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Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Intervention and Support:
Collaborating for Improvement

by

Diana Case Brown

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Thesis Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the frequency of office behavioral referrals for discipline before and after the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). The study measured proportionality of referrals based on student ethnicity as one assessment of staff cultural competence. Survey data was collected on teachers’ perceptions of the PBIS program implementation. The study took place at a Title 1 elementary school in a San Diego suburb with a student population of approximately 800 students and 42 full and part-time teachers. The researcher used a convergent parallel design method. Student behavior referral data for the 2014-15 and 2015-15 school year was combined with student demographic data and compared. Based on the result of a t-test and with 99% confidence, the researcher concluded there was a statistically significant difference in the number of office behavior referrals issued after the implementation of PBIS. Risk ratio calculations found some evidence of disproportionality for behavior referrals among African-American, Filipino, and students who identified as Two or More Races. Survey results revealed a majority of teachers participated in creating the behavior expectations matrix, taught the expectations with fidelity, and held collaborative conversations about student behavior and possible interventions during their weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Additionally, 50% of teacher respondents were unclear about when to issue behavior referrals and want clarification on PBIS corrective consequences for misbehavior. Recommendations include maintaining school-wide, selected, and targeted interventions, creating a predictable, coherent discipline referral process, and monitoring discipline data for inequities to guide the school’s cultural competence.

Keywords: CulturallyResponsive, Office Discipline Referrals, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, Professional Learning Communities
Chapter 1: Definition of Problem

At this writing, our country is embroiled in an embittered and divisive political battle. Presidential candidates and their parties are debating economic policies, immigration, national security, health care, civil liberties, and educational reform, among other issues. While these are not unusual campaign disputes, the addition of exclusionary and vitriolic statements made towards and about certain racial, religious, and cultural groups has given many Americans a chance to reflect on deeply held value and belief systems. In addition, racial tensions are high after the senseless deaths of several African American males at the hands of law enforcement, and police have become targets of retaliatory violence. A recent Pew Research study titled “On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart” (2016), identifies large gaps between blacks and whites in their views on race relations and inequality. Findings from this new national survey which included 1,799 white and 1,004 black adults show that whites are almost equally likely to say race relations are good as they are to say they are bad, while the majority of blacks say race relations are bad (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Schools are educating an increasingly diverse populace in a more complex social environment and cultural context. Multicultural education has been an integral component of pre-service teacher programs for decades, yet we still have a long way to go. The American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, a leading voice on teacher education, reports "While more diverse teachers have entered the profession in recent years, their numbers have not kept pace with the PK–12 population shift. . .and analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) data showed that students of color made up more than 45% of the PK–12 population, whereas teachers of color made up only 17.5% of the educator workforce" (American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, 2013). Culturally responsive school
discipline practices along with an understanding of positive instructional models for teaching adaptive social-emotional-behavioral skills feels like one place to begin healing a deeply wounded society. In order to begin this work, educators and administrators must be open to reflective, authentic, and collaborative dialogue as they evaluate and implement equitable discipline systems.

**Purpose of Study**

Research shows a growing national concern over reports of inequitable disciplinary practices for minority or other vulnerable groups of students (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Sprague & Golly, 2014; Acosta, et al., 2015). In addition, the number of children and youths exhibiting aggressive, non-compliant, and acting out behaviors in schools has been rising steadily and “antisocial behavior and high levels of aggression evidenced early in a child’s life are among the best predictors of academic failure and delinquency in later years” (Sprague & Golly, 2014, p. 24). Clearly there is an on-going need for school leaders to manage student discipline in a positive, culturally responsive manner. School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SW-PBIS) is a widely acclaimed systems approach to improve school culture and enhance the capacity of schools to educate all children by developing evidence-based school-wide discipline systems.

The effective implementation of PBIS requires the commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of teachers and staff. One way teachers have collaborated to improve instruction and learning has been through organized teams called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These groups have received recognition as a way to maximize professional development for teachers and make data-based instructional decisions. While research has shown a correlation between teachers’ participation in PLC’s and increased student academic
achievement (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008; Marzano, 2003), there has been limited research on the effect of collaborative conversations in the areas of student behavior and school-wide discipline plans in the PLC setting. One key characteristic of an effective PLC is that participants are committed to improvement and “…acknowledge the incongruity between a proposed commitment to learning for all and the absence of a coordinated strategy to respond when students do not learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing systems and process to ensure that students who experience difficulty receive additional time and support for their learning…” (Dufour, 2004, p. 41).

This research study will analyze the frequency of office discipline referral (ODR) data before and after the implementation of PBIS at a Title 1 elementary school. It will also survey teachers in the school’s PLCs to determine which teacher behaviors may have affected the implementation of this new positive behavior management program. Finally, it will closely examine the existing ODR data for disproportionality among student ethnic groups.

**Research Questions**

The research for this study is focused on the following three questions:

1. Did implementation of PBIS at one elementary school affect frequency of behavior referrals?

2. What teacher behaviors impacted the implementation of PBIS?

3. Is there evidence of disproportionality of issuance of behavior referrals by students’ ethnicity?
Preview Literature

Educational leaders, researchers, and policymakers are increasingly focused on a particular aspect of the school environment referred to as its climate. School climate consists of “...the attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that underlie the instructional practices, the level of academic achievement, and the operation of a school” (McEvoy & Welker, 2000, p. 134). A positive school climate includes a safe and orderly environment, ranked as one of the top five school-level factors linked to student achievement (Marzano, 2003). Simply stated, it is the heart and soul of a school. It’s what makes students and teachers want to get out of bed in the morning, go to school, stay there all day, and joyfully participate in learning and teaching – or not. At the federal level, the importance of school climate and a safe and orderly environment was heralded in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (National Education Goals Panel, 1994) which advocated that by the year 2000, every school “…will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning” (p. 13). Shortly thereafter, in reaction to increased incidences of school violence, a report from the U.S. Secretary of Education entitled Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools (1998) recommended that school leaders implement proactive practices to prevent disruptive and violent behavior and promote a positive school climate.

Discipline issues have always been a challenge for educators and administrators. Historically, traditional approaches for dealing with antisocial student behavior have focused on punishment, rejection, and exclusionary tactics. Pushing students away from the school system has not served as a solution, but merely shifted the problem to another sector of society, the greater community (Walker et al., 1996; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). Research has shown that removal from school has a myriad of negative academic and behavioral implications for students and society (Boneshefski & Runge, 2015; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). A recent
University of California, Los Angeles study estimates that cutting the 16 percent nationwide rate for 10th grade suspensions by one percentage point could potentially save taxpayers close to $691 million by reducing school dropouts and referrals to law enforcement (Sparks, 2016).

Equally disconcerting is the evidence of disproportionality in disciplinary actions for minority populations. Recent disciplinary data has shown an overrepresentation of students by race, socioeconomic status, special education status, and gender (Tidwell, Flannery & Lewis-Palmer, 2003; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). National research reports suggest that African American students are four times more likely to be suspended than White students, and Hispanic students are suspended and expelled twice as often as their White counterparts (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). Evidence indicates that suspensions are linked to decreases in academic achievement and an increased likelihood for dropping out of high school. This in turn leads to citizens who will earn less income, utilize social welfare services with higher frequency, experience more health problems, and engage in higher rates of criminal activity (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014).

On the other hand, a positive school climate can constructively influence students’ academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Gage, Larson & Sugai, 2016; Marzano, 2003; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Improving school climate, therefore, provides a hopeful and promising opportunity for preventing behavioral difficulties, improving interpersonal relationships between students, staff, and administrators, and building a stronger citizenry.

Common factors contributing to a positive school climate include: (1) A safe environment conducive to academic and social skills development, (2) A guaranteed and viable curriculum (all students have access to the same curriculum and teachers have ample time and resources to deliver the intended curriculum), (3) Targeted assessments, (4) The elimination of
any practices based on the notion that students cannot or will not achieve; and (5) Acknowledgement, affirmation, and celebration of academic and pro-social achievements. (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Likewise, Marzano’s research on high reliability schools ranks a safe and collaborative culture as the critical foundation in a hierarchy of levels for continuous school improvement. “In essence, Level 1 addresses the day-to-day operation of a school: What are the rules? How do we follow them? What will happen when the rules are not followed? How do we work together to make the school run optimally?” (Marzano, et al., 2014, p. 4).

Today’s educators have been tasked with pressures to raise academic rigor and achievement for all learners with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With the advent of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and the diverse expectations of community stakeholders, there is an increased demand for evidence and data to support school reform decisions. As a result, more schools are seeking comprehensive, fully integrated approaches to promote positive school climates, and prevent antisocial and aggressive student behavior.

One model of proactive discipline called School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SW-PBIS) is a “non-curricular universal prevention strategy that aims to alter the school environment by creating improved systems (e.g. discipline reinforcement, data management) and procedures (e.g., office referral, reinforcement, and training) that promote positive change in staff and student behaviors.” (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, et al., 2008, p. 462). This model includes seven critical components: (1) Formation of a PBIS leadership team, (2) Establishment of behavioral expectations for all common areas and classrooms, (3) Plans for defining and regularly teaching and re-teaching those expectations, (4) Systematic rewards for students who exhibit positive behaviors (5) Systematic response for behavioral violations
including classroom-managed versus office-managed discipline problems (6) Consistent consequences for disciplinary infractions (7) Formal system for the collection and analysis of disciplinary data used to make decisions around program implementation (Bradshaw, Koth, et al., 2008).

The current research study focuses on year one implementation of PBIS at a Title 1 TK-5 elementary school in North San Diego County, California.

