Evaluating School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports for Primary Classrooms

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Evaluating School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports for Primary

Classrooms

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The place of inquiry implemented a School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention (SWPBIS) program during the 2018-19 school year to the large number of students receiving exclusionary discipline at the primary level. Even with the supports in place, a large number of students continued to be removed from class. When students are removed from class, it can have a negative impact on student learning.

This mixed methods study was designed to evaluate the current SWPBIS systems in place at the classroom level based on the exemplary models utilized by the Pennsylvania PBS Network, which uses the exemplary models from the Center on Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS).

The research included a survey of 14 participants, three focus groups that included eight teacher participants, and four individual interviews with staff who have direct access to the primary level classrooms. The survey results indicated that a majority of staff members found that classroom systems that are aligned to the SWPBIS system are in place, except for the ratio of positive praise to negative praise given in the classroom and options in the classroom to continue instruction when negative behaviors occur. Teacher responses varied regarding their confidence levels in determining minor versus major infractions. The focus group results indicated that there is not a set way to analyze discipline data at the primary levels and that teachers do not have alternatives to exclusionary discipline in their classrooms. Similar to the survey results, the participants in the individual interviews were not able to determine the difference between a minor

and major discipline infraction and that alternatives to exclusionary discipline are not being used in the classrooms.

The researcher proposed the following recommendations based on the study findings: ongoing professional development in positive praise at the classroom level, professional development in creating positive behavior plans for individual students, including all stakeholders in the review and development of the minor/major discipline infraction flowchart, and coaching support to staff to analyze individual classroom data monthly to identify disproportionalities in the data.

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Preface

I would like to take a moment to thank some people who have supported me in the process of completing my dissertation. I would like to first thank my parents and grandmother who have always been my role models and have always shared with me the importance of curiosity and being a lifelong learner. Secondly, I would like to thank my fellow administrators and staff as they are always willing to help and participate in my research and provide words of encouragement throughout the process. Third, I would like to thank my friend, Tricia Kovall, who was always willing to read my writing and provide me with feedback and input. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Diane L. Kirk. Thank you for all of your insight, guidance, and support throughout my time at Pitt. I am grateful for your mentorship and willingness to always provide support to me in my leadership journey. I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Jane Bovalino and Dr. Keith Trahan, as you both were always willing to offer insight and input throughout the dissertation process. I would also like to thank Dr. Susan Dawkins and her tremendous help and guidance throughout the editing process. Finally, I would like to thank my peers in the 2019 EdD Cohort. It was an honor to collaborate with you, and I appreciate and value the friendships that we have created.

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to examine the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support plan (SWPBIS) at the North River Elementary School. Specifically, this study will focus on the classroom level due to the concerning number of individual discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline for students in the primary grades at North River Elementary. Exclusionary discipline is defined as any type of discipline that removes students from the classroom. Even with an SWPBIS plan in place, students removed from the classroom do not receive the social and emotional supports that are needed to be academically successful. The large number of individual discipline referrals for students at North River Elementary is a concern in their early years of education. Kramer, Caldarella, Christensen, and Shatzer (2010) suggested that if students do not receive appropriate interventions before the age of eight, they are less likely to be able to utilize the interventions. This is an area of concern for all schools in the country, as Kramer et al. (2010) estimated that as many as 20 percent of the student population includes students with emotional and/or behavioral problems, and 84 percent of those students do not currently receive appropriate interventions. Additionally, this research is consistent with the student experience at North River Elementary, as even with an SWPBIS program in place at North River Elementary, the variety of behavioral needs of individual students continues to impede their learning.

Educators must examine the impact that exclusionary discipline practices can have on student learning, specifically at the primary level. Kramer et al. (2010) concluded that children's ability to understand their emotions by age five is a significant factor in academic success at age nine. This information supports Jacobsen et al.'s (2019) analysis from the Fragile Families Study,

which followed a group of urban children from birth to age nine to study the effects of exclusionary discipline practices on children. The authors concluded that 11 percent of children received some type of exclusionary discipline by age nine. The exclusionary discipline practices did not decrease aggressive behaviors, but rather increased student aggression. The interruption of daily routines can cause anger in children, as well as the feeling of being misunderstood and treated unfairly (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

1.1 Problem of Practice

1.1.1 Broader Problem Area

Due to increased violence in school settings and the rise in school shootings, the issue of school safety became a major concern in the late twentieth century. In response, Congress and state bodies enacted new legislation. One example was the Safe Schools Act of 1994, which tied school district funding to compliance with new zero-tolerance policies. As districts began to create zero-tolerance discipline polices to comply with the mandates, exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions began to increase (Ramey, 2015).

Exclusionary practices are detrimental to students because they have a negative impact on students academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally. Gagnon, Gurel, and Barber (2017) examined Florida's exclusionary discipline practices at the elementary, middle, and high school levels using 2010-11 data from the Florida Department of Education and Common Core of Data. The authors found that Florida had the highest student suspension percentage in the United States and that suspension was the most common exclusionary discipline practice, up to 50 times more

than other alternatives. The team recommended that schools complete a comprehensive evaluation of the infractions that warranted suspensions, as there had been an increase in suspensions for minor infractions (Gagnon et al., 2017).

