additionally, I described the study's results and its trustworthiness of the

study. I examined administration teams' perspectives on why the state department of education rated their schools as emerging in implementing the PBIS framework. Themes that emerged from the data included barriers to the emerging PBIS status and funding for PBIS training and support. Participants that PBIS training is necessary to expand how students and teachers can be rewarded.

Training allows staff to learn the importance of explicit teaching expectations with teaching content activities. The PBIS training is more effective when the school PBIS team identifies applying specific strategies and ideas to the school building. They also mentioned that buy-in from staff is the most significant barrier that I believe PBIS has. Many staff members do not believe in the long-term effect of rewarding positive interventions. It is essential that the building principal believes in the PBIS's long-term effects and support its implementation as much as possible. If the building principal allows the PBIS committee the needed support, it can help it thrive in the building.

The school administration cited several challenges, such as the staff's inability to change the climate by rewarding and acknowledging positive behaviors more than unwanted behaviors. It was mentioned without support from staff. It is challenging to implement new programs that would help engage students. Other challenges of implementing are finding incentives that students will work hard to obtain and finding funding for incentives and rewards. In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and social change potential.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspective of school administrators at five middle schools in an urban southeastern state school district that has implemented the PBIS framework. Overall, three themes emerged: administrators' perspective of PBIS, experiences with the emerging PBIS state status, and the perceived barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out of the six middle schools in the district. Key findings suggested that each school's PBIS team felt that PBIS is a great program, and when implemented consistently with fidelity schoolwide, there could be a significant decline in misbehavior. Participants also shared barriers to implementing PBIS, including staff buy-in, lack of resources, and funding. School teams also suggested a need for continued professional development for the success of implementing PBIS.

In this chapter, I summarize the key findings before interpreting the findings. The interpretations are based on comparing the key results in this study with the findings from the literature reviewed. As well as against the theoretical framework to understand the conformity and differences to the theory. Within the discussion is a description of the limitations of the study. Based on the interpretation of findings, recommendations are made to the stakeholders regarding future research. Additionally, the study's implications are discussed, and the conclusions are outlined.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section includes a discussion of the key findings of this study in relation to the existing literature. The section is organized based on the RQs to allow for a clear presentation and easy understanding.

RQ 1

RQ1 was “What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging PBIS state status?” Participants indicated that the implementation has been started but not fully implemented at their current schools. The research on PBIS, when implemented within its entirety, shows considerable gains behaviorally and academically (Foust, 2020).

Additionally, the staff understood the purpose of PBIS but did not believe that they entirely knew their role in implementing interventions. The majority of participants felt that there needs to be more shared leadership. Further, most of the participants felt the workload placed on the PBIS coach is too much for one person, and they mentioned that there needs to be more defined staff accountability. Similar research has revealed the importance of staff members’ roles in the success of PBIS in schools including administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, consistency, a sense of community, and school counselor integration (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Other studies have shown that PBIS can benefit schools if implemented with fidelity.

The research also discusses the importance of stakeholders and their roles in the school’s success. School-level stakeholders and PBIS teams consist of teachers, counselors, principals, assistant principals, parents, and teachers. Principals, teachers, and other stakeholders at the school work to develop expertise by working collaboratively

(Arrington, 2020). All stakeholders working together allow leadership to be distributed and all school community members the opportunity to contribute to decisions within the framework of school initiatives (Arrington, 2020).

Money was another response that was repeated in almost all interviews. Schools' PBIS teams are constantly looking for ways to reward teachers and student that is cost proficient. So the team is continuously developing new innovative ways for staff/ student incentives to help promote a positive work/learning environment. But many schools across the United States in rural districts do not have the resources to fund the expertise of a local PBIS coach (McDaniel et al., 2021). This was not the case for the district in this study; however, the issue that participants revealed was the lack of funding for award incentives for positive behaviors for the students at the school level. Reinforcement theory posits that individuals' behaviors are a function of their consequences (Haberman & Olivero, 1968). Applying this approach to students, when students display positive behavior, they are rewarded and that positive behavior is more likely to continue. Thus, Skinner's (1968) and Bandura's (1977) theories supported the study's conceptual framework and the importance of having funds to reward students for positive behavior. Many schools mentioned the struggle to reward students, which led to the burnout that most schools experience. It would be easier for schools to administer the incentives and strategies needed to make PBIS successful with the funds provided.

