

EXPLORING EFFECTIVE PRIMARY TIER STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL
IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS

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by

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Exploring Effective Primary Tier strategies for Successful Implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports
Title of Item

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports, SWPBS, SWPBIS
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Abstract

This research project discusses school-wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBS) as a proactive solution to increasing behavior challenges in schools today. Research indicates SWPBS can be successful in decreasing office discipline referral rates and suspension rates when effectively implemented. This study applied action research to identify the behavioral needs of a high performing elementary school located in southern California. The school formed a Positive Behavior Support team that collected and reviewed data and introduced effective strategies based on current SWPBS research. The main findings indicate that having an effective SWPBS system in place can lead to positive school-wide changes such as lower discipline and suspension rates, and an overall improved school climate.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Student behaviors are becoming increasingly challenging in today's schools. Research has indicated that lack of discipline is viewed as one of the most serious challenges facing public schools and exclusion and punishment are the most common responses to conduct disorders in schools (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Concurrently, studies have shown that exclusion and punishment are ineffective at producing a long-term reduction in problem behavior (American Psychological Association, 2006).

The purpose of this research is to explore one approach to dealing with problem behaviors in a positive, proactive manner. Over the last 20 years, validated practices that apply what we know about the science of human behavior have been used to improve the effectiveness of school systems (Sugai & Horner, 2006). One such system is a positive behavior support system that focuses on the entire school environment. School-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) is described as a systematic plan that focuses on the social culture within a whole school and specific positive behavior supports for those students with problem behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2009). SWPBS was first developed by researchers at the University of Oregon in the 1980's as a response to interventions needed for students with behavior disorders. Efforts to make these improvements focused on prevention, data based decision making, team based implementation and school-wide systems (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). SWPBS programs are individually created to meet the specific needs of each individual school. SWPBS has gained popularity and has been increasingly implemented in over 16,000 schools throughout North America (PBIS.org, 2013). The U.S. Congress has recently introduced the Positive Behavior for

Safe and Effective Schools Act (H.R. 2597) to provide support and funding to develop more SWPBS programs across the country. This research project focuses on the successful strategies needed to implement SWPBS effectively, using one elementary school's findings during their first year of implementation.

The guiding questions of this research project are:

1. What makes the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support successful in elementary classrooms?
2. How can schools engage staff and students in the school-wide positive behavior support effort?

Statement of Problem

Elementary schools are facing a set of difficult challenges today, from academic accomplishment to social competence to maintaining a safe school climate. Students arrive to school with different ideas of what is socially acceptable and traditional “get tough” and “zero tolerance” approaches have proven to be ineffective (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Students need to be taught in an environment in which they feel safe, know what to expect and are free from distractions. Schools need to take a proactive approach to dealing with challenging behaviors, before these behaviors become too difficult to manage or a violent situation results.

Incorporating SWPBS is one proactive approach. A study of the many elements necessary for the successful implementation of school-wide positive behavior support in elementary schools is essential. Staff, parents and students need to work together to reach the most successful outcome for all involved. My research focuses on finding the methods and strategies needed to successfully implement SWPBS in the elementary school setting. One southern California

school will serve as a case study over the course of the first year of implementation of its own SWPBS plan.

The review of literature will discuss the most current research on the topic of SWPBS by looking at the foundation and conceptual framework of PBS and how SWPBS has evolved from the same methodologies. Next, the organization and characteristics will be discussed as a framework for developing multi-tiered systems of behavior support. Four different elementary school case studies will be examined to explore the strategies, interventions and results of successful implementation models of SWPBS. Discussions will lead to how SWPBS implementation can be evaluated and measured through consistent data collection and implementation fidelity evaluations. Finally, the barriers that may hinder SWPBS and the factors that lead to long-term sustainability will be discussed in detail.

In the section on methodology, the processes that were used to implement a SWPBS plan at a high performing elementary school in a coastal town in southern California will be explained. The step by step progression of implementation, interventions introduced and data collection strategies will be discussed. The author will use archival data to analyze behavioral patterns and areas of concern prior to the implementation. Data was collected in the form of office discipline referrals and suspension rates over the course of eight months. The data of the implementation period will be compared to baseline data to measure results in the analysis section of the paper.

Finally, the concluding section will discuss how my own experience with this research and how my project relates to the current research discussed in the Literature Review. Limitations to this study, personal lessons learned and future research to explore will be

elaborated upon, as well as a preliminary explanation of the guiding questions posed for this research project.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is an applied science that uses educational methods to expand an individual's behavior repertoire and systems change methods to redesign an individual's living environment to achieve first, an enhanced quality of life and, secondly, to minimize problem behavior (Carr et al., 2002). PBS has emerged from three major sources of philosophy and practice; a) applied behavior analysis, b) the inclusion movement, and c) person-centered values (Carr et al., 2002). The convergence of these methods assumes that if an individual's needs are met, then the quality of life will improve and problem behavior will be reduced or eliminated. One of the main characteristics of PBS is the focus and emphasis on prevention. The best time to intervene on problem behavior is when the behavior is not occurring (Carr et al., 2002). This stands in stark contrast to the discipline actions that many schools choose to administer. Traditional discipline measures focus on the behaviors only after they have become a problem. Punishment, removal or suspensions are used as means to stop problem behaviors from occurring again. The idea behind PBS is that "intervention takes place in the absence of problem behavior in order to prevent such behavior from occurring again" (Carr et al., 2002 pg. 10). This approach focuses on skill building and environmental design as two vehicles for producing desirable change (Carr et al., 2002).

Skiba and Sprague (2008) offer alternatives to suspensions and expulsions in their article: *Safety Without Suspensions*. Suspension, which refers to the short-term removal of a student from school for a disciplinary infraction, is one of the most widely used disciplinary procedures

in the United States (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). While suspension should occur in response to behaviors that threaten school safety or security, most occur for disruptive behavior, non-compliance or insubordination (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Studies have found that removing students from school for discipline reasons has a poor effect on student outcomes and the learning climate, as well as can be associated with higher dropout rates among frequently suspended students (Martin, Tobin & Sugai, 2002). Further research has indicated that suspension acts more as a reward than punishment to some students who dislike attending school (Martin et al., 2002). Skiba and Sprague admonish that most administrators turn to school exclusion “as a disciplinary tool because they need to do something and don’t know what else to do” (Skiba & Sprague, 2008 pg. 41). Their solution to reactive exclusionary measures such as suspension and expulsion is described as a School-Wide Positive Behavior Support system (SWPBS) based on prevention, multi-tiered support, and data-based decision making (Horner & Sugai, 2009; Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Prevention, Multi-tiered Support and Data-based Decision Making

The SWPBS model follows such reform measures as Response to Intervention (RtI) which is based on preventative support through screening, targeted intervention and consistent data collection to address academic deficits based on a continuum model (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan & Sugai, 2010). With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004, a greater emphasis for attention was given to help improve student outcomes through evidence or “scientifically-based research” (IDEA, 2004). RtI promotes careful consideration through a multitude of interventions that are designed to meet individual student needs. First considered an alternative to the traditional IQ approach to identifying students with a learning disability, RtI has grown to be considered a multi-tiered

approach to monitor student progress closely and construct intervention decisions based on student need (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Services are delivered through three tiers of support, with an increasing amount of interventions provided with each increasing tier. Tier 1, primary or universal level, focuses on all students with access to the general core curriculum. This tier includes approximately 80-85% of the student population per school. Tier 2, secondary level, involves small, targeted interventions for students in tier 1, requiring targeted interventions for specific skills. This group typically includes 3-6% of the school population. Tier 3, tertiary level provides intense intervention services and frequent progress monitoring often in a 1-1 setting. At times, the interventions are provided by a special educator. This group usually contains 3-5% of the schools population (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The RtI continuum model now includes behavioral expectations through SWPBS. The SWPBS system is based on a team problem-solving approach that targets three levels of intervention: primary (universal access), secondary (selected) and tertiary (targeted) to create safe school environments (George, White, Schlaffer, 2007). Research has indicated that primary tier prevention among elementary, middle, and high schools share the same basic features: to establish a social culture where students expect and support positive behavior choices and teaching and learning opportunities are maximized (Horner et al., 2009).

As with the RtI model's focus on early intervention, (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003), SWPBS focuses on prevention of problem behavior through on-going monitoring, and individualized interventions to determine "at-risk" students who may benefit from secondary or tertiary prevention efforts (Horner et al., 2009).