In another study, Anderson and Ritter (2017) reviewed seven years of discipline data from the state of Arkansas and found that elementary school students received more severe consequences than middle or high school students. They concluded that this finding could be due to the subjectivity and different treatment of students at different schools. As a whole, research has shown the need to reduce exclusionary discipline practices at the primary level. Instead, students need to be provided the necessary supports to help understand their emotions in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten to help reduce exclusionary discipline as they progress through school.

1.2 Discipline at North River Elementary

Current discipline methods at North River Elementary are concerning due to their exclusionary nature. The 2018-19 North River Elementary Student-Parent Handbook information regarding student discipline includes only exclusionary discipline information. This information includes detention information (Teacher, Office/In-School, and Saturday Detention) as well as suspension information for In-School Suspension, Out-of-School-Suspension, and Suspension Hearings. Teacher detentions occur during lunch or recess. Office-level detentions can occur before, during, or after the school day. Conversely, School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) information was not included in the handbook. Teachers were also not provided with clear definitions of minor (classroom managed) and major (office referral) infractions to guide their classroom management and reactions to student behaviors. Major

discipline infractions remove students from the classroom as discipline actions that include but are not limited to: detention, in-school suspension, and out-of-school suspension, which causes students to miss instruction time. Exclusionary discipline practices are punitive and reactive, punishing students for mistakes and not providing an opportunity for staff to help students address the cause of misbehavior. This approach has proven to be ineffective because numerous students continue to violate the student code of conduct and receive the same punitive discipline measures throughout the school year. There are no indications that the current discipline measures in place prevent future discipline referrals for the same student. If the current system remains in place, students will continue to receive exclusionary discipline and miss academic instruction because they are removed from class.

Due to the large number of inconsistent classroom discipline methods resulting in discipline referrals in 2018-19, North River Elementary implemented School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWBPIS), which focuses on the school-wide behavioral expectations of R.A.M.S. (Respectful, Accountable, Make a Difference, Success). The SWPBIS program is a proactive and collaborative approach to school-wide discipline and focuses on creating and maintaining an environment for achieving social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviors. Staff members can recognize positive student behavior throughout the school by providing students with a punch on their SWPBIS punch card. Once students earn 10 punches, they are able to earn a prize from the office. Each time a student completes a punch card, their name is also entered into a monthly drawing to win gift cards or a special lunch. The SWPBIS program does not replace each teacher's individual classroom management system but serves as a guide for teachers to follow when creating their own classroom management systems so that students receive the same clear, consistent behavioral expectations inside and outside of the

classroom. The goal of the SWPBIS program is to provide consistent, appropriate behavioral expectations and recognize when students are meeting the expectations in all areas within the school. In the past, teachers utilized various classroom management models that included positive and negative reinforcers. Staff were provided with professional development in order to align their classroom management systems with the SWPBIS program and remove the negative reinforcement from their individual classroom management systems. This professional development was critical in eliminating inconsistencies in staff expectations for students.

At the start of the 2019-20 school year, alternative discipline measures were added to the consequences that were currently in place in an effort to reduce exclusionary discipline practices. In order to address these discipline concerns, different options were considered to meet the diverse needs of students and to decrease referrals. For the 2019-20 school year, guidance counseling, behavior interventions, and supports such as "Think About It" reflective discussions and writing prompts, as well as social stories, were added as alternatives for office referrals. The 2019-20 Student Parent-Handbook was also updated to include SWPBIS Information as well as alternatives to exclusionary discipline. The Handbook outlined the SWPBIS program and also included levels of infractions and a list of disciplinary options for each level (See Appendix G.1, Attachment A: 2019-20 Student Parent Handbook).

The focus for the SWPBIS program for 2019-20 was on individual classroom management aligned to the SWPBIS program. At the start of the school year, the SWPBIS team provided professional development to staff regarding classroom management. However, each staff member had to implement the SWPBIS rules in their own classroom management system. In order to support teachers, the SWPBIS Team also created a discipline flow chart for teachers to utilize to determine if a discipline infraction would result in a minor or major referral, as there was no clear

definition regarding which type of behavior was an office referral (major) as opposed to a teacher-managed discipline (minor) (Appendix G.2, Attachment B: Major/Minor Grid). Along with the flow chart, the SWPBIS Team created a R.A.M.S. SWPBIS Expectations Grid (Appendix G.3, Attachment C: SWPBIS Grid) that was posted throughout the school and in each classroom. At the start of the school year, teachers explained the grid and taught the behavioral expectations with their classrooms for each area of the school.

Additionally, staff received SWPBIS information weekly in the faculty bulletin and reviewed that information with their classes. The SWPBIS team also reviewed discipline data with all staff at the monthly faculty meetings. Throughout the 2019-20 school year, there were still inconsistencies with office referrals (major) versus teacher-managed (minor) referrals. The flowchart indicated that a teacher-managed behavior that was habitual, occurring five to seven times a month, would then be considered an office-managed (major) discipline as interventions at the classroom level were not reducing the behavior. Upon reviewing data, the SWPBIS team found that some teachers were submitting office referrals after one behavior in class and did not provide the student with appropriate interventions at the classroom level.