RQ 2

RQ2 was "What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status for five out of

the six middle schools in the district?” One of the significant barriers highlighted by participants was the challenges surrounding staff who do not believe in changing the climate or culture of the school that fits the PBIS model. Studies support the importance of school climate and how significant it is to the school’s success. School climate plays a pivotal role in feeling respected and supported in the school environment (Osher et al., 2020). Schools must create environments conducive to learning and growing, and principals, counselors, and teachers must develop structures within the school that encourage secure relationships (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Nearly 46 million U.S. children are exposed to abuse, neglect, hunger, homelessness, the death of a parent, or community violence each year (Arrington, 2020), which supports the importance of relationship-building between teachers and students to develop a healthy school climate that may buffer against the negative impact of these adverse events. A positive school environment conducive to learning helps strengthen the effects of healing and student learning and behavior (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Another significant finding for RQ 2 was the challenges of implementing or finding incentives that students will work hard to obtain. The majority of the participants felt that funding for incentives and rewards was another area of concern. Another key finding was the process of gaining teacher buy-in. The PBIS framework requires a mindset shift for teachers to focus more on students’ positive behavior than students’ negative behavior because they have been conditioned to focus on the negative. Studies show that school personnel adapts to students’ problem behaviors in school. Problem behaviors have caused researchers, educators, specialists, and politicians to seek

evidence-based, socially and developmentally appropriate, and sustainable interventions to prevent problem behaviors through changes in the school context (Melekoğlu et al., 2017). Another study showed the key components to improving behavior through the PBIS framework require importance of administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, creating consistency, building community, and school counselor integration (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Low staff support has been associated with increased PBIS implementation and sustainability barriers. Nonsupportive staff are concerned about stakeholders' commitment and participation, including staff, administrators, and students (Tyler & Feuerborn, 2017). Nonsupportive staff also demonstrate a lack of understanding of the PBIS framework. School personnel must continue learning to celebrate the positive and encourage those with negative behavior to change their ways.

Additionally, most participants discussed the importance of year-round training. PBIS training is necessary to expand how students and teachers can be rewarded. Training allows staff to learn the importance of explicit teaching expectations with teaching content activities. Participants felt PBIS training is more effective when the school PBIS team identifies applying specific strategies and ideas to the school building. PBIS training is necessary to expand how students and teachers can be rewarded. Training allows staff to learn the importance of explicit teaching expectations with teaching content activities. The PBIS training is more effective when the school PBIS team identifies applying specific strategies and ideas to the school building. Increasing training is a must to reduce behaviors that will significantly impact the instructional

setting and allow students to have a better opportunity to master the content taught in each classroom.

When looking at barriers, participants shared a consensus on holding their staff accountable for using PBIS consistently in their classroom and around the school. School administrators sometimes have to remind staff to make sure they have followed the process before writing a referral. Inconsistency is one of the most prominent barriers schools face when implementing PBIS. Research has also reported the tendency for schools to abandon PBIS practices altogether. One study examined the reasons for abandoning school-wide PBIS practices related to lack of training, the fidelity of implementation, and the lack of accountability of school personnel to follow through with the PBIS framework (Nese et al., 2016).

The primary aim of PBIS is to ensure students' behavioral success and academic achievement in schools. A review of the literature illustrates a focus on the effectiveness of PBIS practices in schools and an ascending trend in the application of PBIS in schools (Ogulmus & Vuran, 2016). The shared perception of PBIS being critical and needed for schools and changing behaviors was a huge component of understanding the 'why the merging statutes from each school'. Schools have to have the autonomy to implement PBIS initiatives and personalize them to the needs of the individual schools. The overall consensus was that most of the participants believe that the PBIS programs will help cultivate the climate and culture of schools, but they must be individualized. The literature findings indicated that the PBIS framework must be implemented with fidelity to affect student behavior positively. The implementation process requires administration

teams, counselors, and teachers to work together through professional learning. A plan that accommodates the school's demographics must be created through professional learning to support students' cultural disparities. During this time, stakeholders' review and corresponding feedback on the plan should help buy in when implementing the framework. Sustainability was another factor that firmly determined the success of the framework.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, there were limitations to this study that need to be considered. One of the study's limitations was the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world and shut school districts down around our country back in 2020. To limit the spread of the virus and minimize the idea of participants not wanting to volunteer due to fears of the pandemic, interviews were held over Google Meets instead of in person as I had initially planned to complete before the pandemic. I chose Google Meets instead of Zoom Meetings or Microsoft Team, two popular virtual meeting platforms. The district in this study used Google Meets for students' virtual classrooms and all district meetings. This platform was what everyone was familiar with using. That is the reason why Google Meets was chosen over any other platform.

This study was qualitative and used a small sample size from each of the middle schools in the district. Additionally, the study focused on the middle schools with the Emerging PBIS state status. The sample chosen were all school personnel who were part of their school's PBIS team, which was very knowledgeable about PBIS and its look in schools.

Recommendations

This study's results have provided invaluable information for future studies on districts alike. Based on the findings from this research, the limitations of this research, and the literature reviewed, the following recommendations are proposed. First, this study focused on the middle school administration/ PBIS Team (principals, assistant principals, counselors, and lead teachers) on the emerging PBIS state status. There were only two team members from each school that were interviewed. Future research could examine a larger population of PBIS members per school. A larger sample size could provide more insight into why schools in this district or districts alike face the problem of the emerging PBIS status.