**Preview Methodology**

School staff members use a district designated behavior referral/citation form for reporting behavior infractions that warrant administrative-level intervention and parent contact. This form, called an Office Discipline Referral (or ODR), provides data that is logged by site administrators and is ultimately reported to the district along with information on suspensions and expulsions. This study employs a convergent parallel design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged. The quantitative analysis will compare ODR data for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years looking for statistically significant difference pre and post PBIS implementation. Risk indices and ratios will be applied to the demographic data looking for disproportionality by ethnicity. Finally, since any school program requires teacher buy-in and support for successful execution, the qualitative research will utilize an on-line teacher survey to elicit attitudes and opinions about the PBIS program and determine which teacher behaviors may have impacted the implementation.
Significance of Study

Action research is designed to improve a product, procedure, or program in a particular setting, without the intent to generalize results (Mertler & Charles, 2011). This study is a first attempt to examine the effectiveness of Year 1 implementation of SW-PBIS, a research-based methodology for positive school discipline, at one Title 1 elementary school and to better understand teacher perceptions of the same. The research design can be considered an example of transformative social justice in that it seeks to determine how the qualitative findings provide a better understanding of the quantitative results in order to explore inequalities. The analysis is offered through a lens of cultural proficiency, with the intent to improve equitable discipline practices.

Summary

A school’s culture refers to its “… beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how the school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity” (EdGlossary, 2013). A positive school culture is one wherein school policies facilitate and promote student safety and are conducive to student learning. Furthermore, mistakes are not punished as failures, but rather viewed by both educators and students as opportunities to improve and learn. Schools are seeking comprehensive, positive, equitable, and data-based models for behavior management reform to help develop students’ social-emotional efficacy. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports is one such approach.
A review of the literature regarding the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support model for school discipline follows in Chapter 2. Related research is included on the effectiveness of teacher professional learning communities as they relate to student behavior and social-emotional skill instruction, along with cultural proficiency and equity research which examines how cultural differences may be misinterpreted as antisocial behaviors.

Definition of Terms

1. **Antisocial behavior**: any form of challenging behavior such as noncompliance, aggression, defiance, bullying, harassment, drug use, or violence which interferes with the student’s learning or with the learning of other students, and causes a school adult to intervene with a disciplinary or behavior-management response (Sprague & Golly, 2014).

2. **Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)**: a proactive, multi-tiered approach to establishing behavioral supports and social culture necessary for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional, and academic success. (Sprague & Golly, 2014).

3. **Professional Learning Community (PLC)**: a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the continual improvement of academic performance of students.

4. **Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)**: written, formalized citations of student misbehavior written by staff members and referred to school administrators for consultation and consequences.

5. **Proactive Discipline**: a positive rather than negative approach to classroom behavior management. A well-prepared, proactive educator who has established and practiced pro-social behaviors with students is able to respond with appropriate and helpful interventions when misbehavior arises.
6. **Inclusive classroom**: a general education classroom where students with and without disabilities work and learn together. This is a federal mandate through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is based on the concept of Least Restrictive Environment for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

7. **Classroom Management**: the skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students focused, organized, orderly, attentive, on task, and academically productive during class (Edglossary, 2016).

8. **Disproportionality**: a disproportionate representation refers to the over- or under-representation of a given population group, often defined by racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also defined by socioeconomic status, national origin, English proficiency, gender, and sexual orientation, in a specific population category.

9. **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**: a process that identifies specific target behavior, the purpose of that behavior, and what factors maintain the behavior that is interfering with the student’s progress in the educational setting.

10. **Behavior Support Plan or Behavior Intervention Plan (BSP/BIP)**: a proactive action plan to address student behavior(s) that are impeding the learning of the student or the functioning of the classroom.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Recently, a retired middle school teacher turned art museum docent complimented our second grade students on their behavior during an art appreciation assembly at our elementary school. Prior to her presentation, the posted rules for assembly behavior were reviewed for the students by the researcher as part of our PBIS program. The majority of students were able to stay seated, listen politely and attentively, ask appropriate questions, and respond with polite applause. During the assembly, the students who had shorter attention spans or were physically squirmy sat in close proximity to their teachers. Two or three students got up to go use the restroom or have a drink of water outside during the talk.

What the speaker observed was one example of a multi-tiered system of support for problem behavior prevention, which is the foundation of PBIS. Tier 1 or universal preventions are designed to teach important pro-social behaviors necessary for both academic and life settings. School-wide expectations, procedures, rules, discipline plans, character building programs, violence prevention and social skills curricula are several examples of universal preventions (Pavri, 2009; Sprague & Golly, 2014; Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004). At this primary level, approximately 85-90% of students are well-served and successful. Universal preventions are the foundation of the school-wide discipline effort. Schools must not assume that students not engaged in problem behavior inherently understand how to behave pro-socially. Educators and administrators must provide time for training, monitoring, and reinforcing expected social behaviors. Most of the students in the multi-purpose room were well-behaved and able to learn and appreciate new information during the arts assembly, likely resulting from the behavioral expectations that had been taught and practiced.
Tier 2 or secondary preventions are targeted towards the 10-15% of students identified as being at risk for anti-social behavior and these interventions may be delivered in a specialized, small group context. Extra academic support, extra adult attention, scheduling changes, behavior contracts, and support from counselors, special educators, and social workers can be used to improve chances for school success and reduce problem behaviors (Sugai, et al., 2000). In the arts assembly, some of the students needed reminders to re-focus their attention and were given a quiet signal or a reminder to remain seated and keep hands to themselves.

Tertiary preventions involve more individualized approaches that focus on the function of the behavior for the smallest number of students (<10%) who have not been successful with Tier 1 or 2 interventions. This level of high support for students with challenging behaviors is critical to the purpose of PBIS, which is not to increase punishment, but rather to develop effective interventions for the development of positive social and academic development (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Pavri, 2009). Some examples of tertiary interventions are intensive academic support, functional behavior assessments, parent collaboration and training, and individual behavior support or interventions plans. At the assembly, three or four second graders needed to be seated right next to their teachers for continual monitoring, redirecting, positive reinforcement, and/or physical movement breaks and these students might be well-served by tertiary interventions.

Key to the success of PBIS in improving school climate is the recognition of the need for systematic, multi-tiered approaches to improving discipline efforts, or a paradigm shift from the notion of the feasibility of a one-size-fits-all program. PBIS offers a research-based model for reforming school discipline programs based upon giving all students what they need to be
successful. As parents and teachers often tell children: Fair is not equal. Fair is everyone getting what they need.

Figure 1.

Figure 1. PBIS model showing three tiers of preventions and support (Sprague & Golly, 2014).

In addition to the three-tiered model of behavioral support and interventions, PBIS is typically implemented across three settings: (a) school-wide specific settings, (b) classroom settings, and (c) individual students.

A well-functioning school-wide system lays the foundation upon which effective classroom and individual behavior support systems can function. According to Sprague & Golly
CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PBIS

(2014), developing school capacity involves the creation of a representative PBIS team which will guide the program’s implementation and evaluate its effectiveness. First, a needs assessment is administered to guide intervention selection. Next, the PBIS team will develop an action plan for improving school discipline with specific goals and objectives. Optimally, the committee has a budget allocation for student rewards, regular team meetings, teaching activities and materials, and data collection and analysis, and can fund a PBIS coach to consult on the implementation process. After the selection of three to five school-wide behavior expectations (e.g. be respectful, make good choices, solve problems), positive behavior expectations are delineated for each school common area and setting (e.g. what does it look like to make good choices on the playground, in the restroom, in the classroom, or in the lunchroom?). These expectations are then posted and visible in all school settings. After that, lesson plans are developed for teaching these expectations, the staff is trained, and then goes on to teach the same expectations to all students. A significant component of PBIS is that trainers recommend the behavioral expectations for each rule are taught and reviewed at least ten times per year.

Problem behaviors are never ignored in a PBIS school, rather they are clearly defined and explained to all students, along with the consequences for engaging in such behaviors (Sprague & Golly, 2014). While staff should use consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior, they must also consistently correct and re-teach students who demonstrate problem behaviors. This is where the paradigm shift happens.

In building a strong foundation at the school-wide level, data-based decision-making is central to the success of this discipline framework. Data is continually collected in the form of office discipline referrals (ODRs), minor infraction reports, and surveys to guide decision-making. The data is summarized at least monthly and reported to the staff regularly. A mindset
of continual improvement calls for examining behavior intervention decisions and strategies at least twice yearly.

Sugai, et al., (2000) reported that ODR patterns can be quantified and used as an assessment of the effectiveness of the existing three tiers of interventions in a school. If the number of students receiving one or more referrals per year exceeds 20%, it is an indicator that universal intervention support (Tier 1) reform is needed. At Tier 2, selected behavior support reform would be justified if there were more than 10 children with 10+ referrals. Finally at Tier 3, selected behavior support reform should be considered if there are more than 0.5% of the students with 10+ behavior referrals.

The effective school-wide program must include a well-managed and informed supervisory staff that has been trained in PBIS principles of behavior management. A system of positive reinforcement which has been agreed upon by the majority of staff members should be in place in all common area settings. These can range from tangible positive reward tickets to verbal praise for following established behavior expectations.

Building upon the school-wide system of expectations are effective classroom management systems. Students spend the majority of their school day in the classroom setting. Even though teachers may have differing views on behavior plans, under PBIS, it is expected that student behaviors and routines in all classrooms will be clearly defined, stated positively, and taught directly, so that all students know consistently what is expected of them. When students follow the expectations, they should be acknowledged and positively reinforced at a ratio of 4:1 (positive to negative comments). Problem behaviors must be clearly defined and receive consistent consequences. Tidwell, et al., (2003) purports that effective classroom management systems include: (a) physical organization of the classroom space, (b) teaching
behavior expectations and classroom routines, and (c) using positive reinforcement to increase pro-social behavior. In a positive, safe, and effectively managed classroom, teachers are well-prepared, and have well-established and orderly transitions within classrooms and throughout the school. Instruction and curriculum match student ability levels, and students have measurably high academic success (75%+ correct responses school-wide). In the shared decision-making climate of PBIS, teachers are given regular opportunities to seek assistance and recommendations for dealing with and improving their classroom management skills. This may happen during weekly PLC meetings and might take the form of observation, instruction, and/or coaching (Sprague & Golly, 2014).