It is important to note that the North River Elementary received Tier One Distinction from the PAPBS Network for the SWPBIS program for the 2019-20 school year. In order to achieve Tier One Distinction, schools must successfully complete a site visit and evaluation by the PaTTAN and IU consultants. The evaluation includes a building walk-through using the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) and an in-depth assessment of the TFI Tier One content at the building level.

In addition, North River Elementary was recognized as a PAPBS Network Participating Site for the 2020-21 school year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, North River Elementary did

not provide any extra professional development in the area of SWPBIS as the school continued with the same program implementation from the previous school year.

Continuing to implement an effective positive behavior support program at the classroom level will help the North River Area School District meet one of its goals, which is to provide equitable opportunities for all students by providing a high quality, rigorous education. However, a variety of inequities exist with current discipline methods for primary students that make it very difficult for students to achieve this goal (Cooper, 2009). In order to provide students with a rigorous education, educators must begin to think empathically, rather than punitively, and utilize restorative based approached to respond to student misbehavior to inclusively meet the needs of all students (Welsh & Little, 2018).

1.3 Stakeholders

A variety of stakeholders are involved in, interested in, and impacted by the Problem of Practice. Each stakeholder group is affected by the use of exclusionary discipline practices in different ways. Even though the interests and power that each stakeholder possesses are different, they all play an important role in the problem at hand.

1.3.1 Administration and Teaching Staff

The administration at North River Elementary consists of one principal. This administrator oversees all areas in the school and has the ability to update and change the discipline procedures and processes at the elementary building. The principal, along with the School-Wide Positive

Behavior Interventions and Supports Team, created a school-wide positive behavior program for the elementary school. Teachers must implement the school-wide plan in all areas of the school, including in their own classroom management. The principal has the ability to share out the school-wide positive behavior expectations for classroom management, but teachers must implement the plan. The principal analyzes discipline information with the SWPBIS team monthly, and the team shares out information with the staff monthly at faculty meetings.

North River Elementary consists of 19 homeroom teachers, seven special education teachers, three Title 1 teachers, four related arts teachers, and one curriculum coordinator. Teachers submit office discipline referrals through the student information system.

1.3.2 Supplemental Support

The North River Area School District consists of roughly 700 students. There are two school counselors for the North River Area School District, with one responsible for the high school and the other responsible for the elementary. Both counselors share responsibility for the middle school. The number of students each counselor oversees is above the recommended average number of students per counselor. Currently, the school counselor's role is reactive; the school counselor provides counseling to individual students after office discipline referrals have been received. The counselor does not currently have any counseling groups for students.

The current role of the school psychologist regarding student discipline is also reactive, as she completes the testing for students referred for evaluation. However, she possesses information and knowledge that would be more helpful to support students and teachers proactively regarding discipline.

At the start of the 2019-20 school year, the North River School District received a grant with a neighboring school district for a behavior specialist to support the entire school district two to three days per week. The primary role of the behavior specialist is to review referrals that are completed by staff and support staff with interventions and to determine if there is a need to complete Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

A Dean of Students/Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) Coordinator position was added prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year. The position was created with the extra funding that the district received to support students due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3.3 Parents/Guardians

There are no programs in place to include parents/guardians in the North River SWPBIS program. Parents/guardians at North River Elementary have a vested interest in their children's progress and want their children to do well in school academically and behaviorally. However, some parents/guardians have shared their own negative schooling experiences regarding exclusionary discipline. Due to these factors, exclusionary discipline and student behavior have led to difficult conversations with parents. Most of the conversations with parents have turned negative as parents have shared that they do not see the same types of behavior at home, which makes it hard for them to understand why their children may be behaving a certain way at school. The differing viewpoints have caused a disconnect between staff and parents.

Finally, it is important to note that when an elementary student receives an exclusionary discipline at the elementary level, parents must adjust their work schedule or make arrangements to provide supervision for their child while they are at home, contributing to a sense of frustration

between home and school. In the past, parents/guardians at North River Elementary have shared that there is no one to watch their children at home if they are suspended and that they cannot miss work to be at home with them.

1.3.4 Students

Students at North River Elementary are able to receive extra social and emotional support through the School Assistance Program (SAP) program and school-based therapy through the Positive Steps Program with Western PA Psych Care. Students can earn school-wide rewards and recognition for behavior and attendance through the SWPBIS program. As noted earlier, North River Elementary students who have not exceeded the academic proficiency standards set by the state of Pennsylvania and all students in Kindergarten through second grade can receive school-wide Title 1 services.

1.4 Statement of the Problem of Practice

Current discipline methods at North River Elementary School are inconsistent with the SWPBIS program that is in place, as shown by the number of referrals doubling within the past year. Additionally, a high number of student behavior referrals have not changed or reduced. Students continue to exhibit the same behaviors at the same levels each school year.