Features of SWPBS

Sugai & Horner, (2009), identify seven key features of SWPBS:

- Rules for appropriate behavior (school-wide expectations)
- Direct, active teaching of the rules (expectations)
- Acknowledgement of students who obey the rules and engage in appropriate conduct at school
- Consequences for rule-breaking behavior
- Use of data to guide decision making
- Administrative support
- District level support

SWPBS implementation will vary from school to school. Practices will be developed and modified based on the strengths and needs of the students and culture of the school (McIntosh et al., 2010). The following studies examine what makes SWPBS successful among elementary schools throughout the country. For the purpose of this paper, only studies of elementary schools were reviewed to maintain relevance to the author's own research.

Case Studies

George et al. (2007) examined two schools that were able to successfully implement a SWPBS plan. The first school was Centennial School located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Centennial School, an alternative school, serves students classified as autistic or emotionally disturbed who range in age from six to twenty-one. Out of the approximately 100 students at Centennial, 93% were labeled as having emotional disturbance. Students who attended Centennial were sent from 40 local school districts when these school districts' multidisciplinary

teams decided that they were not capable of dealing with the challenging behaviors of these students

In 1998, A SWPBS plan was implemented at Centennial School, with the three-tier model of support; universal, selected and tertiary. George et al. (2007), found that after implementation there was a significant reduction in anti-social behavior and the need for physical restraints. During the first 20 days of school, of the first year of implementation, 122 physical restraints occurred and during the same year, during the last 20 days of school, no restraints were needed. Two of the schools isolation rooms (time-out spaces) were able to be closed at the end of this school year also. Teacher interviews revealed that the interventions were proven to have positive student outcomes and the staff remained committed to using SWPBS in the future years. After nine years, the school continues to see positive behavioral results with increases in pro-social behaviors and decreases in anti-social behaviors.

The second school George et al. (2007) examined in their study was Northwestern Elementary also in Pennsylvania. Northwest Elementary was located in a high-crime downtown area serving approximately 550 students in first-fifth grade. Student population consisted of 48% Caucasian, 47% Hispanic, 3% African American and 1% Asian. 67% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. During Northwest's baseline year, there were 1,717 office discipline referrals (ODR's) and 845 after school detentions and very little parent involvement evident by the lack of parent attendance at the school's open house in the fall. 57 students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were responsible for 298 ODR's, 338 after school detentions and 24 days of suspensions.

In the first year, Northwest Elementary began to implement a PBS plan in their cafeteria, the area with the most behavior disturbances. Teachers immediately noticed an increase in respectful behavior and were eager to begin the following school year with a SWPBS plan. The SWPBS plan at Northwest included the following characteristics:

- (a) clearly defined rules and expectations across all school settings, (b) direct teaching of rules and expectations, (c) a graduation of consequences for rule-violating behavior, (d) heightened recognition of students' appropriate behavior by school staff, (e) the use of data for decision making, and (g) consistent follow-through by school staff.
- (George et al., 2007, pg.43).

During the first year of implementation the number of ODR's dropped from 1,717 to 702. The number of after-school detentions dropped from 845-85 and these results have continued to decrease in the years following. The SWPBS plan also had a positive impact on students with IEPs, during the second year with 34 ODR's, two after school suspensions and 8 days of suspensions. Also, during the first year of implementation 450 families attended the open house in the fall compared to zero families the previous year (George et al., 2007).

George et al. (2007) used his study to find comparisons between these two successful models of SWPBS. The researchers found several factors that accounted for successful implementation. The first factor each school had was a strong focus on leadership and support from the administrators during the implementation process. The second factor was a diversified school-wide team at each school that consisted of school personnel from all areas of the school, i.e. school principals, school psychologists, classroom teachers, instructional assistants, etc. The

third factor was clear expectations and agreements that were specific for each setting in the schools. For example “be responsible, be respectful, be safe.” The fourth factor which made SWPBS successful was the commitment by the teachers to implement class-wide interventions and focus on positive behavior and opportunities for students to regain focus and composure for misbehavior. The fifth factor centered on organization in the form of a handbook that clearly delineated the expectations and structure of the whole school’s behavior plan. Finally, both schools had interventions in place for teachers to use before sending a child to the office or delivering a consequence. Each school, although different, had a step by step guide for teachers to follow when faced with misbehavior.

These classroom and school wide interventions provided students with a safe setting where all students and teachers followed the same rules and expectations. Students received attention and praise for exhibiting pro-social behaviors and were acknowledged frequently. Low-level behaviors diminished due to the levels of interventions teachers were exhibiting. Students were able to remain focused in their classrooms and stay on task. In addition each site offered ample training opportunities for teachers and support staff to learn and practice new skill before implementing them. Staff was also given time and feedback to plan and share strategies and information with each other. George et al. (2007) concluded that the change made by these schools was done so because the administrators and teachers believed that meaningful applications could transform the culture of their schools.

Curtis, Van Hone, Robertson & Karvonen (2010) discuss the results from a 4-year study of the implementation and development of a SWPBS plan in a K-5 elementary school, Glen C. Marlow, located in a rural county in western North Carolina with an enrollment of approximately 520 students. Their study concluded with significant reductions in behavioral referrals to the

office and an overall decrease in suspensions over the course of the implementation of the SWPBS program. The two elements that are credited for the school's success are an effective leadership team and clear behavioral expectations. The leadership team consisted of a school counselor, special education teacher, two classroom teachers, the principal and two parent representatives. In addition a social worker provided by the district was added to the team.

Once the leadership team was established, and the foundation and philosophy of SWPBS was clear, they were sent to a series of trainings over the course of one school year (2002-2003). During this same school year, amid the SWPBS trainings, the leadership team began developing their school's own program based on the behavioral expectations created by the team. Five behavioral statements were chosen for the school: 1. Be safe, 2. Be kind, 3. Be responsible, 4. Be respectful, 5. Be mindful. All staff members (including teachers, cafeteria workers, janitors, counselors and administrators) were provided with a set number of tickets each week to pass out to students demonstrating the positive behavioral characteristics. Every Friday a random drawing was held with the collected tickets, and small prizes were awarded.

After the first year of implementation, the leadership team began consultations with teachers who had chronic problem behaviors with particular students. The focus of these meetings were to provide strategies that would best meet the individual needs of the student, like providing individual or small group counseling, modifications to instruction, family consultations or referring for psychological testing.

It is important to note that this particular school had a school counselor who was involved in every step of the SWPBS implementation, from being a member of the leadership team to attending individual behavioral consultations to informally dealing with students sent to the

office for behavior infractions. The success at Glen C. Marlow can be attributed to the principal and school counselor who collaborated frequently, and addressed behavioral needs in a timely, consistent manner. The school counselor was responsible for creating opportunities to reach a large number of students, amend the school-wide behavior plan to include more rewards for positive behaviors and contribute to a safer learning environment overall at Glen C. Marlow (Curtis et al., 2010).

Horner et al. (2009) completed a randomized, wait-list controlled trial assessing the effects of SWPBS in elementary schools in the states of Hawaii and Illinois over a three year period. Research was conducted from 2002-2006. Within each state, 30 K-5 schools were chosen and were placed within a “Treatment” or “Control” group. The Treatment group was designated to receive SWPBS training first, and the Control/Delay group would receive training 1 year later. The schools were selected based on (a) state capacity to provide whole-school team training in SWPBS; (b) nomination by school administrators and (c) the absence of direct training of staff in SWPBS prior to the study. Selection of the Control or Treatment groups was completely random and the school demographic variables were not statistically significantly different. The average enrollment in the Treatment group was 440.3 students, and the schools in the Control/Delay group had an average enrollment of 547.8 students.

The researchers looked at four measures throughout the study: (a) successful implementation of SWPBS, (b) perceived school safety, (c) levels of ODR’s, and (d) academic achievement (the proportion of third graders meeting the state reading achievement standard).

To measure successful implementation, the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) was utilized. SET was developed by Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner (2001) to explore primary

tier prevention practices. The instrument assesses seven core features of SWPBS: (a) behavioral expectations are defined, (b) behavioral expectations are taught to students, (c) rewards are delivered for appropriate social behavior, (d) predictable consequences are delivered for inappropriate behavior, (e) formal systems are used to collect data and use data for decision making, (f) an administrator is supportive and actively involved in improving student social behavior. The SET is administered by a trained observer who also conducts brief interviews with administrators and reviews written material, discipline goals, and notes visual displays throughout a school. A school is considered at criterion when the total SET score is above 80% (Sugai et al., 2001).

To measure perceived school safety, a School Safety Survey (SSS) was utilized (Sprague, Colvin & Irwin, 1996). This survey uses summary ratings from five different staff members, serving different roles within the school (usually an administrator, a supervisory staff member, a classified staff member and 1-2 teachers). The SSS is split into two factors, *A Risk Factor* and a *Protective Factor*. A Risk Factor examines design of space, crowding, perceived caring, perceived sensitivity to cultural differences, student bonding with the school, the quality of student-adult interactions, perceived fairness of school rules, and level of adult supervision. The Protective Factor is based on school climate, clarity of behavioral expectations, perception that all students are included in the school, student perception of identification of the school, student participation, opportunities for student skill acquisition, and formal and predictable systems for conflict resolution (Horner et al., 2009).