Individual student support is likely the greatest challenge for schools and teachers, but the area with the greatest potential for life-altering changes. Goals for this level of PBIS implementation include the use of behavioral assessments to identify students exhibiting problem behaviors and a means for teachers to easily receive assistance with problem students in their classroom. Teachers have the opportunity to receive training in effective methods for preventing behavioral escalation, creating functional behavior assessments (what is the student seeking from the disruptive behavior – peer-attention, diversion from the task, etc.) and delivering positive behavioral interventions for students with chronic problem behaviors (Sprague & Golly, 2014). Increasingly, students with significant behavior challenges and/or learning disabilities are participating in inclusive classrooms, so teachers will require training in skills needed for developing and implementing functionally-based behavior support plans (Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015) at this Tier 3 level of support. Pavri (2009) reports that “Special educators are increasingly providing pre-referral support and services to students at risk for learning and behavior difficulties, and are in a position to provide leadership, technical support, and much
needed professional development for the establishment and implementation of an RTI model [multi-tiered supports] at their school” (p. 12).

What might a school expect as a result of the implementation of a multi-tiered system of behavior support across school-wide, classroom, and individual settings? Bradshaw, et al. (2008) researched the effect of PBIS on staff’s perception of school organizational health with a randomized controlled trial conducted in 37 elementary schools over a three year period. The Organizational Health Diagnostic and Development Corporation defines organizational health as “…an organization’s ability to function effectively, to cope adequately, to change appropriately, and to grow from within” (Organizational Health Diagnostic & Development Corporation, 2011). Results showed significant improvement in organizational health for those schools implementing PBIS, based on an index that measured five aspects of a healthy functioning school including: (1) integrity (protection of the academic environment from outside demands and influences) (2) staff affiliation (relationships and interactions between staff and students are warm, and friendly and there is a common purpose and feeling of accomplishment, (3) academic emphasis (in classrooms students are positive, cooperative, respectful and driven to improve their performance, (4) collegial leadership (administrator is supportive, open, friendly, and invites shared leadership, and (5) resource influence (administrators are able to access funding and opportunities that benefit the school site) (Bradshaw, et al., 2008). Over 14,000 schools in the U.S. currently utilize PBIS to support pro-social behaviors and decrease disruptive behaviors, and research has shown the impact of this program in reducing problem behavior and improving academic success (Reinke, et al., 2013; Sprague & Golly, 2014).
Culturally Responsive Classrooms

With the increasing diversity in demographics and a widening socioeconomic divide, schools are educating students with a greater variety of academic, economic, and social needs. Cartledge & Kourea (2008) report that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (i.e. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American) have higher drop-out rates, disproportionate placement in special education programs, and greater rates of failure to meet state and national academic standards. Additionally, the interpretation of social behaviors through a singular cultural lens has contributed to disproportionality in discipline practices (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008; Voltz, et al., 2003). In order to ensure academic and social success for all, teachers must adapt in several ways to meet the needs of CLD students. Educators can improve their cultural competence by: (1) developing their personal cultural awareness, (2) identifying and using culturally responsive instructional strategies and adjusting curriculum content to make it relevant, and (3) viewing students’ social behaviors through a cultural lens. A one-size fits all approach to classroom discipline is no longer effective. The culturally proficient educator employs preventive and instructional methods for managing behavior rather than punitive approaches. In particular, teachers need differentiated, intensified and targeted pedagogical approaches for teaching pro-social behaviors to students who are overly-physical, non-compliant, and off-task.

Culturally competent teachers recognize that their worldview is unique and personal, and they are respectful and tolerant of other cultural views. They understand that their cultural norms are not universal. Instead, these teachers take time to learn about their students’ origins, and relationship and communication styles. They understand how their students and their families view time and space, health and hygiene, traditions and holidays, and discipline among other
cultural norms. A culturally competent teacher recognizes that their own biases and perceptions can influence their teaching. For example, in some cultural groups, overlapping speech (several people talking at once) is a common communication style. Rather than punish a child for “talking over” a teacher, the culturally competent educator will offer instruction in turn-taking for formal communication in the classroom and larger society. In a report describing the implementation and outcomes of teacher-directed professional development called Project CRISP, which was designed to improve teachers’ awareness of culturally influenced learning and behavior differences in the classroom, 45% of general educators and 53% of special educators indicated the training had significantly increased their awareness of cultural differences related to social behaviors. One teacher reported, “Some cultures are more outgoing in different ways than others are…you have to understand that maybe their response to you or their response to a particular subject matter that might be presented to them- it’s not an act of defiance; it’s not an act of being disruptive. It’s a natural way of them expressing how they feel about a particular thing” (Voltz, et al., 2003, p. 70).

Reflection and introspection on beliefs about race and social justice are critical practices for culturally responsive teaching. In evaluating their current perspectives on these topics, teachers might ask themselves the following questions:

1. What is the racial or gender breakdown of the students that I typically send from my class for disciplinary actions?
2. How often do I send the same students for disciplinary actions?
3. What messages am I communicating to the students who are the recipients of these actions?
4. What messages am I communicating to their classmates?
5. Is the behavior of my students getting better? How do I know? If it is not getting better, why not?

6. Do I dispense disciplinary referrals fairly on the basis of race and gender?

7. Are disciplinary actions therapeutic or simply punitive?

8. Do I distinguish culturally specific behaviors from behavioral inadequacies?

9. If students have substantial behavioral differences, have I taught them the skills that they need to know?

10. Am I punishing some students for my lack of skill in effective behavior management?


PBIS provides one evidence-based proactive system for culturally proficient classroom management. The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education in a report entitled: *Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies* (2008) sees great potential for PBIS when it is approached from a multicultural perspective and advises teachers, administrators and support staff to:

1. Develop the awareness that one person’s definition of “inappropriate” behavior may be vastly different from another’s. Such perceptions are influenced by cultural expectations and perceptions vary across cultures.

2. Demonstrate respect and caring when forming connections with students,

3. Explicitly teach behavior expectations and rules in a respectful and caring manner,

4. Offer a continuum of behavior supports and interventions.

5. Involve families and community members in positive, supportive, culturally relevant ways.
In a culturally responsive and affirming environment, students’ behaviors are appropriately and proactively either accepted or redirected. “The definition of a culturally responsive disciplined classroom may vary; but at the very least, key features need to include cultures of fairness, attitudes of caring and commitment to teaching CLD students with disabilities, and teachers skilled in implementing culturally responsive behavioral interventions” (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008, p. 362).

**Professional Learning Communities**

Dufour et al. (2004) defined a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as educators committed to working in collaborative teams interdependently in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve common goals and get better results for the students they serve. The significance of the word “action” cannot be overemphasized, as the point of members learning, reflecting, and analyzing data together is to be able to turn goals and aspirations into results by doing things differently. “By acting in new ways, members of a PLC acquire new experiences that lead to new awareness. Gradually this heightened awareness is assimilated into fundamental shifts in attitudes and beliefs, which over time, transform the culture of the school.” (DuFour, et al., 2004, p. 4).

Critical organizing questions for the development of an effective PLC are:

1. What is our fundamental purpose?
2. What do we hope to become?
3. What are our strategies for getting better?
4. By what criteria will we assess our improvement efforts? (Dufour, 2004).

PLC’s have successfully focused their efforts on improving academic achievement by examining assessment data and making instructional and curricular changes at the grade level.
However schools must also answer the question of what happens when, despite their best efforts, students do not learn? Historically, the response to this has been left to the purview of the individual classroom teacher, resulting in a variety of different practices for supporting – or not - a student experiencing difficulty. Research into effectively organized PLCs suggests that schools should be able to respond to struggling students in ways that are (1) based on intervention, rather than remediation, (2) systematic and school-wide, (3) timely, and (4) directed, meaning students are required rather than invited to receive extra assistance and support. The school culture shifts from an ideology of “my classroom, my students” to one of “our school and our students.” It becomes the PLC team’s responsibility to ensure that no student falls through the cracks, a fundamental shift in an approach to teaching and learning (Garrett, 2010). A multi-tiered system of academic and social-emotional and behavioral interventions is one response to meet this need.

In a recent study of six outstanding, high-poverty schools in Massachusetts, researchers interviewed 142 teachers to learn more about how their efforts had been supported in these high-achieving environments. Teachers reported that all of their schools encouraged collaboration and five schools had put PLCs at the center of their school-wide improvement strategy. According to the teachers, working collaboratively reduced their stress levels in a high-demand, fast-paced environment, helped them plan and teach better, and made their work more manageable and rewarding. (Johnson, Reinhorn & Simon, 2016). Although team participation required additional time, the benefits to the continual improvement of the school paid off with a mission that “. . . gave purpose and practical meaning to teachers’ work on teams, where they developed curriculum and lesson plans, assessed their students’ learning, gauged the effectiveness of their
instruction, and monitored students’ behavior, needs, and progress.” (Johnson, Reinhorn & Simon, 2016, p. 25).

Marzano’s comprehensive work with high reliability schools (2014) ranks the implementation of a PLC as a critical commitment for school improvement at the foundational level of providing a safe and collaborative culture. “Collaborative teams can be used to identify and execute ways to make the school more safe and orderly, obtain teacher input into decisions regarding school policies, and provide input regarding how the school can function more effectively.” (Marzano, 2014, p.28).