The more specific problem involves students at the primary level, as they make up a majority of the students who are exhibiting these behaviors. It is essential that students receive

behavioral interventions before the age of nine so they are able to successfully utilize the interventions (Kramer et al., 2010).

1.5 Operational Definitions

1. Exclusionary Discipline: any type of discipline that removes students from the classroom due to their behavior.

2. School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS): a three-tiered system that provides supports to all students in the first tier and uses the secondary and tertiary levels to provide extra support to identified students.

3. In-School Suspension: a type of discipline in which a student is removed from the classroom and is supervised by a certified teacher.

4. Out-of-School Suspension: a type of discipline in which a student is removed from the classroom and is unable to attend school or be on school property.

5. Minor Discipline Infraction: an infraction managed at the classroom level by the teacher.

6. Major Discipline Infraction: an infraction managed at the office level by the principal or dean of students.

7. R.A.M.S. Rules: acronym used for the North River Elementary SWPBIS for behavioral expectations (R - Respect, A - Accountable, M - Make a Difference, S - Success)

8. PAPBS Network: provides training and technical assistance to Pennsylvania school districts in the areas of academics and social and emotional well-being (Runge et al., 2016)

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Exclusionary Discipline

As teachers and administrators consider the implications of exclusionary discipline, disruptive students continue to be removed from the classroom in order to address their misbehavior (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Each year, over 2.6 million children receive out-of-school suspensions, and more than 40 percent of the students are suspended multiple times each year (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Out-of-School (OSS) suspension has become a common practice for minor infractions, such as truancy and minor misbehavior. For example, in 2015-2016, six out of 10 suspensions in Connecticut were for attendance and non-violent referrals (Jacobsen et al., 2019). When students receive any type of exclusionary discipline, it causes disruption in their learning process, and it can have a negative impact on academic performance. Exclusionary discipline has been associated with lower student achievement, increased dropout rates, and involvement with juvenile services (Gagnon et al., 2017). Anderson and Ritter (2017) suggested that to reduce suspensions, policymakers should adopt mandates that create alternatives to exclusionary discipline as a way to address these issues and keep students engaged in the classroom. When students are removed from class for misbehavior, they miss important academic instruction. In an effort to address these concerns, districts have shifted from utilizing exclusionary discipline practices to utilizing positive, proactive approaches for classroom management to provide consistent behavioral expectations to support student need (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013).

2.1.1 Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline

There is a need for alternatives to exclusionary discipline due to the increase in suspensions over the past 40 years, as well as the findings that zero tolerance policies have not decreased negative behaviors (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). Alternatives to exclusionary discipline include positive behavior supports such as School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and social and emotional learning programs.

One alternative to exclusionary discipline is the addition of positive behavior supports in the school setting. "Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a universal prevention strategy that aims to alter the school environment by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive behaviors in staff behaviors, which subsequently alters student behaviors" (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010, p. 134). Bradshaw et al. (2010) utilized the School-Wide Evaluation Tool, Effective Behavior Supports Survey, and Office Discipline Referral Data to determine the effectiveness of SWPBIS implementation for 37 schools from five school districts in Maryland over a five-year period. The authors found a significant reduction in office discipline referrals, as well as fewer major office discipline referrals per 100 students per school day compared to national data. They also noted a significant reduction in suspension rates in the schools that implemented the SWPBIS program (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Along the same lines, Netzel and Eber's (2007) study of a pilot program for positive behavior supports at an elementary school found a 22 percent reduction in the overall suspension rate. Some of the alternative measures included administrative warnings, parent conferences, communication logs, recess variations of recess, and individual student behavior contracts. The alternatives to suspension provided an opportunity for administrators and teachers to communicate openly with families, thereby creating problem-solving opportunities. Administrators also shared in the study

that throughout the process they became more comfortable with selecting disciplinary alternatives to exclusionary discipline in order to support individual student needs (Netzel & Eber, 2007).

Another effective alternative to exclusionary discipline is the implementation of a social and emotional learning program. Kramer and Caldarella (2010) analyzed the effectiveness of the Strong Start social and emotional learning program at the kindergarten level. Four kindergarten classes comprised of 67 students completed the Strong Start Curriculum once a week over a 10-week period. The teachers used direct instruction to provide weekly lessons to cover topics that included feelings, anger, anxiety, problem solving, and friendship. Prior to the start of the program and again at the end of the program, teachers and parents completed behavior rating scales. The survey responses showed a significant increase in meaningful prosocial behaviors, although the improvement of internalizing behaviors was not consistent. The authors concluded that early intervention for social and emotional problems is imperative as they can become less manageable for students after the age of eight (Kramer & Caldarella, 2010).

Even though the research shows positive effects of alternatives to exclusionary discipline, educators must evaluate alternative disciplinary programs to determine which is most feasible to implement in their school district. The SWPBIS program identifies three tiers to support a variety of student needs and to address behavior by teaching appropriate behavior in all areas of the building and by recognizing positive behavior. Social and emotional support programs can be stand-alone programs, but if a school has a SWPBIS program in place, it can be aligned with the appropriate tier of the SWPBIS program.