Another recommendation in the future needs to be focused on teacher buy-in. Future research should be conducted to identify staff that are not following the PBIS framework, then place the root causes of why or why they are not on board with using PBIS. Some studies discuss that using PBIS will reduce referrals so, one could look at teachers with high referrals rate to gather a sample pool for a future outlook on the buy-in.

Another avenue of research that showed up a lot from participants in the interview is for schools to implement year-round training. Further research should focus on identifying the types of PBIS training and individualizing those training for each school. Some training ideas that came up within this study are: rewarding positive behavior, school-wide behavior expectations, managing the classroom environment through PBIS, proven studies behind PBIS, and showing how it works if implemented with fidelity.

A third avenue for research is to explore funding PBIS. Participants discussed different things other schools use rather than others because of lack of funding. There was also a shared feeling of lack of funding to provide students and teachers incentives that they like. Further research should focus on how lack of funding impacts the implementation of PBIS and sustaining the program for years to come.

The last recommendation to explore would be to look at students' perspectives and thoughts on the PBIS emerging states in their schools. Looking at students' perspectives could better understand positive behavior and what parts of PBIS they feel work and need to be addressed. Focusing on the students' perspective could help the students to buy into the program while reducing discipline referrals, which would move schools from Emerging to Proficient.

Implications

This study focused on the PBIS emerging state statutes for the majority of the middle schools in the district. PBIS is an evidence-based framework that stretches across the country in over 25,000 schools (Horner and Sugai, 2015). PBIS is a three-tier framework program implemented in schools and districts to improve student behavior so that learning can occur in the classroom (Horner & Macaya, 2018). The study found evidence that PBIS has been implemented within the school. There is also evidence that there are gaps in practice surrounding buy-in, funding, and lack of continuous professional learning about PBIS.

It should be noted that there was no identical school when it came to PBIS and how it was implemented. Schools should have the autonomy to differentiate the PBIS

framework to fit their schools. Another implication of this study is that social change requires school leaders and the PBIS team to give all other staff to share their beliefs and thoughts on making the program work in their schools. Some things within the framework are non-negotiable, but when the opportunity presents itself, the school administration should allow staff to share ideas on how to make the program work. In this study, staff indeed perceived a lack of monitoring from the schools' leaders. During the implementation stage of PBIS, the study found that staff perceived administrators did a great job pushing staff to initially using PBIS incentives and strategies. Over time through the school year, school administrators monitored or focused less on making sure staff were using PBIS in the school, which could be a major factor in school framework inconsistency.

Another implication is determining what incentives are essential to teachers and students. Students are rewarded for their positive behavior, while the staff is rewarded for consistently using PBIS within the classroom and throughout the school. The use of a survey to survey teachers and students to help create a list of incentives that would help motivate and encourage the usage of PBIS. Foust (2020) mentioned the importance of leaders for educational change to listen to their followers and respond to their concerns. By reading teacher responses, administrators may better understand how teachers view the implementation of programs at the school level and where support is limited. This may, in turn, prompt administrators to provide resources for teachers to support the implementation process. This could lead to a more successful school-wide implementation of PBIS. A third implication found in this study is ongoing professional

development and a refresher of PBIS throughout the school year needs to be required. Participants agreed that schools need to implement year-round training. PBIS training is necessary to expand how students and teachers can be rewarded. Professional development is significant; as mentioned earlier, training allows staff to learn the importance of explicit teaching expectations with teaching content activities. PBIS training is more effective when the school PBIS team identifies applying specific strategies and ideas to the school building.

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by increasing teachers' and administrators' awareness of the need for a collaborative effort in implementing an initiative like PBIS and may lead to increased collaboration as PBIS continues to be used at the school. This change could be brought about by district-level professional development on implementing PBIS and building relationships. Though not measured as part of this study, improvement in student behavior through more collaborative implementation of PBIS may influence student academic performance and student attendance (Sugai & Horner, 2015). The benefits of this change may be that any action that supports positive teacher-student relationships may also lead to a positive learning environment and increased school success.