As research-based best practices and federal laws require students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), collaboration between general education teachers and special educators is increasingly necessary. In a multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral interventions, many of these students are at the tertiary level and require the greatest amount of individualized instruction. Finding time to communicate and collaborate about an individual student can be a great challenge, as teachers’ responsibilities for planning, instruction, and assessment, along with meetings, parent conferences, and other extra-curricular duties dominate their schedules for a large number of students. (Evans & Weiss, 2014). Special educators can be helpful in facilitating professional development for teachers to acquire behavior management skills and self-monitoring checklists to monitor their own implementation of these practices, and the use of individualized strategies for inclusive settings. Some of these include group contingency contracts, activity reinforcers, cue cards and visual prompts. Through self-monitoring, goal-setting, and self-evaluation, all students can learn to manage their own behavior and improve their attention compliance, and independence in the general education setting. (Evans & Weiss, 2014).
School leaders play a key role in creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Effective leaders of a PLC-based school facilitate shared leadership, authority, and power by giving staff authentic opportunities for input into the shared values and vision of the school (Carpenter, 2015). This aligns with the collaborative nature of PBIS, where teachers and other staff members must work hand-in-hand with administrators to improve culture through data-driven, problem-solving school improvement processes.

**Conclusion**

In an educational environment of increasing ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, more rigorous academic standards, and inclusive classrooms, there is an ever greater need for practical, evidenced-based, culturally responsive, behavior management systems. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports is a highly regarded, evidence based framework. Schools implementing this program can use office discipline referrals to track progress towards equitable, positive, school climates. Safe, controlled and effective schools are not accidents, but settings where purposeful planning and effort have been made to create and maintain positive and safe school cultures (Sugai, 2000).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Research has shown that Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) can be effective in improving school culture, reducing problem behaviors, and building staff affiliation through a positive, collaborative, and supportive atmosphere (Sherrod, et al. 2009; Sugai, et al., 2000; Bradshaw, et al., 2008). These are all intended outcomes of the program. One measure of the success of PBIS implementation is through the monitoring and analysis of office discipline referrals (ODRs). This type of data has been useful for identifying disproportionality for minority and special education students, and more recently for examining school discipline systems for improvement (Sugai, et al., 2000; Marzano, 2014; Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). ODR data may also offer a lens into the school’s level of cultural proficiency.

This study is a first step in documenting PBIS data at one elementary school and is focused on the following research questions:

1. Did implementation of PBIS at one elementary school affect frequency of behavior referrals?
2. What teacher behaviors impacted the implementation of PBIS?
3. Is there evidence of disproportionality for behavior referrals by student ethnicity?
Setting

The study took place at a Title 1 K-5 elementary school, located in a North San Diego County suburb with a student population of approximately 810 students. Student ethnicity demographics for the 2014-15 school year were: 2.8% Black or African American, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.1% Asian, 1.8% Filipino, 78.2% Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 14.1% White, 1.0% Two or more races. Additionally, 81% of the student body classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, 52% as English Learners, 13% as students with disabilities and 0.5% as Foster Youth. The school is one of the newest in the district and is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, a beautiful, spacious library, several large playground areas on separate levels and a massive grass playing field. Since the opening of the school, a professional learning community culture has been de rigueur. The school earned California Distinguished School status in 2013. The school’s vision articulated in the School’s Accountability Report Card (SARC) reports that the school affirms high levels of learning for all students as its fundamental purpose and is willing to examine all practices in light of their impact on learning.

Between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years, the school’s administration changed suddenly and completely. The former principal was promoted to a district office position and the assistant principal retired. The new administrators spent their first year in 2015-16 familiarizing themselves with the students, staff, and programs, including the launch of “The Leader in Me.” The Leader in Me is a leadership, goal-setting, and character development program based on The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey. Classroom mission statements, an introduction to the 7 habits (Be Proactive, Put First Things First, Begin with the End in Mind, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpen the
CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PBIS

Saw) classroom greeters (students who will stand and greet a visitor to the classroom), and classroom leadership roles were added to the school culture during this first year of implementation (Covey, 2004).

Training

At the beginning of the 2015-16 school term the school district provided a two-day training session in Positive Behavior Intervention and Support by Dr. Jeffrey Sprague to site teams. Each school was represented by administrators, teachers, special educators, and classified staff members. Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Supports in Schools (Sprague & Golly, 2014) served as a guidebook for the professional development. Site teams completed a self-assessment survey and prioritized goals for improvement of school discipline systems. Next steps included developing 2-3 school rules, identifying specific settings at the school and defining specific behavior expectations for each one of those settings in the form of a matrix. Following the creation of this document, it was recommended that behavior expectations be communicated to all stakeholders and explicitly taught. Dr. Sprague suggested teams create a year-long lesson schedule and develop a plan for providing positive feedback to reward expected behaviors. Finally, he reviewed research on using office discipline referrals to make data-driven decisions and provided an opportunity for site teams to discuss current practices and areas for improvement in the office discipline referral system.

“If the adults in the school agree upon and can state all specific behavior expectations, minor inappropriate behaviors diminish significantly” (Sprague, et al., 2014). Based on that premise, the team agreed upon three school rules (1) Be Respectful, (2) Make Good Choices and (3) Solve Problems. Armed with these rules and a modicum of professional development guidance, the new PBIS site team made a brief introductory presentation at the back to school
staff meeting. The creation of a school-wide behavior expectation matrix began in mid-October. The assistant principal and researcher invited participation in identifying behavior expectations by hanging posters in the staff lounge titled with each of the school common areas, such as playground, multi-purpose room, walkways, etc. Staff members recorded their ideas and concerns over the course of several days and the results were summarized into a behavior expectations matrix. Due to attrition, the researcher invited any interested staff members to participate on the PBIS committee to review and approve the final matrix (See Appendix B). Over the year, this committee evolved to include a representative from each grade level who could take information back to their grade levels about PBIS matters.

Participants

The study invited the participation of all students through a Parent Information Sheet in both English and Spanish sent home in weekly home-school communication envelopes. The form explained the study and contained an opt-out clause for those choosing not to participate. The study focused on those K-5 students who received one or more office discipline referrals (ODRs) in the 2014-15 (Pre-PBIS) and 2015-16 (Post-PBIS) school terms. Parents of 6 students with referrals opted out of participation. Their data is not included in the analysis. In 2014-15, 117 students or 15% of the student body received at least one behavior referral. In 2015-16, 55 students or 7% of the student body received at least one behavior referral. For the teacher survey, all certificated teachers were invited to participate. There are 36 full-time certificated teachers teaching grade levels ranging from transitional kindergarten through fifth grade, and 6 part-time certificated teachers working in the school-wide reading intervention program. All 42 teachers were invited to participate in the on-line survey and 28 responses were received.
Teacher (full and part time) ethnic demographics are 74% white, 19% Hispanic/Latino; 5% Two or more races and 2% Asian.

**Method and Design**

This mixed methods study will address the effectiveness of Year 1 PBIS implementation at an elementary school. A convergent parallel design will be used in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged (Creswell, 2013). This study can also be viewed as a transformative social justice design, as it seeks to determine how the qualitative findings provide a better understanding of the quantitative results in order to explore inequalities (Creswell, 2013). Mertens (2007) offers this research approach as an intersection of mixed methods and social justice. “By carefully devising mixed methods to obtain input into the conditions that warrant the conduct of research, opportunities are opened for those whose voices have been traditionally excluded. Hence, the reason we need good mixed methods research is that there are real lives at stake that are being determined by those in power. The voices of those who are disenfranchised on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, disability, or other characteristics remind us of the issues of power that surround so much in the public sphere, even that supposedly neutral and objective world of research.” (Mertens, 2007, p. 214).

As a first step, extant office discipline referral data will be organized, categorized, and analyzed for racial disproportionality for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. Next, numbers of behavior referrals for the two years will be compared before and after implementation of PBIS. An on-line teacher survey will explore teacher’s experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about PBIS, office discipline referrals and teacher collaboration. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data is the need to evaluate the success of the PBIS program by using a needs assessment (survey) and a test of the success of the program (analysis of referral data).
Since no experimental conditions will be imposed, this work qualifies as an action research study. Action research, common in the education field, seeks to find helpful solutions to current and pressing problems at the local level through the processes of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Mertler & Charles, 2011). The data collected and analyzed for this single school site will support evaluation and continuation of a school-wide PBIS program designed to promote positive student behavior, reduce behavior referrals, and improve social-emotional well-being for students and staff.

**Instruments**

In April, 2016, upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and with the support of school administrators, the research study was outlined at an after school faculty meeting. The researcher informed teachers that she would be conducting a study seeking to understand in what ways teacher collaboration affects the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and student discipline referrals. The researcher asked full-time certificated teachers to participate at that meeting, and followed up with email invitations to all full-time and part-time certificated teachers. Teachers were encouraged to participate and make their opinions heard by completing an anonymous survey on Google Forms within a two week window. Following are the survey questions:

1. What grade do you teach?

2. How many years have you been teaching?

3. How knowledgeable are you about the PBIS program at our school site?

4. Did you have an opportunity to participate in developing the school-wide behavior expectations?
5. Describe a time (or times) when you used PBIS strategies in your classroom or on campus.

6. As part of your Professional Learning Community (PLC) collaboration time this year, you were asked to discuss at-risk students and document concerns, goals, and strategies on a new form called Grade Level Student Success Team (SST) Meeting Notes. How helpful was this process for supporting your work with children with behavioral challenges?

7. What helpful guidance for improving students’ behavior have you received from your colleagues during your PLC meetings? Please list.

8. How has the addition of the PLC agenda items “PBIS” affected the amount of time you spend discussing student behavior during your weekly PLC meetings?