2.2 Effective Components of SWPBIS State Models for School Districts

Horner et al.'s (2014) study examined the SWPBIS programs in seven states (Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, and Oregon) that achieved success in order to determine which elements of the programs were most significant to their success. School districts who participate in SWPBIS in each of the seven states completed the State Implementation and Scaling Survey (SISS), which included questions regarding states of implementation (Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, Full Implementation, Innovation, and Sustainability) and the core elements of SWBPIS (Leadership Team, Funding, Visibility, Policy, Political Support, Training, Coaching, Evaluation, Behavioral Expertise, and Local Demonstrations). The researchers found that there was not a common schedule or timeline for the adoption process, as the timeline for the stages varied for each state. The stages of implementation were not linear, but rather cyclical due to the individual needs at each school/district. All of the states began the coordination of the SWPBIS programs with strong advocates at the state level. However, once states were able to provide local training and coaching, the cost of implementing SWPBIS became more feasible for schools, and more districts were able to access the training. Each state had a history of providing educational training to school districts, and each state sought out the necessary SWPBIS programs and training to provide local trainers with the appropriate skills for successful implementation. All seven states also used and analyzed data throughout the implementation stages.

In summary, all seven states had strong advocates for the SWPBIS implementation and provided ongoing training and professional development throughout the implementation process by utilizing local trainings with coaching capacity.

2.2.1 Maryland Model

Maryland created a statewide SWPBIS preventive model called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) for all 24 school districts in the state (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011). The goal of the model was to improve student behavior and school climate by focusing on four stages of implementation (preparation, initiation, implementation, and maintenance).

Similar to Horner et al. (2014), Maryland recognizes the implementation process is not linear, meaning schools may need to move back to a certain stage to modify and adjust the implementation based on the data they gather throughout the process. The Maryland PBIS model is implemented through the student supports programs, and most districts utilize their school psychologists and guidance counselors as coaches. Professional development is a focus throughout the program, exemplified by the two-day summer PBIS training and one-to-two regional booster trainings offered to all of the 24 school districts each year. The trainings are for the PBIS core team members and school districts require the identification of a building coach at each school. All staff members receive extensive training and multiple professional development opportunities during the implementation phase in order to promote sustainability.

Initially, Maryland received both state and national funding (National PBIS Technical Assistance Center). The National PBIS Technical Assistance Center even provided a full-time staff member to help coordinate the implementation of the Maryland PBIS program. After a few years of implementation, it was determined that this funding and support from was no longer sustainable. In order for districts to maintain their PBIS programs, each district is now required to have a district-level PBIS coordinator. The district leaders participate on the state-level team and work together to create local and state training events. Maryland does not utilize the resources that are provided from the National PBIS Technical Assistance Center but uses their own evaluation

system, which was developed by the Sheppard Pratt Health System and Johns Hopkins University. Bradshaw and Pas (2011) examined the PBIS implementation practices at the elementary level. The research results indicate that the Maryland PBIS model was effective as over half of the schools in the state were trained in PBIS. Maryland schools were able to identify if they would like to be trained in PBIS. The research also found that PBIS programs require multiple years of implementation and professional development to achieve their improvement goals (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011).

2.2.2 Pennsylvania Model

In the 2006-07 school year, the state Department of Education in Pennsylvania began to focus on the fidelity of SWPBIS implementation in the state. The driving focus of SWPBIS implementation was the State Performance Plan, as five out of the 20 indicators in the plan were associated with improving academic, discipline, and school completion rates and inclusive practices for students with disabilities and students from diverse populations. At that time, most Pennsylvania schools were already implementing the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) academic models in their schools. The structure of the SWPBIS program was very similar, but the focus would be on behavior as opposed to academics (Runge et al., 2016).

In order to support the SWPBIS implementation in Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network (PAPBS) was formed:

The mission of the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network (PAPBS Network), through training and technical assistance, is to support schools and their family and community partners to create and sustain comprehensive, school-based behavioral health

support systems in order to promote the academic, social and emotional well-being of all

Pennsylvania's students. (Runge et al. 2016, p. 10)

Technical and training assistance for PAPBS is provide by the Pennsylvania Training and

Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and Intermediate Units. Each year, the PAPBS holds an

annual PAPBS Implementers' Forum to provide professional development to school districts with

ongoing professional development opportunities (Runge et al. 2016).

The PAPBS also adopted instruments from the Center of Positive and Behavioral

Interventions and Supports to measure fidelity. The instruments include the Implementation

Checklist (TIC), which is used in the action planning stage prior to implementation; Benchmarks

of Quality (BoQ), which is used annually to assess implementation fidelity; Schoolwide Evaluation

Tool (SET), a tool that is used to assess the fidelity implementation; and Tiered Fidelity Inventory

(TFI), another tool which is used to assess implementation at each tier (Runge et al. 2016).