Problem behaviors or ODR's were measured by the School-wide Information System (SWIS), a web-based information system designed by the faculty and staff at the University of

Oregon (May et al., 2000). SWIS provides technical support to collect discipline data, ODR data, and create graphic and tabular data summaries (Horner et al., 2009).

State Standardized Tests were used to measure third grade reading competence. Hawaii used the *Stanford Achievement Test (9)* and Illinois used the *Illinois State Achievement Test*. Data reported by each state was collected to document the percentage of third graders in each school meeting or exceeding the state reading standards for third grade (Horner et al., 2009).

During the first two years, The Treatment Group received SWPBS training and support from the state level. Teams from each school attended three to four trainings that lasted one to two days each. The trainings focused on: a) building staff commitment to SWPBS, b) developing the team and management systems, c) creating a process to identify, teach, monitor, and acknowledge school-wide behavioral expectations, d) creating consequences for misbehavior, and e) applying SWIS to collect, summarize and use data to make decisions. Each school district selected a local coach who would meet with the team monthly to provide support. During each meeting the teams reviewed the SWIS data to plan and make decisions (Homer et al., 2009).

The focus of this study was on the first year of implementation of SWPBS. Over the course of the four year study, some schools dropped out due to closure of schools or changes in administration. Also, policy in Hawaii changed so less training was offered to the Control/Delay group. The SET, which determines the extent to which schools are implementing the primary tier of SWPBS became the primary dependent variable. The Treatment schools improved significantly more than the Control/Delay schools' scores immediately after one year of training (Horner et al., 2009). Data from the SET showed that the schools that received the training and

support to implement SWPBS and did so with fidelity, were perceived as safe environments. The schools implementing SWPBS were associated with higher academic achievement through the measurement of third grade reading scores. The Treatment group also had lower rates of ODR's than the Control/Delay group, however, it is important to note that ODR data was not collected by any of the participating schools prior to the study, and so this data cannot be attributed to the implementation of SWPBS (Horner et al., 2009). To use ODR data it seems beneficial to collect a baseline data one year prior to implementation to measure any positive or negative outcome.

Horner et al (2009), discusses the outcomes of the study as producing significant documentation that the schools that were implementing SWPBS with fidelity were "perceived as safer environments." The discussion also explains that further research is needed to associate the implementation of SWPBS with increased reading scores among third graders. This study serves as a preliminary result to the hypothesis that the implementation of a SWPBS system with the belief that teaching students to be respectful and responsible, will lead to mastery of core academic standards. Further analysis or elaboration is needed in this area.

Bradshaw, Mitchell and Leaf (2010) examined the effects of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) on student outcomes in a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in 37 elementary schools. SWPBIS and SWPBS are used interchangeably, the authors of this study however, use the terminology SWPBIS. The schools were all volunteers from five different districts in both urban (49%) and rural (41%) settings in Maryland. Twenty-one schools were randomized to the intervention group called *SWPBIS schools*, and the sixteen other schools were assigned to a group called *Comparison schools*. Identical recruitment, training and support procedures were used for both groups. There were no

statistically significant differences in demographics between the SWPBIS schools and the Comparison schools (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Each SWPBIS school formed an internal team of 6-10 members, of which 4-5 members attended a 2-day summer training led by Dr. George Sugai, a founding developer of the SWPBIS model. The staff members were trained to develop their implementation plan specific to the needs of their school, and a training plan for professional development for the rest of the staff at their sites. The SWPBIS schools were offered 2 days of professional development for all staff prior to the implementation process. The team also attended summer booster training events each year of the four year study. The school districts provided behavior support coaches to each of the schools to conduct day long trainings 4 times per year.

Four measures were used in this study: The SET (Sugai et al., 2001) and the Effective Behavior Support Survey (EBS; Sugai, Todd & Horner, 2000) were used to measure implementation fidelity and ODR and suspension data collected through SWIS (May et al., 2000) measured student outcomes. The state's standardized academic achievement tests from the Maryland School Assessment were used to measure student outcomes for 3rd and 5th graders math and reading scores. The EBS is a staff survey that measures four behavior support systems in a school: a) schoolwide discipline systems, b) non-classroom management systems (i.e. hallways cafeteria, recess), c) classroom management systems and, d) systems for individual students engaging in chronic behaviors (Sugai et al., 2000).

The SET was administered to all schools in the study prior to any SWPBIS training to determine baseline data. The SET was also administered annually in the spring for each year of the study. All staff members in both studies were asked to voluntarily complete the EBS survey

packets annually. Their names and identifying information were removed by the researchers and the data was summarized in aggregate form. Approximately 80-86% of staff returned the EBS responses over the course of 5 years. There was no significant difference in the number of returned responses between SWPBIS and comparison schools (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

When reviewing the SET assessments and EBS reports, Bradshaw et al. (2010) were able to conclude that the schools trained in SWPBIS implemented the program with high fidelity, meaning the SET score had a fidelity index of 80% or higher and administrative involvement in data collection and decision making as well as social validity measures were also highly indicated on the EBS reports. Once all 21 schools trained in SWPBIS reached high fidelity, they were able to sustain this status for the length of the trial, indicated by the increased SET and EBS scores annually.

ODR data were only calculated in the SWPBIS trained schools. The researchers used the number of major office referrals per 100 students per day at each trained school throughout the trial. The rate was .201 at the end of the first year and dropped to .159 at the end of the 4 year trial. The national SWIS average ranged from .34-.37 for the school years during the trial, indicating a substantial decrease over the course of the study (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Suspension data were reported for both SWPBIS trained schools and comparison schools. The data indicates that the comparison schools suspension rates did not decline and was considered not significant, but the SWBIS trained schools significantly declined in suspension rates from baseline year to the final year of the trial. Using a Z score, comparison schools indicate $Z = -1.54$, $p = .12$ and SWPBIS schools indicate $Z = -2.17$, $p = .03$, $d = .27$ and. This shows

that the percentage of students suspended declined significantly over time for SWPBS schools but not comparison schools (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Like Horner et al. (2009), the discussion of academic achievement for this study was brief and discussion for further research in this area was noted. Data from state test scores suggests a slight trend in SWPBIS trained schools to measure higher percentage gains among third and fifth grade reading and math scores than comparison schools. Fifth grade math scores demonstrated the highest indication of gains when SWPBIS schools were compared with comparison schools. No difference was found among third grade test scores (reading and math) and fifth grade reading scores between comparison and SWPBIS schools, however, the overall improvements in scores tended to be higher for SWPBIS schools than for comparison schools on third and fifth grade reading scores. Both Horner et al., (2009) and Bradshaw et al., (2010) reiterate in their discussions that the effect of SWPBIS on academic outcomes is difficult to measure and that SWPBIS training initially focuses on developing school wide systems to directly address behavior rather than academics, so any academic achievement outcomes may take longer to emerge.

In conducting a review of the studies of Bradshaw et al., (2010) and Horner et al., (2009), Chityo, May & Chityo (2012), discuss the question whether SWPBS can be considered “evidence based”, and find that only Bradshaw et al. (2010) and Horner et al. 2009) were among the few studies that met the criteria for being considered “evidenced based.” Recently, the No Child Left Behind Act has been requiring schools to use and implement only research validated practices in school settings. While SWPBS is becoming increasingly popular throughout the country, the possibility to determine if SWPBS is evidence based is only being considered promising. (Chityo et al., 2012). Chityo et al., created a matrix of five criteria to code 34

different articles that reported on behavioral interventions that targeted all students in a school setting between 1990 and 2011. The five criteria included:

a. The practice and participants are defined with operational precision

The study needs to be designed clearly enough to allow for replication if needed.

b. The research employs valid and reliable measures

The study needs to use a variety of assessment measures, i.e. SET, ODR's or standardized test scores.

c. The research is grounded in rigorous design

Clear information is presented about the groups and procedures used in the study.

d. The research documents experimental effects without iatrogenic outcomes

This refers to the positive or negative student outcomes demonstrated through the implementation of SWPBS.

e. The research documents effects

The study would need to meet two indicators, sustainability determined by high implementation fidelity and consistent administrative support

(Chityo et al., 2012, pg. 4, Horner et al., 2010)

Out of all 34 of the research articles, only Bradshaw et al., (2010) and Horner et al., (2009) met *all* five criteria to be considered evidence-based for SWPBS. The two studies were designed clearly enough for replication if needed, employed valid and reliable measures (i.e. SET, EBS, ODR's etc.), were able to document the implementation of SWPBS resulting in positive student outcomes without any negative effects, and were both able to document high fidelity and sustainability using a rigorous research design (Chityo et al., 2012). While it is promising that two studies (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009) are directly pointing to SWPBS as an

evidenced based practice, the evidence also indicates more research is needed to solidify SWPBS as a grounded practice. Future research needs to include overcoming barriers to SWPBS and promoting sustained implementation.