The main focus of the study is to transition schools out of the PBIS emerging statuses. Installing, Emerging, Operational, and Distinguished are the four levels the State Department rates each school. This study helped provide evidence to local school districts and other districts better to understand the reasons behind the emerging PBIS statuses. This study will also help develop a better understanding and implementation of

PBIS in schools through professional development, designed for teachers to learn new skills and ensure effective implementation. The implications for positive social change will depend on school personnel to effectively use PBIS to improve students' social behavior in school districts. This study's results can be used by other school districts with the same demographics to understand better the challenges, successes, and decision-making processes of implementing PBIS.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the challenges that urban middle school administrators experience in transitioning their schools out of the PBIS emerging status. The central phenomenon was the middle school administration team's perspectives on the PBIS framework in reducing unwanted behaviors throughout the school and implementing PBIS. I sought to answer two research questions: RQ1: What are the experiences of school administrators with emerging Positive Behavior Intervention Support state status? RQ2: What are the school administrators' perspectives on barriers to PBIS implementation in the local school district related to the emerging status of five out of the six middle schools in the district? The study concluded that school leaders initially trained school personnel. Despite the training provided, more needs to be done to ensure that school personnel continuously receive updated information and consistently have an avenue to access and discuss their experiences with PBIS. Specifically, this study showed the need for ongoing training and access to personnel who can assist. There needs to be a shared role rather than relying on the PBIS Coach to pull data, analyze it, and everything that falls along with the coaches' duties and responsibilities.

The semi-structured interviews provided insight into the implementation of PBIS. The interpretive approach allowed me to capture the reality through the interview data through the participant's experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In this study, team leaders were a consistent point of reference. They provided detailed insight into what was truly happening with their school surrounding PBIS. They supplied in-depth information about what was really going on at their school in terms of PBIS. The research will serve as a model for other districts struggling to improve student learning in middle schools due to student behavior in the classroom. The completion of this study added to the body of knowledge on this topic for mid-sized suburban school districts. The PBIS framework, which is founded on research, encourages positive student behavior by using intervention tactics that meet students' social and emotional needs while discouraging negative behavior (PBIS.org). Another finding is that staff buy-in and punishment have uneven results. PBIS is a proactive approach to behavior management. Teachers should praise pupils for good behavior, but there are instances when sanctions are necessary, but they should be rehabilitative rather than punishing.

PBIS is best implemented in cooperation with the school since it requires a conducive climate and buy-in from all stakeholders. While noting that there was a school-wide effort to implement PBIS, this study notes that school administration identified successes inside the PBIS. The potential contribution of this study to professional practice is on implementing PBIS through professional development from the perspective of school employees and its impact on establishing a successful program. The data acquired from interviews for mid-sized suburban school districts was outlined in this

basic qualitative study. The effectiveness of PBIS training statewide will be determined by the Professional Learning Community of the local school district.

Finally, it is concluded that the strengths of PBIS are best realized in an environment where all stakeholders are fully supportive and invested. Students learn significant behavior modification in such an environment, so that positive behaviors and attitudes become the norm. While success is possible where there is a lack of buy-in and support, the degree of success experienced may depend on the extent of the lack of buy-in and where the lack of buy-in and support exists. In this study, all of the schools used PBIS on a school-wide basis. As a result, despite a lack of buy-in from some stakeholders, teachers in PBIS environments can achieve success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. Welcome the participants and introduce myself.
2. Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
3. Discuss the purpose and the process of the interview.
4. Explain the presence and purpose of the recording the Google Meet interview
5. Outline the general ground rules and interview guidelines, such as prepared for the interviewer to interrupt, assure that all the topics can be covered.
6. Address the assurance of confidentiality.
7. Inform the participant that the information discussed will be analyzed as a whole, and participant's name and the name of the school will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore the challenges that urban middle school administrators confront to overcome the PBIS Emerging status of their campuses. The utilization of interviews will help explore educational leaders implementing PBIS as a proactive behavior program to enhance students' social conduct. The interview data will help determine if PBIS has been implemented with fidelity to reduce the number of behavioral incidents at the local district since many incidents have not declined. Interviews will explore the middle school administration team's perspectives on the PBIS framework in reducing unwanted behaviors throughout the school and the implementation of PBIS.

Discussion guidelines

The interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions, and if you don't understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape-recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

General instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and names of teachers, principal, and other parties, and the school's name. Your identity will be kept confidential, and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

Interview questions

Conclusion

Answer any questions and thank the participant for his or her time.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at this school?
3. What are your perceptions of PBIS implementation in the school/class?
4. Please describe the challenges, if any, you have encountered since PBIS implementation.
5. Describe the responsibility you felt in making sure PBIS was successful.
6. An effort like PBIS needs leaders or change agents to get things going and to maintain the efforts of followers. How do you describe your role in the PBIS effort?
7. What role does administration play in the implementation of PBIS in the classroom?
8. Do you believe PBIS is data-driven? Please explain why or why not.
9. How has PBIS impacted your classroom management?
10. What are your perspectives on the PBIS training?
11. What do you believe is the most significant barrier to implementing and sustaining PBIS?
12. How do you view district administration actively supporting PBIS?
13. What are your thoughts on PBIS being critical and needed for schools and changing behaviors?
14. How knowledgeable do you think the school is in implementing and sustaining PBIS?
15. Can you think of examples that would help improve the implementation and sustainability of PBIS?
16. Can you give me examples of what you feel are limitations of the PBIS framework?