2.3 SWPBIS at the Classroom Level

Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) indicated that poor perceptions of school climate are

connected to attendance concerns, student disengagement, misbehavior, and exclusionary

discipline, while, on the other hand, effective classroom management promotes positive academic

performance, a decrease in discipline referrals, and positive perceptions of school. Their study was

conducted in Maryland, with 1,902 fifth grade students completing a school climate survey. The

survey topics included fairness, order, discipline, and student and teacher relations, as well as

academic motivation. The authors found that exclusionary discipline had a negative impact on

student/teacher relationships in class. Teachers who used exclusionary discipline received low

ratings in fairness, order, and discipline (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Koth et al. (2008) also researched school climate and similarly discovered that classroom factors, such as sizes and number of students in a room with behavior concerns, hold significant influence. Their study indicated that classroom-level factors, as opposed to school-level factors, had influenced student perceptions of school climate (Koth et al., 2008).

Sherrod, Getch, and Ziomek-Daigle (2009) found that the use of positive behavior supports decreased the number of discipline referrals by 26 percent. However, even with the implementation of SWPBIS programs, teachers continued to struggle with managing student behavior in the classroom (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). Reinke et al. (2013) found that teachers who provide students with high levels of praise in class, measured as four positive interactions to one negative interaction, experience fewer disruptive classroom behaviors. Thirty-three elementary teachers participated in the study from three elementary schools in a large urban school district. Each school that participated in the study had implemented SWPBIS with high fidelity. Positive praise, or the lack thereof, is a critical part of student perceptions of classroom climate as the results showed that only one of the 33 teachers observed had a positive to negative praise ratio (Reinke et al., 2019).

Additionally, proactive classroom management and positive student/teacher relationships play a major role in reducing office discipline referrals. Classroom management is one area that is supported with the SWPBIS program, but research has also shown that even in schools that have implemented their SWPBIS program with high fidelity, there is still a need for teachers to provide positive reinforcement for student behaviors (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011). Even if a school exemplifies fidelity at the school-wide level, negative student behaviors will continue if classroom

management systems are not fully aligned with the school-wide SWPBIS system in place (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011).

2.4 Measuring Program Fidelity

Kim, McIntosh, Mercer, and Nese (2018) suggested that positive SWPBIS outcomes cannot simply come from program adoption and training, but schools must also implement the SWPBIS program with fidelity. Two instruments that have been developed to assess program fidelity are the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and School-Wide Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ). Kim et al. (2018) studied the fidelity of the implementation of SWPBIS programs of 477 schools across 10 states and found that growth rates of out-of-school suspension and office discipline referrals were not predicted by fidelity due to the level of integration of the SPWBIS program in classroom practices and systems. Kim et al. (2018) argued, "Although stronger fidelity of school-wide implementation is often associated with stronger based classroom implementation (Pas et al., 2015), schools meeting or exceeding the fidelity criteria for SWPBIS implementation may not have adequate implementation of positive behavior support systems in classrooms" (p. 366). Due to this factor, schools must review the implementation of the SWPBIS program at the classroom level to assess whether classroom practices are fully connected to the school-wide systems (Kim et al. 2018).

Mathews, McIntosh, Frank, and May's (2014) utilized the PBIS Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) to analyze the implementation of the PBIS systems (school-wide, non-classroom, classroom, and individual), Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), and Office Discipline Referral Data (ODR) from 261 schools across the United States that demonstrated PBIS fidelity for three

consecutive years. The results of the study concluded that the only significant predictor of office referrals was classroom systems, supporting the theory that the classroom management decisions that are made by individual teachers is significant to the sustainability of the PBIS program (Matthews et al., 2014). The study also found that there were "strong statistically significant intercorrelations between all Classroom Systems features." The authors concluded that the Classroom Systems subscale was a strong predictor of the PBIS implementation and student outcomes and that individual classroom teachers play a significant role in sustaining positive outcomes of PBIS. Even though PBIS is a school-wide approach, the extent to which individual teachers implement the PBIS structure in the individual classroom management systems plays a major role in the overall success of the program. Pinkelman et al. (2015) suggested that professional development is one important factor for sustainability in the SWPBIS programs. Additionally, Mathews et al. (2014) found that a common approach to implementing SWPBIS in schools is to "define, teach, and acknowledge school-wide expectations in school-wide and non-classroom settings" (p. 175). Classroom teachers must then modify and adjust their own systems to include the SWPBIS information. The reason for this approach is that teachers will be more inclined to "buy in" and implement the practices in their own classroom if they see success in certain areas outside of the classroom. By doing this, schools run the risk of having classroom management systems that are not aligned to the SWPBIS program. In order to address this concern, schools must provide professional development that is focused on improving teacher understanding of why the key principles of the SWPBIS program need to be implemented within individual classroom management systems.

The literature for this study provides rationale for the need for alternatives to exclusionary discipline practice at the primary level. Research has shown that the implementation of SWPBIS

systems within schools has reduced the number of office referrals. The literature also highlights the important role that individual classroom management systems play within the SWPBIS systems to provide the alternative supports to reduce exclusionary discipline and allow students to remain in their classroom. Effective SWPBIS models include individual classroom management systems that are aligned to the school-wide system that is in place. Schools who have implemented SWPBIS programs also continue to analyze discipline data and survey staff using PBIS assessment surveys to measure program fidelity to modify and adjust SWPBIS programs based on survey data.