Perceived Barriers to SWPBS

Why is SWPBS successfully implemented in one school but not in another? Several barriers have been found to hinder schools from successfully implementing SWPBS. There is one documented study involving the different perspectives of team members in schools that were implementing a SWPBS system. Kincaid, Childs, Blase and Wallace (2007) obtained the perspectives of 70 different participants from school leadership teams to identify the barriers and facilitators in implementing SWPBS. Using a nominal group process, the researchers identified the major barrier and facilitator themes. Two open-ended questions were posed to each group of participants (8 groups):

Question 1: What have been the barriers to implementing schoolwide positive behavior support in your school or district?

Question 2: What has facilitated the implementation of schoolwide positive behavior support at your school or in your district? (Kincaid et al., 2007, p.176)

After the questions were presented, a facilitator guided the group members to individually write down their responses, share their ideas with the group, then rank the top ten items with a 7 point scale (1-not very important to 7-very important). Staff buy-in was rated as the most critical barrier to successful SWPBS implementation, nearly doubling any other theme. Staff

implementation, use of data, reward systems, time and implementation issues were other high ranking barriers. District support ranked highest as a facilitator, followed by PBS project support, communication and school level/team trainings (Kincaid et al., 2007). Handler et al. (2007) recommend assessing staff buy-in using a formal questionnaire or interview regularly (2-3 times per school year) to determine the degree that staff has bought in to the implementation process.

Lohrmann, Forman, Martin and Palmieri (2008) interviewed school technical assistants to understand the perspectives and factors that influence school personnel's barriers or resistance to implementing SWPBS with fidelity. To qualify as a study participant, a technical assistant needed to be able to report on a school they provided direct on-site technical assistance to (a) at least one school they considered successfully implementing SWPBS for at least 2 years and (b) at least one school where implementation was hampered by barriers encountered. 14 technical assistants were chosen from 10 states through an interview process. Some participants provided technical assistance on SWPBS to individual school buildings, whereas others provided district-wide support. All participants had experience providing direct support to schools, building leadership teams implementing SWPBS, which included training responsibilities, product development, and facilitation (Lohrmann et al., 2008)

The researchers were able to identify a number of variables why primary prevention strategies were not implemented and developed a summary of five key variables.

1. Lack of Administrative direction and leadership
2. Skepticism that the universal intervention is needed
3. Hopelessness about change

4. Philosophical differences

5. Staff feel disenfranchised from each other, the administrator or the mission of the school

Lohrmann et al. (2008) discuss future implications for practice and offer strategies to work against these barriers. Understand the “underlying reasons (or function) for resistance” (Lohrmann et al., 2008, p. 266), to effectively overcome this barrier, one may need to further examine such things as the social conditions of the school, relationships between staff and administrators as well as individual beliefs held by staff members. Another strategy discussed is to “select strategies that match the reason for resistance” (Lohrmann et al., 2008 p. 267), the authors explain the importance of matching motivation for resistance with opportunities to shape cooperation and commitment. Suggestions include; building rapport with school staff, engage staff in activities to help design intervention components, create dialogues and discussions, use examples, stories and empirical evidence. Handler et al., (2007) discuss the role an administrator plays during implementation. Certain leadership characteristics can help administrators successfully navigate the implementation process. Frequently monitoring and acknowledging staff and students who are demonstrating positive expectations, allowing individual staff members to contribute to the SWPBS plan, and contextualizing the school setting to help change *both* adult and student perceptions of SWPBS are some of the practices modeled by effective administrative leaders (Handler et al., 2007). As each school is different with a unique set of characteristics, so should an intervention be. Each intervention needs to “differentiate technical assistance based on need” (Lohrmann et al., 2008, p. 267), SWPBS is not a one size fits all approach, but an individualized plan created by a school’s own team members. Each school’s plan should be different to best meet the needs of their students and staff.

Sustainability

Most research regarding SWPBS sustainability is in the form of qualitative or case study research (Sugai & Horner, 2006; Bambara, Nonnemacher & Kern, 2009; Kincaid, et al., 2007). Bambara et al. (2009) through a qualitative interview study, identified five critical factors that affected the sustainability of school-based individualized positive behavior support. School culture, building administrator support, time efficiency, capacity building and stakeholder involvement were all identified as potential enablers or barriers to sustaining the individual student support system within SWPBS.

After initial training in SWPBS, there are currently no evidence-based interventions in place at the school level to sustain or continue to improve positive student outcomes from an effective SWPBS plan (McIntosh et al., 2011). McIntosh, Horner and Sugai (2009) offer a model of SWPBS sustainability that includes four factors: priority, effectiveness, efficiency and continuous regeneration. With these factors, the emphasis is on long-term student outcomes such as; academic achievement, reduced problem behaviors and improved social competence driven by the fidelity of implementation. McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan & Sugai (2010) describe the four critical factors in a plan created by Minnesota's State Leadership Team to discuss Minnesota's State SWPBS Sustainability Plan.

Priority. From the State Level, Minnesota created goals and strategies to integrate initiatives on evidence-based practices. Using the RtI model, the Minnesota RtI Center provided trainings and coaching to implement RtI in the form of academics. Since RtI and SWPBS share similar strategies and goals blending the methodologies became a top priority.

Effectiveness. Each school needed to create an effective leadership team before the state provided trainings or support. The initial school trainings were conducted three times over two years. The trainings focused not only on implementing SWPBS to criterion but basic skills and theoretical framework to understanding SWPBS. Furthermore, the state provided coaches to each of the schools and technical assistance to help with implementation problems.

Efficiency. Initially, Minnesota's State Leadership Team provided support, centralized training and extensive resources to the first implementers. However, this soon became costly and inefficient. As a solution, local training began to be provided regionally and the State Leadership Team developed step by step training materials for implementation. The training curriculum remained adaptable to allow for each school to implement with fidelity yet individualize the supports for the needs of their school.

Continuous Regeneration. SWPBS schools in Minnesota collected both implementation data (using SET) and student outcomes data (using ODR's and SWIS). SET data indicated that by year two of implementation, 77% of SWPBS schools attained fidelity of implementation. Data also shows that after three years, the schools continued to sustain implementation, even after state training was withdrawn (McIntosh et al., 2010).

McIntosh et al. (2011) created an instrument designed to measure the variables that enable or prevent sustainability for the primary tier of SWPBS called the School-Wide Universal Behavior Sustainability Index-School Teams (SUBSIST). The SUBSIST is an online, web-based survey consisting of 50 items or statements designed to be completed by school team members or personnel familiar with the SWPBS plan at their designated school. McIntosh et al. (2011) completed a pilot study of 25 participants from 14 schools across five states. The majority of the

participants were from the elementary level (11) with one middle school and 2 high schools. The average number of years implementing SWPBS was 4.9, with a range of 2-10 years. The results of the pilot SUBSIST were promising. The study determined that the SUBSIST was a valid and reliable instrument to measure sustainability of primary tier SWPBS systems. When compared with the SET assessment, the SUBSIST measures a broader range of features including barriers and enablers in the school environment. While the SET is designed to measure fidelity of implementation at one point in time, the SUBSIST measures long-term results. It is important to note that both assessments provide valid, reliable information to measure sustainability and that high SUBSIST scores can be directly related to high SET scores (McIntosh et al., 2011).

Identifying the critical principles of sustainability (McIntosh et al., 2009) make it possible to create and plan SWPBS systems in such a way that the probability of sustaining an effective SWPBS plan will increase even before implementation (McIntosh et al., 2010). Minnesota has demonstrated the capacity to sustain high fidelity of implementation for three years, however, this data is still too minimal to draw any conclusions about long-term sustainability.

Currently in the United States and Canada over 16,000 schools are implementing SWPBS (PBIS.org, 2013) which creates many opportunities for large scale studies focusing on sustainability in the future (McIntosh et al., 2011).

The following two chapters will discuss in detail the methodology and analysis of results from an eight month exploration into the implementation of SWPBS in a suburban elementary school.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This research project focuses on the successful strategies needed to implement SWPBS effectively, using one elementary school's findings during their first year of implementation. The project is grounded on action research methodology and utilizes a mixed methodology approach of gathering qualitative and quantitative data to identify successful strategies of establishing a School-wide positive behavior support plan in one elementary school setting. Action research is defined as an educator's tool to gather data based on the school's need (Mertler, 2008). As a teacher at this school site, I had the role of being an active member of the PBS team and the role of researcher for the purpose of this project. As a special educator with training in the RtI continuum model and intensive behavior interventions, I was able to facilitate the implementation process and disseminate SWPBS information to all staff members as their colleague. This action research is designed to deconstruct SWPBS in a way that all educators can take on a role as a facilitator and enabler. Since it was compiled and created by a teacher, this action research is designed for other teachers, to give them the understanding that positive change is possible at all levels of a school site.