9. Do you know what student behavior warrants the issuance of a behavior referral?

10. If you answered “No/Not Sure” what would help clarify the process for you?

11. How many referrals have you issued this past year?

12. Do you feel the implementation of PBIS has had an effect on the number of behavior referrals issued at our school?

13. In your opinion, how effective was PBIS in teaching behavior expectations to students?

The survey was a combination of multiple choice questions for gathering demographic data, Likert-scaled questions to measure responses along a continuum, and open ended questions to gather short answers and clarifications to responses. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering is effective because it provides multiple ways to look at research questions and provides an opportunity to explain quantitative results through qualitative responses.
Procedures

Office Discipline Referrals. Permission was requested and granted by school administrators to review documented behavior referral data for the school years 2014-15 and 2015-16. These records are maintained by the Assistant Principal in Excel documents listing students’ name, date of infraction, teacher, grade level, infraction, and consequence. District-created office discipline referrals are issued to students by teachers, supervisors, and administrators for a variety of infractions (see Table 1).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Playground/PE</th>
<th>Cafeteria/Lunch Area</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disrupting work of others</td>
<td>Disobeying School Adults</td>
<td>Throwing Food</td>
<td>Rude/disrespectful</td>
<td>Disregard for rules/safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to school or private property</td>
<td>Rough play after being warned</td>
<td>Leaving a mess</td>
<td>Arguing with adults</td>
<td>Stealing from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to complete work</td>
<td>Throwing rocks or other objects</td>
<td>Eating food outside of designated areas</td>
<td>Threatening another person</td>
<td>Misconduct in PE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harassing or taunting others</td>
<td>Misconduct in restroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardy after recess</td>
<td>Pushing/hitting/kicking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possession or use of a dangerous object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graffiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Out of assigned/ supervised area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Behavioral infractions listed on the District Behavior Citation form.

The researcher next retrieved demographic documents from Synergy (the school’s current electronic student information system) and manually input student ethnicity and gender into the spreadsheet. After excluding data from those students whose parents had used the opt-out clause
in the research study notification, the data was organized for analysis. All data was destroyed at the completion of the study.

**Teacher Survey.** The researcher is also a teacher at the school site and served as coordinator of the PBIS implementation process throughout the school year. Teachers were invited by the researcher to participate in the on-line Google Forms survey which was designed to assess the PBIS program. Teachers were advised that although their participation in the research component of this study would yield minimal or no direct benefits to them save the opportunity to reflect upon disciplinary and collaborative practices, the researcher believed that the study had the potential to greatly inform other teachers and researchers working to create positive school climates through PBIS implementation. The first request for participation was at a presentation at a faculty meeting in April, 2016, and subsequent to that, teachers received two reminders via email, and one written message on the white board in the staff lounge. A link to the survey was provided. Participants were advised the survey would take 10-15 minutes and would be available on-line for two weeks. Risk and safeguards were provided on the first page of the survey and consent was granted by participation in the survey process.

**Conclusion**

This study examined student behavior referral data for two school years before and after the implementation of a formalized PBIS program at a Title 1 elementary school. It looked at numbers of referrals per student, and compared frequency of referrals by month between the school years looking for statistical significance. Demographic data was added to the discipline records for a more comprehensive and culturally responsive view of student misbehavior. The data was analyzed for proportionality within ethnic groups. The study also employed a survey to gather qualitative data on how teachers may have impacted the implementation process. By using a convergent parallel design methodology, quantitative (ODR) and qualitative (survey)
data was collected in parallel, analyzed separately, then merged for interpretation. It is hoped that the data collected and analyzed for this single school site will support evaluation and continuation of a school-wide PBIS program designed to promote positive student behavior, reduce behavior referrals, and improve social-emotional well-being for students and staff. The research findings are presented in the following chapter on data analysis.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

There is a growing need for schools to manage student discipline in a proactive, positive, culturally responsive manner. This study investigated the effect of the implementation of a school-wide discipline model called Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) at a Title I elementary school on the number of issued office discipline referrals. It also examined the office discipline referral (ODR) data for evidence of disproportionality among ethnic groups. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from an on-line survey regarding experiences, opinions, attitudes, and level of knowledge about the PBIS program. This chapter will include a presentation of the research findings in the section entitled Data Presentation and Analysis, followed by a discussion of how these results may or may not relate to and/or benefit education practices in a section entitled Interpretations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

After a student receives a behavior referral, that information is logged into an Excel spreadsheet which is maintained and updated by the assistant principal. The spreadsheet records students’ names, dates of incidences, teachers’ names, problems and consequences. For this study, the researcher added student demographic data, including ethnicity, to each student record.

For purposes of discussion in this data analysis, ‘Year 1’ will refer to the 2014-15 school year prior to PBIS implementation, and ‘Year 2’ will refer to the 2015-16 school year after PBIS implementation. Discipline data was reported for the entire school year (11 months) from August through June for both Years 1 and 2.
Behavior referral data.

The data showed that 117 students or 15% of the student body had received one or more ODRs in Year 1, and 55 students or 7% of the student body received referrals in Year 2. There was a decrease in the number of referrals from Year 1 to Year 2 of 53%.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Students</th>
<th>Total Number of Students with 1 or more ODRs</th>
<th>Percentage of student body with ODRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Number of students receiving office discipline referrals as a percentage of the student population in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

The researcher next reviewed ODR data to determine how many individual students had received multiple referrals, as this might inform the need for additional Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 preventions.
Figure 2. A comparison of the number of students receiving one or more than one ODR for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

In Year 1, 68 students received one ODR and 23 students received two ODRs. In Year 2, 38 students received one ODR and 15 students received two ODRs. For both years, the decreasing number of students with multiple referrals could possibly indicate that referring students to the office for discipline was an effective corrective consequence and deterrent for future misbehavior. On the other end of the scale, five students received five or more ODRs in Year 1, and one student received five or more ODRs in Year 2. One factor contributing to this difference is likely a change in administrators, who discouraged the writing of multiple behavior referrals for a student with severely challenging social-emotional behaviors. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.
ODR data was next examined by month for the two school years and the raw data is displayed below in Figure 3.

Figure 3. This line plot shows the difference between number of referrals per month in Year 1 and Year 2.

The analysis involved analyzing monthly differences between ODRs in academic year 2014-15 and 2015-16 by employing a matched pair t-test. There were 11 months (n) of data, August through June, in the two academic years, so n1 = n2 = 11. The null hypothesis stated there would be no change in the number of behavior referrals from Year 1 to Year, and the alternate hypothesis stated that ODRs would be reduced. Therefore, this was a one-sided t test. Degrees of freedom (DOF) for the test is n1 + n2 - 2 = 11 + 11 - 2 = 20. The t critical value at α = 0.05, 20 DOF is 1.7247. The calculated t value for this data is 4.171, easily exceeding the
critical value of 1.7247. As expected, the corresponding p-value is quite low at 0.000236. Therefore this result is also significant at the $\alpha = 0.01$ level. These results can be interpreted to mean there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of ODRs from Year 1 to Year 2 at a .01 level of confidence.

The research by Sugai, et al., (2000) quantified ODR patterns as an assessment of the effectiveness of the three tiers of preventions in a school. Those calculations were performed for data from this study for Years 1 and 2 of ODR data, and show that, based on these indices, no urgent reforms are needed.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PBIS Level of Support</th>
<th>Suggested Index for Reform</th>
<th>2014-15 Data</th>
<th>2015-16 Data</th>
<th>Need for Reform at this Level?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1 Universal Prevention</td>
<td>More than 20% of students earn one or more behavior referral</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2 Selected Prevention</td>
<td>More than 10 children have 10+ referrals</td>
<td>5 students</td>
<td>1 student</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3 Targeted Prevention</td>
<td>There are more than 0.5% of students with 10+ referrals.</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>No – referrals in this Tier are decreasing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Analysis of Need for Universal, Selected, and/or Targeted Prevention Reforms.

(Sugai, et al.,(2000)).
Disproportionality calculations.

A risk index is the proportion of a group that may be at risk of a certain outcome. This calculation can be helpful to school leadership for measuring cultural equity in disciplinary actions (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014).

\[
\text{Risk index} = \frac{\text{Number of students in a particular ethnic group receiving one or more ODRs}}{\text{Total number of enrolled students in that ethnic group}}
\]

\[
\text{Risk ratio} = \frac{\text{Risk index of a particular ethnic group receiving one or more ODRs}}{\text{Risk index of all other ethnic groups receiving one or more ODRs}}
\]

Disproportionality refers to one group being represented at a rate higher or lower than the comparison group. A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates exact proportionality, while overrepresentation is indicated by a ratio greater than 1.0 and underrepresentation is indicated by a risk ratio less than 1.0. Caution is advised when interpreting results from risk ratios calculated when some groups have small numbers (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). Following are risk index and risk ratio calculations based on the school site’s 2014-15 and 2015-15 ODR data.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Number Receiving one or more ODRs</th>
<th>Risk index</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Evidence of disproportionality?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>Overrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>Overrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>Proportional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more Races*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Overrepresented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Small sample size

Table 5

2015-2016 School Year (Year 2 Post-PBIS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Number Receiving one or more ODRs</th>
<th>Risk index</th>
<th>Risk Ratio</th>
<th>Evidence of disproportionality?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Overrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Proportional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Risk Ratio Calculations by Ethnic Groups for Behavior Referrals during 2015-16.

Results align with national statistics that show African-American students are more likely to be overrepresented with discipline referrals than other ethnic groups. In Year 1, students identifying as Filipino and Two or More Races, were also overrepresented, although smaller sample sizes make these results less reliable.

Survey results.