3.0 Methods and Measures

The purpose of this study was to complete a program evaluation in order to gain feedback and perspectives from stakeholders in an elementary classroom implementation of SWPBIS and how the implementation is related to exclusionary discipline practices. This study utilized mixed methods to collect and analyze data. Quantitative data included demographic information, current and historical discipline data, and pre-existing SWPBIS data. Qualitative data included individual interviews of teachers and paraprofessional staff as well as grade-level teacher focus groups.

3.1 Demographic Data

North River Area School District is unique in that it is a small K-12 complex located in Western Pennsylvania, with approximately 700 students. The North River Area School District is considered an underperforming district as each building has not met or exceeded the academic proficiency standards set by the state. Furthermore, 62.6 percent of students at North River are economically disadvantaged, and 27.7 percent of students at North River receive special education services. Due to the large number of students who are economically disadvantaged, the district qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision program (CEP), which offers free breakfast, lunch, and dinner to all district students. Demographically, the three largest student populations at North River are white at 63.9 percent, Black at 21.4 percent, and multiracial at 7.9 percent. Transiency is also a concern for the district as approximately 20 percent of the students each year are transient (Rochester Area SD). The North River School District is also a schoolwide Title I

school for students in grades kindergarten through second grade. All students in these grades qualify for extra academic support that is provided by four Title I staff members. The district also receives Title II funding for supporting effective instruction and Title IV funding for student support and academic enrichment. According to the United State Census Bureau, the North River School District median household income is $30,120, with 29.8 percent of persons in poverty. Thus, a large number of families who are experiencing poverty have students who attend the North River School District (Bureau, 2019).

3.2 North River Discipline Data

North River Elementary experienced a significant increase in discipline referrals for the 2018-19 school year. Approximately 325 students were enrolled at North River Elementary in kindergarten through fifth grade. In the 2018-19 school year, 407 office discipline referrals for 105 students were reported, an increase of over 100 referrals from the 2017-18 school year. Out of the 105 students, 25 students were identified as repeat offenders with five or more referrals. Sixty percent of the students who received discipline referrals were students in the primary grades. Although there was a large number of discipline referrals in fifth grade, this study is not addressing the fifth-grade referrals since the number of referrals at that level decreased in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. The reduction of discipline referrals could be attributed to the change in staffing. Therefore, the data will not be utilized in this study. A breakdown of the discipline referrals by grade level/program is listed below in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Discipline Referrals by Grade Level/Program 2018-19 School Year

Grade	Referrals	Percentage of All Referrals
Kindergarten	77	19%
1st Grade	75	18%
2nd Grade	52	13%
3rd Grade	37	9%
4th Grade	20	5%
5th Grade	94	23%
Emotional Support Program	52	13%

Table 2. Repeat Offender Information (5 or More Office Referrals) 2018-19

Grade	Number of Students	Classroom Breakdown (3 Homerooms)	Percentage of All Referrals
Kindergarten	5	3-1-1	20%
1st Grade	5	2-0-3	20%
2nd Grade	5	4-0-1	20%
3rd Grade	2	2-0-0	10%
4th Grade	0	0-0-0	0%
5th Grade	6	Departmentalized	30%
Emotional Support Program	2	1 Classroom	10%

Table 3. Repeat Offender Information (5 or More Office Referrals) Demographic Information 2018-19

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White	58%
Black	29%
Multiracial	15%

Category	Percentage
Special Education	52%
Economically Disadvantaged	58%

The data indicates that discipline referrals were also disproportionate by race and gender. Male students and Black students are overrepresented in the number of discipline referrals. Male students make up 87.7 percent of the referrals and only make up 58 percent of the student population. Black students are overrepresented in disciplinary action, as 21.4 percent of the student population is Black and makes up 31 percent of all the discipline referrals.

Table 4. Discipline Data by Gender 2018-19 School Year

Gender	Percentage of Students	Referrals	Percentage of All Referrals
Male	58%	357	87.7%
Female	42%	50	12.3%

Table 5. Discipline Data by Race 2018-19 School Year

Race	Percentage of Students	Referrals	Percentage of All Referrals
White	72%	225	55.3%
Black	16%	126	31%
Multi-Racial	12%	56	13.8%

Due to the state-mandated school closure in March 2020 for COVID-19, there was not enough data to compare a full school year (180 days). Instead of full-year data, monthly office referral data from September through February was analyzed from the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. The information is listed in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. North River Elementary Office Referral Information

Office Referrals by Month	2018-19 School Year	2019-20 School Year
September	29	35
October	34	42
November	42	30
December	43	15
January	32	31
February	72	49
	252 Total Referrals	202 Total Referrals

Table 7. North River Elementary Suspension Information

Suspension Information	2018-19 School Year	2019-20 School Year
In-School Suspension	6	1
Out-of-School Suspension	11	0

The data shows that the implementation of disciplinary alternatives for office referrals reduced the number of suspensions, while office referrals were only reduced by 20 percent. Even though the number of suspensions was reduced, students were still removed from class and excluded from

instruction when teachers referred them to the office. The SWPBIS team determined that the large number of office referrals could be due to staff inconsistencies in submitting those referrals.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the North River SWPBIS Team did not provide any staff professional development in differentiating between office and classroom discipline referrals. Instead, all of the in-service training time was designated to prepare staff for the different types of educational programming options for the 2020-21 school year.