The following is a brief description of district and school information, and a detailed explanation of our school's own SWPBS implementation process over an eight month period.

District Information

This school district is the third largest district in the county and located on the central California coastline. More than 17,000 students in grades kindergarten through twelve receive a standards-based curriculum from highly qualified professionals. The district is comprised of 17 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 3 comprehensive high schools, 1 continuation high school and 3 alternate high schools. The district demographics include 15% identified as English Learners, 40% of student qualifying for free or reduced price meals and 9.6% receiving special education services.

School Information and Initial Steps

The focus of this study involves a high-performing elementary school located along the central California coast. This school serves students in grades kindergarten through five, following a traditional calendar. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, 541 students were enrolled, including 6% in special education, 4% qualifying for English Learner Support, and 39% qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. This elementary school has established boundaries and draws students from within its surrounding neighborhood. As a *School of Choice*, this elementary school accepts students residing outside established boundaries. Approximately fifty students annually attend this school via the School of Choice application. Class sizes are approximately 21:1 in grades K-3 and 32:1 in grades 4-5.

This elementary school houses the only elementary program for students with Emotional Disturbance within the district (approx. 15 students). The school is a high performing school that integrates language arts and mathematics into all areas of the instructional program. The instructional day follows a banking time schedule. School begins at 7:55 a.m. and ends at 2:35

p.m., Monday through Thursdays. Friday dismissal at 11:40 allows staff to collaborate, research, review assessments, discuss student progress and plan upcoming instruction.

During the 2011-2012 school year, there was not a School Wide Positive Behavior Support system in place at this site. The district has created a Behavior Support Team consisting of elementary school principals, district administrators, and school psychologists to help facilitate implementation of SWPBS systems. The purpose of the team is to:

- Support positive school culture
- Identify and harness support and resources available in the district
- Develop short and long term goals for specific students and/or sites
- Develop action plans for specific students and/or sites
- Promote collaboration between schools

One of the action plans designated by the Behavior Support Team for this focus school was to develop a functional School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Plan during the 2012-2013 school year that would help decrease the incidence of negative student behaviors and improve the overall climate of the school.

Data for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years were obtained when the author began researching this topic for a research proposal. Permission to analyze archival data was given in writing by the school principal and through the Institutional Review Board at California State University Channel Islands. The following data were collected and analyzed: a) referrals to the principal for behavioral reasons (office discipline referrals: ODRs) and b) out of school suspensions. Additionally, surveys were emailed to teachers and staff to gain feedback on the implementation process during the 2012-2013 school year.

The archival data collected for the 2011-2012 school year served as the baseline because during that school year there wasn't a SWPBS plan in place.

The on-site PBS leadership team was created in August of the 2012-2013 school year. The team consists of seven members; the school principal, the office manager, two special education teachers, one lower grade teacher (K-2) and one upper grade teacher (3-5), and a parent representative. The PBS team agreed to meet monthly, and was able to use the banking time on Friday afternoons to convene. At one of the earliest meetings it was decided that this year would be ideal to explore strategies and implementation ideas throughout the school year. As no member had received any formal SWPBS training, and district funding for such events was unavailable, the team agreed to focus mainly on tier 1, universal strategies, and the subsequent years would be able to focus on tier 2 and 3 interventions. The goals the team agreed to explore for the 2012-2013 school year were:

- To form a committed PBS leadership team
- To establish and teach positive behavior expectations
- To establish a data collection system
- To create a predictable system of consequences for behavior infractions
- To identify target areas where negative behaviors occur most frequently
- To design a system to positively acknowledge and reinforce positive behaviors
- To promote staff and student buy-in

Establishing and Teaching Behavioral Expectations

The team met twice in August to draft and revise the schools behavioral expectations. Together the team devised a matrix identifying three core values: Be Safe, Be Respectful, and Be

Responsible. The matrix included all areas of the school where the expectations were going to be established: the classroom, hallways, bathroom, cafeteria, playground, arriving at and leaving the school campus. The team included feedback from all grade levels in the design of this matrix and took into consideration the unique needs of this school. For example, when arriving and leaving school, the expectations were created to deal specifically for students who arrive early or late and the procedures a student needs to follow when entering/leaving the school campus, as this was an area of concern brought up by the office manager. The behavioral expectations were positively stated, and always promoted the core values of safety, respect and responsibility (see appendix A-1). The leadership team disseminated the new expectations to staff before the first day of school at a staff breakfast meeting. The principal arranged an assembly for all students on the second day of school to introduce the new expectations to the students through a PowerPoint presentation. In addition, a copy of the matrix and an introduction letter were sent home with students during the first week of school for parents to review.

During the initial introduction of the expectations, the teachers were encouraged to review the expectations in their classroom sometime during the first week of school. Members of the PBS team made themselves available to come in to different classrooms to help introduce and teach the new positive behavior expectations.

Establishing a Data Collection System

The principal created a worksheet template to record the office discipline referrals for the entire school year (see appendix A-2). The template included: the date, time, setting, who referred the student, name of student, description of behavior and the consequence. The principal kept this information in a binder in his office. When the PBS team convened the data

would be reviewed and shared with the team. Data from the previous school year 2011-2012 was reviewed, analyzed and broken down into segments of average of ODRs by month, locations of problem behaviors, referrals by staff and referrals by student name. Additionally, suspension data was reviewed and averaged by month.

Mid-way through the school year, a template was generated by the PBS team called the Behavior Incident Form. This form was created to gather essential information in the setting of the incident by the person referring the student. The form included the date, time, name of student, description of the behavior, possible antecedents and possible motivation for the behavior. This form was generated out of a need for personnel to decrease the amount of ODRs and increase the PBS strategies that were being implemented. It was assumed that staff, including support staff and lunch time aides, would need proper, additional training to use these types of forms, and the team thus decided to delay introduction of the Behavior Incident Form for the following school year. Some members of the PBS team decided to pilot this form during the 2012-2013 intervention school year.

Creating a Predictable System of Consequences

To create a predictable system of consequences for behavior infractions, many different examples were reviewed by the PBS team. In addition to interviews with other principals in the district, online samples were gathered by the researcher for the team to review. The baseline ODR and suspension data were reviewed to determine which areas of need were greatest. The PBS team created a hierarchy of behaviors and their consequences based on the school's positive behavior expectations Be Safe, Be Respectful and Be Responsible. The behaviors were divided into three levels (1-2-3) based on the severity. Level one behaviors included minor infractions

such as running in the halls, calling out in class, out of seat in the classroom, etc. The consequences were described on the adjacent column, these included consequences like a brief conference with student or loss of recess. It was decided that these consequences would be managed in the classroom or by the person observing the behavior, but would not include administrative intervention.

Level two behaviors included arguing or becoming defiant with staff, leaving an assigned area (without supervision), etc. The consequences for level two behaviors ranged from phone call or conference with parent to a time out in another classroom. Like level one behaviors, level two behaviors were expected to be managed by the classroom teacher, with a consult with an administrator if needed. Level three behaviors always involve administrative management. These behaviors range from physical aggression, possession of dangerous items, threats to property destruction, etc. The consequences could result in an ODR or suspension, but were handled by the administrator of the school. When a student behavior resulted in chronic level 2 or 3 behaviors a Student Study Team Meeting was called and members of the PBS team were asked to consult with individualized interventions for this particular student.

Identifying Areas Where Negative Behaviors Occur Most Frequently

Data for the baseline year (2011-2012) were analyzed at the beginning of the intervention year (2012-2013). Based on a review of ODRs and suspension data it was determined that 50% of negative behaviors occurred on the playground during recess, while 41% of negative behaviors occurred in the classroom. Other areas included the bathrooms, cafeteria and hallways. These data were the basis for creating the matrix for school-wide behavior

expectations. The data also revealed the four main descriptions of negative behavior included: bullying, physical aggression towards peers, insubordination towards staff and disrupting class.

The PBS team explored a playground strategy called *Stop, Walk, Talk* which is part of a curriculum that blends bullying prevention with SWPBS (Education and Community Supports; Ross, Horner, Stiller). This strategy teaches children to understand and use the *stop* signal (with their hand or verbally) when they are engaging in a problem behavior or seeing another student exhibiting a problem behavior. Students are taught through modeling to walk away from problem behavior if the behavior persists. If the behavior continues, the student is expected to talk to an adult as a way to solve the problem rather than tattling.