There was a 66% response rate for the teacher survey. Of the respondents, 50% had been teaching for more than 12 years, 14.3% had 8-12 years teaching experience, 32.1% had 4-7 years, and 3.6% had been teaching few than 4 years. Grade levels for the respondents are pictured in Figure 4 below.
When asked about their familiarity with the PBIS program on a 1-5 continuum with 1 indicating Not Knowledgeable and 5 indicating Very Knowledgeable, 3.6% of the teachers responded with 1, 10.7% responded with 2, 46.4% responded with 3, 32.1% responded with 4 and 7.1% responded with 5. These results indicate a moderate level of understanding of the overall PBIS program with room for improvement.
The next survey question asked if teachers had the opportunity to participate in the development of the school-wide behavior expectations. This opportunity had been provided to teachers via email invitations to (1) participate on the PBIS committee and (2) record their ideas for expected behaviors in the school’s common areas on posters hung in the staff lounge. Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported yes, they had been given the opportunity to participate, 21.4% said no, they had not had the opportunity, and 3.6% were not sure. In retrospect, this question may have been poorly worded and misinterpreted by those responding “no” to mean although they had been given the opportunity to participate, in fact they did not participate in the development.
Question 5 asked teachers to describe a time or times they had used PBIS strategies either in their classroom or on campus. Responses were coded and grouped into four themes: (1) teaching expectations and rules, (2) reinforcement of positive behavior, (3) using positive language and tone with students, and (4) accessing behavior support and modification strategies.

One example from an upper grade teacher for using PBIS to teach rules and expectations was “I implement PBIS strategies when students need reminding. For example, when I am supervising the playground and I see students not following the rules, I ask them what the appropriate behavior is and remind them that we all follow the same rules.” Primary teachers report, “We frequently visit the signs around the campus and discuss expected behaviors in those areas,” and “In kinder, it’s often a matter of the students learning what is and is not acceptable behavior in specific places around campus. They need to understand the expectations.”
Teachers' Uses of PBIS

Figure 6. Bar graph showing the different ways teachers used PBIS throughout the year.

Teachers also used PBIS strategies to reinforce correct behaviors. “When I see students making good choices on the playground, I try to make those known and a focus.” Examples of responses coded for positive language and tone include, “Like other teachers I’ve always worked to make sure my students follow rules and try to remind students in a positive way about rule rather than using negatives in my speech,” and “I thank students for [following expectation] and let them know how much I appreciate it,” and “One of the strategies I use most often is pointing out positive behaviors to correct the negative behaviors. It is amazing how this works because the students who are showing inappropriate behavior usually correct their behavior on their own after hearing me mention the appropriate things I see students doing. This keeps the learning environment positive because less negative terms are being used.” Another teacher wrote, “I
also use positive behavior rewards in the classroom and do my best to have a positive attitude and compliment our students.”

Teachers also recounted PBIS strategies used for the Tier 2 intervention and behavioral modification strategies the model provides. For example, “I have used PBIS related to a very aggressive and overactive child. Strategies used: student/teacher/parent behavior contract, observation charting, school to home behavior chart, etc.,” and “In the classroom, I-messages, think sheets, and walk-on-white sheets [reward coupons for walking on campus walkways], proactive language, reflection conversations, peer-coaching (on the playground).” Since Year 1 implementation of PBIS largely involved the establishment of Tier 1 preventions, it was encouraging to see how teachers collaborated and problem-solved with students who needed additional interventions and supports.

The next section of the survey asked teachers about their collaboration around PBIS implementation. The PLC agenda, which is submitted to the site principal prior to the weekly team meeting, was amended this year to add PBIS as an item for discussion. When asked about how this contributed to the amount of time teachers spent talking about matters relating to PBIS, 39.3% said it increased the amount of time, 10.7% said it decreased the time, and 50% said there was no change. The large number of teachers indicating “no change” could be interpreted in several different ways. It could mean that they did not spend any time discussing the PBIS program, or it could mean that they have always used meeting time to discuss how to support one another and monitor students’ behavior, needs, and progress. Since there was no follow-up clarifying question to explain the responses, there is no way of knowing what “no change” means. The agenda item “PBIS” was open-ended, and no direction or suggestions were given to staff on what to include during their PLC discussions.
Another survey question inquired about a new procedure related to the student study team referral process. This question asked teachers to rate the helpfulness of the *Grade Level Student Success Team Meeting Notes* form, in which teachers were asked to discuss at-risk students and document concerns, goals, and strategies with their colleagues. Results ranged from 3.6% saying this was not a helpful procedure, to 17.9% reporting somewhat helpful, 57.1% rated the process as helpful, and 21.4% indicated it was very helpful. Again, since no clarifying question followed, no conclusions can be drawn as to why teachers did not find this helpful, although 78% indicated they found the process to have value.

Teachers were next asked to list what kinds of helpful guidance they had received from colleagues during their PLC meetings. In coding these responses, one dominant theme emerged, which was the sharing of behavioral modification strategies and interventions. Four subordinate themes, including: (1) positive talk, praise, and rewards; (2) involving parents; (3) giving emotional support to teachers; and (4) teaching rules and expectations were also noted. Some examples pulled from the dominant ‘sharing strategies’ theme are: “We share with each other different strategies and new ideas with students that are a challenge. We offer new ideas and ask what has been done already and that alone is of great help,” and “Some of the guidance provided was talk to parents, modify their work, develop personalized behavior contracts, more intervention support, counseling/social skills group, peer support, and more frequent check-ins.” One kindergarten teacher shared these helpful interventions gleaned from collaborative conversations with peers, “(1) Behavior strategies involving observation, charting/journaling, (2) Using different kinds of behavior contracts, (3) Different options/ideas for consequences/rewards, (4) How to divide and conquer negative behaviors in several students.”
Figure 7. Number of comments relating to the different kinds of collaborative PBIS conversations teachers had during the PLC meeting times.
Teachers felt generally that PBIS was effective in teaching behavior expectations to students. Figure 8 shows that, on a 1-5 continuum with 1 indicating not helpful and 5 indicating very helpful, 78.5% of the respondents chose 3, 4, or 5, whereas 21.4% chose 1 or 2.

**Figure 8.**

![Bar graph showing teachers’ opinions on the effectiveness of PBIS in teaching behavior expectations to students on a continuum scale of 1-5.](image)

The final portion of the survey asked about corrective consequences and the effects of PBIS on the behavior referral process. Results showed 53.6% of teachers reported they had not issued any referrals this year, 42.9% had issued between 1 and 5 referrals, and 3.6% (1 teacher) had issued 5 or more referrals. When asked about PBIS effectiveness in establishing firm, fair, and corrective discipline for students, on a 1-5 continuum with 1 indicating not helpful and 5 indicating very helpful, results showed 46.3% felt it to be only moderately helpful (see Figure 9).
When asked if they understood what student behaviors warranted the issuance of a behavior referral, 50% of the respondents answered yes, while 50% answered no/not sure. This was a meaningful finding, as it showed lack of consensus and questions the validity of the ODR data. A clarifying short answer question followed which asked, “If you answered no/not sure, what would help clarify the behavioral referral process for you?” These responses were sorted by themes and are presented in Figure 10. The first theme was a desire for a specific list of student behaviors that would earn a referral. Teachers wrote: “A list of behaviors that are automatic referrals – no wiggle room,” and “Set guidelines have not been established,” and “What actions require immediate referrals?” and “Specifics from administration, in writing, about what would constitute a referral.” Other teachers wanted a broader perspective on the entire corrective
consequence process and seemed to fall back on the need for a flow chart, which had been used by the previous administration. For example, “A flow chart with behavior specifics” and “I think having a specific flow chart similar to one we’ve had in the past would be helpful because what I think would require a referral, another teacher may not agree with me.” The final theme related to confusion about the philosophy of writing and reporting referrals under PBIS. For example, “There is a difference in not issuing referrals because they do not warrant one vs. not giving any because of the PBIS numbers that are being reported. We went from one extreme to another. It is very frustrating,” and “In the past, I was more sure of what warranted the issuance of a referral. But now with PBIS, I’ve been a little less sure,” and “I’m no longer sure what warrants a behavior referral (and what is in place of it).”

Figure 10.

![Improving the Behavior Referral Process](image)

Figure 10. Bar graph showing teachers’ ideas for clarifying the behavior referral process.
A final question asked if teachers felt the implementation of PBIS had an effect on the number of behavior referrals issued at the school. 42.9% responded affirmatively, 17.9% responded negatively, and 39.3% were unsure.

**Interpretations**

This research study sought to analyze office behavior referral data for changes in frequency of issuance before and after the implementation of PBIS at one elementary school. Since over 85% of students in Year 1 and over 90% of students in Year 2 did not receive any behavior referrals, this suggests that effective school-wide prevention programs are in existence. A t-test found statistically significant differences for monthly referrals at the 99% confidence level between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. While it might be hoped that the Tier 1 universal preventions set in place in Year 2 with school rules and specific behavior expectations caused this difference, the methodology was not experimental in nature and causation cannot be inferred. Additionally, qualitative data collected in parallel through a teacher survey found that 50% of teachers did not clearly understand when to issue a behavior referral. This convergent parallel research design called for merging both sets of data for analysis. In so doing, the researcher concluded that while the number of office referrals decreased significantly in Year 2, many teachers may have felt they had been discouraged from using this as a corrective consequence for student misbehavior.

The study also investigated the ODR data for equity in discipline practices. After risk ratio calculations were applied, findings showed some evidence of disproportionality in Year 1 among the African American, Filipino, and Two or More Races ethnic groups, and in Year 2 among the African-American ethnic group. This is valuable school climate data. Reporting these statistics to the staff can build awareness of the potential for cultural insensitivities
regarding behavior and help initiate collaborative conversations around staff capacity for cultural competency.

Teacher survey data revealed that teachers are generally on-board with the implementation of PBIS. They feel they have had the opportunity to participate in the development of school-wide behavior expectations, which contributes to buy-in, and they are actively teaching those expectations to students. There is an appreciation of the positive feeling tone of the program, and collaboration through discussions during PLC meetings is supportive. Although Tier 1 preventions seem well-established, many teachers are still unclear about how and when to give corrective consequences and these findings will guide the PBIS team’s planning for professional development in Year 2.