When this strategy was brought up at a staff meeting mid-year as an intervention to deal with problem behaviors on the playground, many staff members encouraged the idea and some even made suggestions to make it easier to implement with all teachers and noon recess aides. Through collaboration and feedback from the staff the strategy morphed into *Stop, Think Walk, Talk*. This strategy involved an adult on the playground noticing a problem behavior, stopping the behavior either with a hand signal or verbally, then asking the student to take a *Think Walk* around the perimeter of the playground. The purpose of the *Think Walk* was to have the student think of other choices he/she could have made instead of the problem behavior. Next, the student returns back to the adult and talks, about a better choice they could have made during recess. If the student is unable to come up with a solution to the problem, they were encouraged to take another *Think Walk* then brainstorm strategies with their classroom teacher before coming in from recess.

Prior to this new strategy being implemented, students were either sent to sit against a wall as a disciplinary measure or sent to the office for problem behaviors at recess. Data were randomly collected by the researcher during one week of recess, to monitor how the Stop, Think Walk, Talk strategy was being used. Implementation of this strategy will be discussed in the following chapter.

Positively Acknowledging and Reinforcing Positive Behavior

During the intervention year, the principal used a weekly incentive called “Principal’s Handshake” to promote the new behavior expectations. He asked all staff members to fill out a certificate weekly to highlight 2-3 students per class that were demonstrating the new behavior expectations positively. He asked the teachers to write examples of how this student was engaging in positive behaviors at school. Students were invited up to his office on Friday mornings for a “handshake” and a small prize along with the certificate. On days the principal was unavailable, the office manager filled in as the hand-shaker.

The PBS team also created visuals like posters and signs using the behavioral expectation language, to be placed throughout the school to reinforce positive behavior. Posters were placed in target areas such as hallways, bathrooms and the cafeteria to help promote the new behavior expectations.

Promoting Staff and Student Buy-In

The 2012-2013 school year served as an “explorative” implementation year, and none of the strategies or interventions were mandatory for any teacher. The PBS team understood that the biggest hurdle to successful SWPBS would be staff and student buy-in. It was assumed by

the team that if staff were bought into the program then, student buy-in would be less of a challenge.

All staff members were offered a SWPBS orientation created by the researcher, before the 2012-2013 school year in which the implementation timeline was introduced, new expectations were reviewed, data from the baseline year was explored and different behavioral strategies were offered. Staff members were informed that an optional survey would be administered by email from the researcher three times during the year to gain feedback and information about the implementation process. The first survey was administered at the beginning of the year and served as a needs assessment for the implementation school year. The needs assessment was emailed to staff explaining briefly what SWPBS is, the purpose of this research and a query for staff to answer questions and leave feedback regarding implementation. This survey served as an informative starting point for implementation procedures and allowed the PBS team to see the current needs of the school. The two subsequent surveys were adapted from an assessment created by Horner, Salentine & Albion (2003) titled the *Self-Assessment of Contextual Fit in Schools*. The survey asks a teacher to rate their understanding of three areas: a) knowledge of the elements of the plan, b) perception to which the school behavior plan is consistent with your personal values and skills and c) the school's ability to support implementation of the plan. After completing the survey, staff were encouraged to pose questions or leave any comments both positive or negative that would help the PBS team and the researcher continue to strengthen the system for the subsequent years. Also, if certain students were proving more challenging, the PBS team was available to offer behavioral support and strategies to the teacher if it was requested.

Teachers were asked to nominate students weekly who were demonstrating positive behavioral expectations to receive a small prize and a certificate. The PBS team discussed ideas of how to recognize staff that were effectively implementing SWPBS strategies at school in a positive way. One way was to have different members of the school honored at staff meetings or luncheons by the PBS team. The idea was to catch members of the school demonstrating positive behavioral strategies either through observation or anonymous notes submitted to a “PBS ballot box” in the office. Other suggestions were to have the principal publicly acknowledge those teachers at a PTA meeting or staff lunch. The PBS team is hoping to implement some of these ideas during the upcoming school year based on feedback gathered from the anonymous surveys.

Also during the following year, a handbook with detailed descriptions of the interventions, tiers and models of behavioral support will be made available for the staff. Currently this handbook is in production. The following chapter will discuss the results from the data collected by the researcher for this project.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The results were measured over an eight month period and compared with the baseline data from the previous year. Time constraints prohibited the researcher from completing a full year of implementation data before this Master's project was due. Archival data were collected and analyzed to review past ODRs and suspensions. Analysis of these data indicated the settings where most problem behaviors occurred and the most frequently occurring behaviors at school. During the baseline year, it was determined that 50% of negative behaviors were found on the playground, 41% were in classrooms, and 9% were divided between the bathrooms, hallways and cafeteria. The behaviors most prominent at this school could be divided into four groups in order of frequency: bullying, physical aggression (fighting), defiance towards teachers and disrupting class.

Overall the data show that problem behaviors decreased during the implementation period: ODR rates decreased by 30% and suspension rates decreased by 28%. The analysis of behaviors determined that 45% of problem behaviors were now occurring on the playground, 32% of behaviors were occurring in classrooms and the other 23% were divided between hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms and leaving school at the end of the day.

ODR Data

ODR data were normalized to a 20 day month to create monthly averages for both baseline months and intervention months. The mean ODR rate for the baseline year was 8.49 referrals per month. During the implementation period, the mean rate of ODRs decreased to 5.94 referrals per month. The results in figure 4.1 indicate a 30% decrease in ODRs in the implementation period when compared to the baseline year.

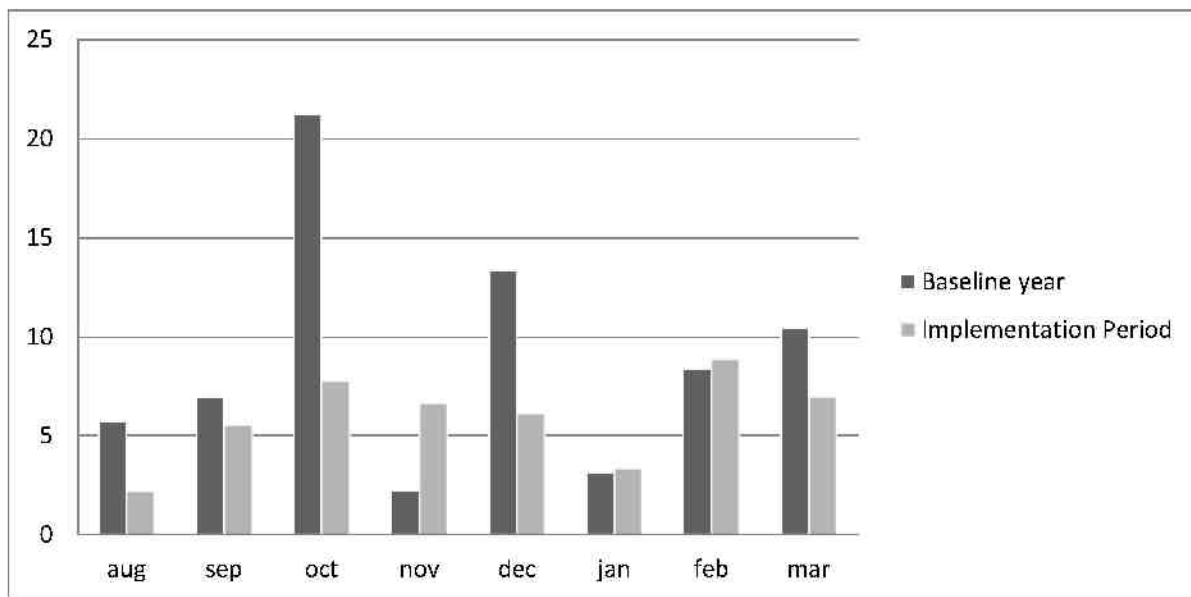


Figure 4.1 Comparison Rates of ODR's by Month

Suspension Data

Suspension data were also normalized to a 20 day month to create monthly averages for both baseline months and intervention months. The mean suspension rate for the baseline year was 2.65 per month. During the implementation period, the mean suspension rate decreased to 1.90 per month. The results indicate a 28% decrease in suspensions during the implementation period when compared to the baseline year.

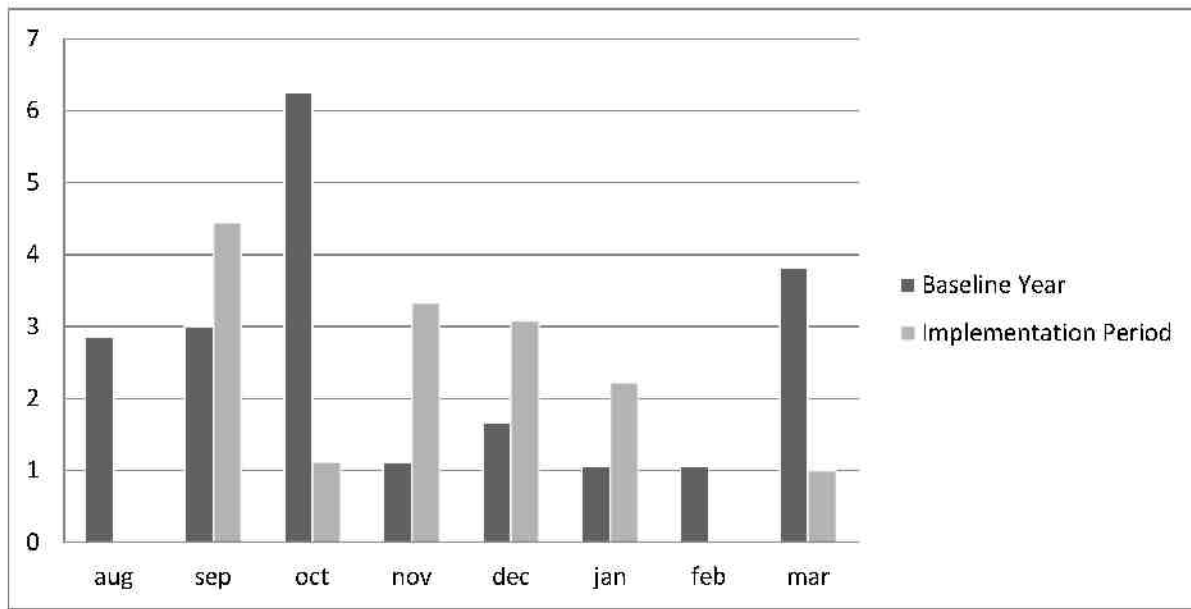


Figure 4 2 Comparison of Suspension Rates by Month

Staff survey

Staff surveys were administered three times during the implementation period. The initial needs assessment was completed by 78% of the teachers at the focus school. The needs calculated through the initial assessment ranked time and administrative leadership as the top two indicators believed by teachers to lead to a successful implementation. Teachers appeared optimistic about the implementation process and were eager to participate in the process.

The second and third surveys, based on the Self-Assessment of Contextual Fit in Schools (Horner et al., 2003), examined eight different areas with 16 questions. Participants were asked to rank each question according to a scale of 1-strongly disagree to 6-strongly agree. The second survey was returned by 60% of the teachers and the third returned by 71% of the teachers.

Data from both surveys were analyzed to discover that the majority of the teachers were in agreement about the knowledge of the expectations and skills needed to implement the

behavior plan, with a mean score of 5; indicating moderate agreement. Scores for availability for resources and administrative support were lower, with a mean score of 3; indicating disagreement over the statements: *“My school provides the faculty/staff time needed to implement this behavior support plan”* and *“My school provides the supervision support needed for effective implementation of this behavior support plan”*. All teachers who completed the survey agreed strongly with the statements as evidenced by a mean score of 6: *“I believe the behavior support plan will be (or is being) effective in achieving targeted outcomes”* and *“I believe this behavior support plan is in the best interest of my students”*.

Observations

Recess observations were formally conducted during the morning periods over one week to monitor the strategy *Stop, Think Walk, Talk* by the researcher. The recess schedule includes 1st -3rd graders going out from 9:30-9:50 and 4th-5th graders going out from 10:00-10:20. Kindergartners have recess from 9:30-10:00 on their own smaller playground. During the lower grade recess there were seven instances of teachers using *Stop, Think Walk, Talk* effectively over the five days of observation. During the upper grade recess four students were asked to take a “Think Walk” to solve playground disputes. There were no ODRs administered during recess for either recess periods during this week. Teachers on yard duty informally reported that the children were responding positively to the *Think Walk* strategy and it had completely replaced “standing on the wall” as a time-out disciplinary measure for problem behaviors on the playground.

Discussion

The intervention was measured over a nine month period. This time allowed for enough data to be collected to determine that ODRs and suspensions had decreased during the intervention period. This time limit, however, did not allow enough data to be collected to understand implementation fidelity. Research conducted by Horner et al., (2009) and Bradshaw et al., (2010) examined longitudinal data over the course of 4-5 years. This study would need to be extended to observe the effects of positive student outcome measures (i.e. increase in CST scores) or sustainability.

Reviewing archival data of ODRs and suspensions allowed the author to gain a true baseline from which to measure progress. Other studies reviewed (Horner et al., 2009, Bradshaw et al., 2010, George et al., 2007) did not collect or review archival data on ODRs. The data collected allowed the PBS team to understand when ODRs were occurring, who was referring, the setting of the behavior incident, a brief description of the behavior and the consequences of the behavior. These data were important for the PBS team to understand the needs of this school and how to create expectations that would best meet the school's needs prior to beginning interventions. These data were also helpful in identifying where to begin the target interventions and what types of behaviors needed to be targeted. The PBS team had all of this information available to them before the implementation period began.

Decreases in ODRs and suspension rates could be attributed to proactive measures taken by teachers and staff at this school. Analysis of teacher surveys and feedback allowed the PBS team to understand how teachers were feeling about the implementation process. Many teachers identified administrative support as a key factor in the SWPBS process. Some teachers did not

feel the administrative support was effective during implementation. They felt more outreach by the principal and school psychologist could have been made. Also, some teachers felt that if they sent a student to the office for discipline, they would be criticized for not doing an effective job of managing their classroom. There were a few incidents where student behaviors were not able to be handled by classroom teachers and more intensive involvement was needed, yet support was not readily available and teachers felt as if they were left alone to deal with the situations on their own.

Overall, teachers reported on their surveys that SWPBS was a positive approach and one that was much needed at this particular school. Teachers appeared to agree that the school wide behavior plan was in the best interest of all students at the school. While, they did not necessarily feel there was enough time to implement all the strategies, most teachers felt that the targeted interventions were ideal for reaching positive student outcomes.

The PBS team will convene twice more before the end of the 2012-2013 school year. Discussions will be centered on implementation fidelity and how to support teachers in the classroom for the following years. District funding in the form of a PBS coach or liaison will also be looked into.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The decrease in behavioral office referrals and suspensions found in this study is consistent with previous SWPBS research results discussed in the Literature Review section (Curtis et al., 2010; George et al., 2007; Horner et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Findings in this small study indicate that a number of proactive strategies can be implemented with little funding or district training and still yield positive outcomes. This study also explores the necessary supports needed for successful implementation. While limited in both time and resources, this study was able to replicate successful SWPBS strategies and individualize the system for the needs of this particular school.

Although the effects from this study were comparatively smaller, the reductions in ODRs and suspensions paralleled the research conducted by Horner et al., 2009 and Bradshaw et al., 2010 among elementary school students. Although no true evaluating tool (i.e. SET or EBS) was used to measure the effects of overall school climate or implementation fidelity, staff feedback given through surveys and after school meetings offered valuable insight into the implementation process. Staff members were openly aware of a decrease overall in behavioral disruptions throughout the school especially on the playgrounds. Some of the barriers to SWPBS that were discussed in the Literature Review were also present in this study. A weakness with administrative leadership was the most obvious link between this study and the research (Kincaid et al., 2007, Lohrmann et al, 2010). Time constraints and the amount of effort required for implementation were also sentiments shared from the teachers of this study. Many teachers felt

positive about the behavior plan, and understood that this was a strategy that served the best interest of their students and the overall climate of the school.

There were numerous limitations to this study, the most noticeable being time constraints. To complete a full implementation year of data, three months more were needed. Although, one could hypothesize that the year will end with significantly less ODRs and suspensions than the baseline year, based on current standings of collected data. Additionally, the PBS team determined that this year was best spent as a year of exploring tier 1 strategies. This gave the intervention a hesitant start, and allowed for certain teachers to feel entitled to “opt out” if they didn’t feel like implementing a new system in their classroom. Thus, the entire school was not entirely on board with the school-wide plan. The administrator did little to see that these teachers understood the foundation of a systems change approach and this may have factored into some of the negative sentiment described on the self assessment surveys towards administration.

The district did not provide any formal training for the administration or the PBS team. There was no funding available for any county wide trainings either. The team relied on members who had done previous research on the topic or worked in a school setting that already had a SWPBS system in place. In addition many resources were gathered online from sites such as PBIS.org and RTInetwork.org. The PBS team took the approach that “we will learn as we grow.”