**Summary**

This chapter described the quantitative and qualitative data collected from ODRs and teacher surveys. It showed statistically significant differences in reported ODR data from Year 1 to Year 2, pre and post PBIS implementation. Evidence of some disproportionality among ethnic minority groups was reported through the use of risk ratio calculations. Qualitative results from a teacher survey were summarized and provided important insights for interpreting the quantitative results. Following is a discussion of the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for this study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In a commentary for Education Week, Marc Prensky (2014) wrote, “Our education and schools should not be so overly focused on learning. It is the wrong aspiration for our students, despite centuries of academic tradition. If we were to focus instead on helping all students be the very best and most capable people they can be (as some of our best independent schools have been consciously doing for some time), our kids' education and our society would be light-years ahead of where they are now. If we had different expectations, who knows what our kids might become?” (p. 40).

While not being overly focused on learning may sound heretical in the education field, the author’s premise was that the goal of education should be about students ‘becoming’ contributing members of society with good character and conscience, and learning should be a means to that end (Prensky, 2014).

The new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), mandates that states now include at least one non-academic measure in their accountability system, and that metric may relate to students’ social-emotional learning. This is supported by a wide body of research on the importance of social-emotional learning (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Evans & Weiss, 2014; Bradshaw, et al., 2008; Pavri, 2009), and presumes that indicators of a safe and orderly environment and positive school cultures can be measurable (Marzano, et al., 2014).

One discipline reform model that has received national recognition for its contribution to improving school culture by addressing social-emotional-behavioral learning is Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a proactive, multi-tiered prevention-based model of school discipline whose core principles include: Developing clear expectations for student behaviors, communicating and teaching the expectations, recognizing and reinforcing
when students are following the expectations, minimizing attention for minor infractions, and having clear and consistent consequences. The program purports to establish “…a positive school climate where no child is left behind, no teacher is left unsupported, and strong home-school connections between teachers and caregivers are created and sustained” (Sprague & Golly, 2014, p. 4).

This research study examined student behavior referral data as one metric of a positive school culture. It examined that data before and after the implementation of PBIS. The study also assessed the office discipline referral (ODR) data for equity among ethnic groups. Finally, teachers were surveyed on their attitudes and opinions about the PBIS program implementation.

This investigation employed a convergent parallel research design to collect quantitative (ODR) and qualitative (survey) data separately and then merged the results for analysis and interpretation. The study took place at a majority-minority Title 1 elementary school in San Diego County, where over 75% of the student body identified as Hispanic/Latino and 81% as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Participants included students who had received one or more behavior referrals in the 2014-15 or 2015-16 school years, and 42 full and part-time certificated teachers who were invited to participate in an on-line survey.

A summary of findings and interpretations, educational implications, limitations, and future research directions derived from this research are presented in the following sections.

Finding Summary/Interpretations

Research Question One. Is there a difference between the number of behavior referrals written before PBIS implementation and after PBIS implementation?

In 2014-15, 85% of students received zero referrals for behavior and 15% received one or more. After PBIS implementation in 2015-16, 93% of students received zero referrals and 7%
received one or more. This shows a reduction in number of referrals of 53%. These numbers possibly validate the success of Tier 1 preventions already in place at this elementary school, even prior to PBIS implementation, including effective instruction and classroom management, a character education program, incentives, clear school rules and expectations, and a hierarchy of consistent consequences (Tidwell, et al., 2003; Sprague & Golly, 2014).

Analysis of monthly ODR data for the two years with a matched pair t-test also revealed a statistically significant difference at a .01 confidence level, where Year 2 ODRs were significantly lower than Year 1 ODRs. While these results appear impressive, several variables including a change in administration are listed later as limitations and may have contributed to this positive change.

**Research Question Two.** What teacher behaviors might have impacted the implementation of PBIS?

A 13 question on-line survey with a combination of multiple choice, Likert scale, and short answer responses was administered to 42 credentialed teachers, with 28 teachers (66%) completing the survey. Data analysis revealed that 85.6% of teachers scored on a range of 1-5 were moderately knowledgeable to very knowledgeable about the PBIS program. Results also showed that 78.5% of respondents, again scoring on a range of 1-5, believed that PBIS was moderately helpful to very helpful in teaching behavior expectations to students. In terms of how teachers used the PBIS program, 43% of responses indicated they used it to teach behavior expectations and rules, 21% applied it by using more positive language and feeling tone with students, 18% used PBIS for rewards and reinforcement, and 11% turned to positive behavior support modifications and strategies.
Vescio, et al., (2007) presented an overview of 11 studies on the impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on teaching practices and student learning. One of the summary findings was that “…when teachers participate in a learning community, students benefit as well, as indicated by improved academic scores over time. All six studies reporting student learning outcomes indicated that an intense focus on student learning and achievement was the aspect of learning communities that impacted student learning” (p. 88). The current investigation focused on a school that was opened in 2008 with a strong and enduring PLC culture. In 2015-16, the topic ‘PBIS’ was added to the weekly PLC agenda for grade level teams. In spite of little direction, teams engaged in collaborative conversations around the topic which were coded into themes from the survey responses. Sharing behavior modification strategies was noted as a major topic of conversation by 61% of the respondents’ comments, followed by positive talk, praise, and rewards by 13% of the comments. This willingness of teachers to engage in discussing a new program for any length of time during a weekly meeting speaks to the underlying (PLC) commitment to continual improvement and learning among the staff, which is to be highly valued and respected.

The survey also exposed an area of uncertainty regarding corrective consequences for misbehavior, as 50% of teacher respondents reported they were unclear about when to write a behavior referral. This had not been emphasized during this first year of PBIS implementation, which focused more on the identification and teaching of behavior expectations for all school common areas (see Appendix B). Under the previous administration, a flow chart for handling misbehavior had been given to teachers to follow, with the direction that classroom teachers were to maintain records of students’ infractions in a behavior binder. The new administrators encouraged teachers to look at each situation uniquely, carefully considering the child and the
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circumstances before writing referrals, and not to be as punitive as in the past. A subsequent question asked how this process could be clarified for staff and 50% responded they would like a list of behaviors that warranted an ODR, 35% wanted a flow chart explaining how to handle all student misbehaviors, and 15% wanted an explanation of the PBIS philosophy for ODRs in general. One interpretation of this data is that some teachers prefer a more structured, formalized system for documenting behavior infractions. There could be several reasons for this, including the need for data collection, or feeling supported by administration and parents in working with students with challenging, disruptive, or dangerous behaviors. As the site ODR statistics show, there are students requiring Tier 3 preventions and interventions, and classroom teachers are not usually trained in these strategies and modifications. At this level, “…proactive efforts are difficult to establish and maintain because students with significant learning and behavioral difficulties are so unresponsive to universal interventions, have such a dramatic impact on the overall and daily functioning of classrooms and schools, respond so slowly to even targeted interventions, and demand such intensive and ongoing behavioral support” (Sugai, et al., 2000). More than ever, regular education teachers are collaborating with their special education colleagues in inclusive classrooms to provide support and reinforcement for students needing tertiary interventions (Evans & Weiss, 2014).

PBIS is framed on the need for a data-based decision-making system. At this school site, work began in the 2015-16 school year with the identification and teaching of behavioral expectations for year one of PBIS implementation. With the collaborative efforts already demonstrated by the staff, it is likely a shared decision-making approach will help create and clarify problem behavior philosophy and consistent corrective consequence procedures in year two.
Research Question Three. Is there evidence of disproportionality of behavior referrals by student ethnicity?

In applying risk index and risk ratio calculations to the behavior referral data, disproportionate disciplinary statistics were discovered for Filipino, Multi-racial, and African-American ethnic groups in 2014-15, and for the African-American ethnic group in the 2015-16 school year. Cartledge & Kourea (2008) reported that African-American children receive more disciplinary actions and harsher penalties than their white peers, and these exclusionary practices are consistently related to disproportionality in special education placement. “Frequent and excessive punishment for African-American males…not only reinforces stereotypes of the criminality of African American males but also convinces these students that the schools are not able or willing to address their specific needs” (Cartledge & Kourea, p. 363). The literature on culturally responsive disciplined environments suggests that schools should be places where students learn to become disciplined and build habits of personal and social responsibility. It is incumbent upon school leaders, then, to be sure their teachers can distinguish culturally-based behaviors from defiant or disruptive behaviors.

Limitations

Although the study data results were positive and significant for decreasing the number of behavior referrals, there were several uncontrolled variables that may have contributed to this change.

First, the change in administrators between Years 1 and 2 likely affected the discipline policies and procedures. The school had used a PBIS-style program called P.R.I.D.E. under the previous administration, so the students were familiar with the concepts, however, the program had been handed down to the staff by the former principal. Also, documentation of student
misbehavior had been encouraged by the former administrators, and it was unclear under the new administration and the newly-mandated PBIS program how much referral-writing should or should not be done.

Another important variable was the implementation of The Leader in Me and 7 Habits program. The school-wide promotion of these habits and classroom leadership routines may have contributed to a more positive school climate and to the reduction in behavior referrals as well.

Another limitation to the study is the reliability of the referral form itself. Office discipline data can be a useful index of discipline systems within a school, but it should be remembered that it can be highly subjective and limited by the manner in which school staff agree on how to respond to student behaviors and when to issue a behavior referral. One teacher’s view of disrespectful behavior can vary greatly from another teacher’s perspective. Also, behavior management and discipline systems differ from classroom to classroom, so one student may be perceived as positive and pro-social by one teacher, and disruptive and argumentative by another. Cultural competencies of teachers also vary regarding understanding of what may constitute a cultural response as opposed to an intentionally disrespectful response, and this can add to the subjectivity of referral-writing (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008).

Finally, as this was action research based on one school site which might serve to inform policies and practices at that unique location, the results cannot be generalized to the greater population.
Recommendations

Based on the results of this investigation, several recommendations are made to enhance the existing PBIS program and chart a course for future reforms.