Sustaining this SWPBS plan will be difficult for the above reasons. As noted in the Literature Review, four critical features were discussed that will maintain a SWPBS beyond implementation years; priority, effectiveness, efficiency & continuous regeneration, as evidenced

through Minnesota's State SWPBS Sustainability Plan (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan & Sugai (2010). Trainings need to occur annually for all staff, not just members of the PBS team. The trainings need to focus on targeted areas of need identified through effective data collection. Staff and teachers need to understand the foundation of SWPBS and how important everyone's role is in creating a system change. Administrators need to understand how their effective leadership will be the guiding force behind a successful SWPBS plan.

My future research will likely focus on the areas of tier 2 and tier 3 targeted interventions. Research will include proactive strategies to help students with challenging behavioral needs remain in the least restrictive environment that will meet their needs. I would like to further this research to explore staff buy-in strategies and how to promote a greater understanding of PBS practices in classrooms and schools through engaging practices where teachers feel like members of a team working together. Finally, this author would like to continue research in the area of sustainability of a SWPBS system over the course of many years, identifying key elements that will enable districts choosing to implement SWPBS plans at their schools.

The two guiding questions throughout this research project were:

1. What makes the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support successful in elementary classrooms?
2. How can schools engage staff and students in the school-wide positive behavior support effort?

The research discussed in the Literature Review, and the my own research findings present an answer to question one. Clear and consistent behavioral expectations, continuous

data collection, a leadership team driven by a strong administrator, significant time and effort, staff buy-in, and effective PBS training have all indicated a reduction in student behavioral problems and an increase in positive student outcomes. Even with limitations to these factors, as evidenced by this research, positive student outcomes can be attainable.

As for question two, engaging staff and students in the school-wide positive behavior support effort is one of the most challenging aspects of SWPBS. Staff members are the heart of the SWPBS implementation effort. The level of dedication members of the staff have to the implementation process will directly affect the school's success. Many factors can hinder or encourage staff involvement (i.e. policy, leadership, funding). Taking on the challenge of SWPBS requires time, commitment and effort from all staff. Motivating staff to implement a systems change approach takes strong leadership and vision for the future. As a member of the PBS team, my role was defined by my knowledge of behavioral interventions and my research of the most current literature on this topic. I was able to initiate and facilitate the beginning steps of this school-wide plan and promote staff buy-in to the best of my abilities. I am lucky to work with a highly dedicated team of staff members, who can see beyond test scores and problematic behaviors. We were able to accomplish a great deal of progress in a short period of time. As a cohesive group, a motivated school-wide staff can promote positive change school-wide.

One approach to staff buy-in is to change the attitudes and beliefs about SWPBS (Kincaid et al., 2007; Lohrmann et al., 2010). Staff need to understand the benefits of SWPBS and realize that if less time is devoted to dealing with student behaviors, then more time can be devoted to classroom academics. The entire school climate can change when all staff members are using a research-based proactive method of behavior support such as SWPBS.

Students need to learn in a safe, predictable, positive school environment. In order for SWPBS to be successful, students need to be actively involved in the school wide change. Research has found that by regularly reviewing school and classroom expectations, students began to practice modeling the expectations themselves (George et al., 2007). Students need to be aware of the varying expectations for behavior in each school environment. For example, classroom expectations are different from those on the playground or in the hallways. When students are aware of the behavioral expectations for each school environment, then they are more likely to respond with appropriate behavior in those environments (George et al., 2007).

Acknowledging positive student behavior was a trend found across the research (Curtis et al., 2010; George et al., 2007; Horner et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Verbal praise and reward systems for positive student outcomes offer students reinforcement for pro-social behavior and helps shape positive behavioral expectations (George et al., 2007)

The body of research on SWPBS is growing. Studies have indicated positive school wide changes and student outcomes (Curtis et al., 2010; George et al., 2007; Horner et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Schools are required to teach students in a safe environment, free from distractions, with clear expectations. Currently, schools need to reduce punitive disciplinary measures when dealing with challenging student behaviors. More proactive, preventative approaches need to be implemented to address challenging behaviors effectively. SWPBS is the best approach to improve the positive behavior outcomes for all students and the entire school community (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

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Appendices

Appendix A-1 Behavioral Expectations: Padre Rules

Appendix A-2 Target Behaviors and Consequences

	Be Safe	Be Responsible	Be Respectful
classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself ▪ Use school materials properly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow directions ▪ Have materials ready ▪ Participate and be an active listener ▪ Complete your class work ▪ Try your best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enter quietly ▪ Use appropriate voice level ▪ Use kind words ▪ Raise your hand to speak ▪ Listen politely
playground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use equipment properly ▪ Stay in assigned area ▪ Nature items stay in nature (sticks, rocks, wood chips, plants, insects, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be responsible for equipment ▪ Use stop, walk, talk to solve problems ▪ Line up immediately at bell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use kind words ▪ Take turns, and include others ▪ Follow game rules ▪ Listen to adults ▪ Be a good sport
cafeteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eat only your food ▪ Keep hands and feet to yourself ▪ Walk in the cafeteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clean up your own space ▪ Stay seated ▪ Raise your hand if you need help ▪ Wait to be excused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wait your turn in line ▪ Use table manners (please, thank you, no mixing food) ▪ Listen to lunch supervisors ▪ Speak quietly
walkways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Walk at all times ▪ Face forward ▪ stay with group ▪ Hands and feet to yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow blue line ▪ Give the right away to younger students ▪ Walk directly to destination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Voices off in hallways and quads ▪ Stay on sidewalk, respect the green spaces
bathrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Walk ▪ Keep hands and feet to yourself ▪ Wash and dry hands with soap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use only what you need of toilet paper, soap and towels ▪ Keep soap and water in the sink ▪ Throw paper towels in garbage ▪ Report messes to an adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respect privacy ▪ Use bathroom equipment properly
arrival/dismissal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enter/exit school from side gates or front of campus ▪ Cafeteria opens at 7:30, playground opens at 7:45 ▪ Please walk bikes, scooters and skateboards on campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Line up with your class at 7:55 a.m. ▪ Tardy students must report to the office ▪ Get to the front of campus quickly if your parents are picking you up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be on time ▪ please wait quietly in the halls and stay out of quads until students are dismissed from their classrooms

Appendix A-2 Target Behaviors and Consequences

LEVEL 1 BEHAVIORS	LEVEL 2 CONSEQUENCES	MANAGED BY
<p>Be Safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unsafe behavior not resulting in injury ▪ Unsafe playground behavior <p>Be Respectful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talking, calling out, making noise during instruction ▪ Teasing or disrespectful tone/voice toward student (not involving profanity) ▪ Inappropriate gestures/ body language (non vulgar) ▪ Non-aggressive touch ▪ Using other’s materials without permission <p>Be Responsible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out of seat or assigned location ▪ Not following directions ▪ Not completing assignments ▪ Not prepared for class or not responsible for materials ▪ Careless work ▪ Possession or playing with non-school items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Praise to students exhibiting positive expectations ▪ Increase proximity to adult ▪ Brief student-teacher conference ▪ “Think Walk” outside ▪ Use of time out or “opportunity space” in classroom ▪ Clip down to yellow ▪ Temporary loss of privilege ▪ Logical consequences/ apology restitution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of free time - Clean up mess - Verbal apology or letter ▪ Out of class time-out ▪ Loss of recess 	<p>Classroom teacher Recess supervisors</p>
LEVEL 2 BEHAVIORS	LEVEL 2 CONSEQUENCES	MANAGED BY
<p>Be safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unintentional behavior resulting in injury ▪ Leaving assigned area without permission <p>Be Respectful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arguing with staff, disrespectful words/ tone ▪ Profanity (not directed towards people) ▪ Vulgar gestures/ body language <p>Be Responsible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insubordination towards adults ▪ Possession of another’s property without permission (low value) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of level 1 consequences ▪ Phone call to parents ▪ Parent/student/teacher conference ▪ Clip down to red ▪ Contract/self monitoring sheet ▪ “Think Sheet” ▪ Opportunity time in another classroom <p>For repeated level 2 behaviors not responding to consequences, level 3 consequences may be appropriate (as determined by consult with administration).</p>	<p>Classroom teacher Recess supervisors Consult with principal</p>
LEVEL 3 BEHAVIORS	LEVEL 3 CONSEQUENCES	MANAGED BY
<p>Be Safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bus Infraction ▪ Physical attack on student/staff ▪ Possession of dangerous substance ▪ Possession of weapon ▪ Leaving school property <p>Be Respectful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Repeated harassment of student ▪ Profanity directed toward student/staff ▪ Verbal/written threat toward student/staff <p>Be Responsible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Property destruction ▪ Theft (beyond nominal value) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Office referral with documentation ▪ Move to red level ▪ Suspension (as appropriate) ▪ Parent-teacher-administrator contract ▪ Referral for SST + interventions 	<p>Administration Behavior specialists PBS Team as consult</p>