1. The school should celebrate and continue its successful Tier 1 universal preventions.
   Results show these strategies are working to support the positive behavior of the majority of students.

2. Maintain the item “PBIS” on the weekly PLC agenda, as results show teachers are actively engaging in collaborative conversations about student behavior and school discipline. Provide suggestions for topics of discussion to encourage deeper reflection. Some topics might include: Identifying Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students and discussing whether problem behavior is culturally-based or not, discussing Tier 3 preventions like functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans with special education professionals, and sharing best practices for effective classroom management.

3. Revise the data-input system for behavior referrals to include student demographic data, and/or merge behavior referral data with the student information system.

4. Create a predictable and coherent discipline referral process. PBIS coaches insist that clear and consistent consequences are critical to the success of PBIS (Sugai, et al., 2000; Sprague & Golly 2014). This discipline policy should contain definitions of major, minor, and crisis incidents and offer a continuum of discipline procedures. It should be developed, taught, and agreed upon by all staff members. A proposed flow chart to begin a conversation on this topic is offered in Appendix C.
5. Since this study has uncovered disproportionality for behavior referrals among some ethnic minorities, the school should continue the evaluation of discipline practices by monitoring and routinely reviewing ODR data. It can also look at equitable discipline practices for gender, and other minority groups including English Learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and students in special education. Once identified, school teams can then look at their school’s cultural competence and practices to begin the work towards reducing exclusionary practices. “Disproportionality may arise as a result of the cultural gap between educators and minority students, lack of training in culturally responsive behavior management practices, personal biases that lead to misinterpretations about behavior, or negative school climate.” (Boneshefski & Runge, 2003, p. 155).

**Future Research**

This research was a case study for one elementary school focused on the implementation of PBIS related to office discipline referrals. In the future, experimentally-designed research across a larger sample in schools implementing and not implementing PBIS could better determine the correlation between PBIS and the incidence of behavior referrals. Additional research might assess the impact of coaching toward increased cultural competence among teachers. Finally, research that focuses on identifying socioeconomically disadvantaged, gender, or English Learner discipline inequities would greatly add to the literature.

**Conclusion**

PBIS has proven to be one effective model for training teachers, guiding leadership, and establishing a positive school culture based on proactive, preventive systems and intervention methods. Successful implementation of PBIS relies on teacher collegiality and collaboration.
Clear communication and protocol for handling student misbehavior is critical between teachers, staff, and administrators. With changing cultural and racial demographics, it is ever more important that schools use a culturally responsive lens when evaluating student behavior.

Sharing this research data will help recognize and celebrate the efforts the school community has made towards building a positive and proactive school environment. Recommendations can be considered for continued ODR data monitoring to improve student behavior and limit office discipline referrals. As schools begin to measure non-academic indicators under the Every Student Succeeds Act, results from this type of research can provide a window into examining school culture related to equitable discipline practices and help determine causes of and solutions to disproportionality.
References


Appendix A

Teacher Survey

I've invited you to fill out a form:

Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS) Survey

Consent to Participate in Research

Diana Brown, a graduate student at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), is conducting a study that seeks to understand in what ways teacher collaboration affects the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and student discipline referrals.

Study Objectives:
This research is geared to answer the research question: In what ways does teacher collaboration in the implementation of PBIS affect behavior referrals at a Title 1 School?

Procedures:
All data collection efforts will be without interruption to regular routines. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 10 minute web-based survey on your feelings about and experiences with PBIS, teacher collaboration, and the behavior referral process.

Risks and Inconveniences.
There are minimal risks to participating in this study. Some time is required to complete the survey, which may be perceived as an inconvenience. Some psychological stress may be associated with reflecting upon challenging students’ behaviors, disagreements and conversations with colleagues, and/or the implementation of school programs and policies. There may be concerns about anonymity of responses and repercussions from participation in the study. Finally, due to the Web-based nature of the survey, there exists a minimal chance that your responses could be intercepted, by individuals not involved with this study, while being transmitted.

Safeguards.
Limited time will be asked of you, only 10 minutes to complete the survey. You will not be contacted for any further information. The survey will be completely anonymous and will be analyzed in aggregate form. No one other than you will know if you have or have not participated in this study. To minimize any risk of confidentiality, all data will be kept private, only to be used for analysis purposes. Data will be kept on a password protected computer only the researcher has access to. There will be no consequences for not taking the survey and you may stop the survey at any time. The school site psychologist is available for consultation should any psychological stress arise as a result of participating in this survey.

Voluntary Participation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. By completing and submitting the survey, you are giving your consent to participate.

Benefits. Although your participation in the research component of this study will yield minimal or no direct benefits to you--save the opportunity to reflect upon disciplinary and collaborative practices--I believe that the study has the potential to greatly inform other teachers and researchers working to create positive school climates through PBIS implementation.
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By taking this survey, you are giving consent for your participation in this study. If you wish not to participate, please stop and close your browser now.

This document has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University San Marcos
Expiration Date: April 7, 2017

What grade do you teach? *

- Kindergarten
- First grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
- Fifth Grade
- Other: ____________________________

How many years have you been teaching? *

- 1-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 8-12 years
- More than 12 years

How knowledgeable are you about the PBIS program at our school site? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not knowledgeable Very knowledgeable

Did you have an opportunity to participate in developing the school-wide behavior expectations? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Describe a time (or times) when you used PBIS strategies in your classroom or on campus: *
As part of your Professional Learning Community (PLC) collaboration time this year, you were asked to discuss at-risk students and document concerns, goals, and strategies on a new form called Grade Level Student Success Team (SST) Meeting Notes. How helpful was this process for supporting your work with children with behavioral challenges? *

1 2 3 4

Not helpful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  Very helpful

What helpful guidance for improving students' behavior have you received from your colleagues during your PLC meetings? Please list. *

How has the addition of the PLC agenda item "PBIS" affected the amount of time you spend discussing student behavior during your weekly PLC meetings? *

☐ Increased  ☐ Decreased  ☐ No change

Do you know what student behavior warrants the issuance of a behavior referral? *

☐ Yes  ☐ No/Not sure

If you answered "No/Not Sure" what would help clarify the process for you?
How many referrals have you issued this past year? *

- 0
- 1-5
- More than 5

Do you feel the implementation of PBIS has had an effect on the number of behavior referrals issued at our school? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

In your opinion, how effective was PBIS in teaching behavior expectations to students? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not helpful  Very helpful

In your opinion, how effective was PBIS in establishing firm, fair, and corrective discipline for students? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not helpful  Very helpful

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Appendix B

Behavior Expectations Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Be Respectful</th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Arrival/Dismissal</th>
<th>Playground Equipment Area</th>
<th>Playground/Blacktop</th>
<th>Lunch Area</th>
<th>Restroom</th>
<th>Assemblies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use kind words and actions.</td>
<td>Use sidewalks and crosswalks safely.</td>
<td>Wait for your turn. Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.</td>
<td>Play fairly and include everyone. Play by school rules. Walk to and from the playground.</td>
<td>Stand in line quietly, facing forward. Hold your lunch card in your hand.</td>
<td>Respect privacy of others.</td>
<td>Enter quickly and quietly. Listen attentively and watch with voices off and hands still. Keep hands and feet to yourself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively listen to others. Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself.</td>
<td>Wait in designated area.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make Good Choices</th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Arrival/Dismissal</th>
<th>Playground Equipment Area</th>
<th>Playground/Blacktop</th>
<th>Lunch Area</th>
<th>Restroom</th>
<th>Assemblies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk on white facing forward. Take proper care of personal belongings and school equipment.</td>
<td>Walk calmly and quietly. Sit on benches only. Arrive on time, leave on time.</td>
<td>Walking zone Use all equipment appropriately. Two hands on the bars at all times. Walk to your line when the bell rings.</td>
<td>Be a good sport. Stay within boundaries. Walk to class as soon as the bell rings.</td>
<td>Make healthy choices. Remain seated until ready to be excused.</td>
<td>Keep water in the sink. Keep feet on the floor. Always flush the toilet. Wash hands with soap and water. Return to classroom promptly.</td>
<td>Sit completely flat so others behind you can see. Clap politely to show appreciation. Participate if asked.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solve Problems</th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Arrival/Dismissal</th>
<th>Playground Equipment Area</th>
<th>Playground/Blacktop</th>
<th>Lunch Area</th>
<th>Restroom</th>
<th>Assemblies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep our school clean. Think win-win to solve problems.</td>
<td>Gather all of your belongings before you leave class. Watch for your ride.</td>
<td>Include everyone. Play fairly. Do not use if wet.</td>
<td>Use playground only when supervised. Return equipment when finished.</td>
<td>Clean up after yourself.</td>
<td>Clean up after yourself. Report any problems to a school adult.</td>
<td>Make room for others to be seated. Be a good example for other students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Culturally Proficient PBIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Music Class</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Hallways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be Respectful</strong></td>
<td>Walk in quietly. Be seated quickly facing forward.</td>
<td>Use a quiet voice. Wait for help. Say thank you.</td>
<td>Walk in quietly. Be seated all the way. Use library voices.</td>
<td>Walk through hallways quietly. Leave all materials in their proper place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make Good Choices</strong></td>
<td>Be ready to listen and learn. Participate with effort and focus. Handle instruments gently.</td>
<td>Return to class promptly when finished.</td>
<td>Use shelf markers. Use your library time to choose the best book for you.</td>
<td>Always walk and stay to the right. Allow others to pass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solve Problems</strong></td>
<td>Wait for a signal to play. Use an office pass.</td>
<td>Use an office pass. Communicate clearly.</td>
<td>Be responsible and care for your books. Return books on time.</td>
<td>Hold the door open for the person behind you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Behavior Flow Chart