It is important to note that during the 2020-21 school year, students were able to choose between the traditional education program with social distancing measures in place, or the North River Cyber Academy program at home. Seventy-seven percent of the students participated in the traditional programming. However, all students at North River Elementary participated in virtual learning from November 17, 2020 to January 18, 2021. Due to the variations of programming and virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020-21 discipline data cannot be analyzed and compared to previous school years. Therefore, data will be restricted to the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years.

3.3 Pre-Existing Data

At the first in-service training at the start of the 2021-22 school year, the North River Elementary SWPBIS Team utilized an annual staff assessment to collect implementation data on four areas of the SWPBIS program (School-Wide Systems, Non-Classroom Setting Systems, Classroom Systems, and Individual Student Systems) and to identify perceived areas of strength and areas of growth.

The survey results indicated that the greatest need is in the area of Classroom Setting Systems. The results highlight the inconsistencies that are in place with the current system. Even though staff has a discipline flowchart to help determine whether a discipline is a minor or major infraction, teachers continue to have difficulty distinguishing between office and classroom managed discipline behaviors. Of the 41 of 47 staff members who responded to the survey, only 50 percent answered that clear definitions of office managed and classroom managed discipline are fully in place. Furthermore, only 25 percent of staff reported that problem behaviors in individual classrooms receive consistent consequences. This is an area of concern, as individual classroom management procedures must be consistent with the SWPBIS program. Analyzing discipline data is also an area of concern as 55 percent of staff responded that there is a need to continue to analyze discipline data at all levels. Finally, the survey results also indicated that 55 percent of staff would like to have regular opportunities to access professional development and assistance for classroom management.

3.4 Survey Information

Due to the needs in the areas of classroom management that the staff identified in the pre-existing survey data, the researcher created a survey based on exemplary models utilized by the Pennsylvania PBS Network, which uses the exemplary models from the Center on Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). The survey included classroom management questions from the following surveys:

- Self-Assessment Survey (SAS), which is used to gain information on staff perceptions of the SWPBIS program implementation and areas of improvement for all systems.

- School Safety Survey (SSS), which is used to assess school safety and violence prevention measures in the school.

- Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), which is used to determine the level to which school staff applies the core features of SWPBIS in their school.

- Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), which is specific to Tier 1 implementation and is used annually to assess areas of strength and growth.

The survey (Appendix A) also included teacher demographic data on teaching experience, certification, and SWPBIS training level. Additionally, the survey included open-ended questions to address the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to classroom management and exclusionary discipline.

The survey participants replied to each question on the survey with one of the following options: "In Place," "Partially In Place," and "Not In Place." The survey also included an open-ended question to address the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to classroom management and exclusionary discipline.

Staff were given time during the school day to complete the survey. The survey was distributed via Google Forms to all teachers and staff members who work with students in kindergarten through second grade, as those grade levels have the highest percentage of discipline referrals. Google Forms was selected for the survey since the North River School District has used the Google Platform for the past four years. All staff members have completed a number of Google Forms in previous years and are able to access the forms through their district email accounts. The researcher emailed kindergarten through second grade staff an introductory email explaining the study and inviting staff to participate in the survey through a link to complete the Google Form (Appendix B).

3.4.1 Staff Survey Analysis

The survey generated quantitative data to analyze components that are in place, partially in place, or not in place at the classroom level. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. In addition, the data was used to adjust and revise grade-level focus group and staff interview information.

3.5 Grade-Level Focus Groups

Three focus groups were used to gain a better understanding of teacher perspectives of the implementation of the SWPBIS program at the classroom level for the kindergarten, first grade, and second grade levels. For the prior three years, grade-level teams at North River Elementary met monthly. The consistent meeting times built a culture of trust, and the researcher determined that this setting would generate authentic, genuine conversations on the topic of classroom management. The focus groups were held over a three-month period, with one meeting per grade level each month. The questions (Appendix C) were provided to the teachers prior to each month's meeting.

The researcher invited the staff to participate via email (Appendix D). Each grade-level team meeting was held via Zoom and recorded and transcribed to provide a written document of each session. Each focus group received in advance the questions that would be asked during the sessions. The focus group questions centered on classroom management systems, exclusionary discipline, and data.

3.5.1 Focus Group Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the focus group meetings was coded utilizing Erlingsson and Brysiewicz's (2017) hands-on guide to content analysis. The first step of the content analysis was to identify meaning units and condense the meaning units. After the meaning units were condensed, the researcher coded the condensed meaning units. The final step of the content analysis was to form categories and themes among the three focus groups.

3.6 Individual Staff Interviews

The researcher completed four individual interviews for other staff members who were not classroom teachers and who have the most direct access to kindergarten through second-grade classrooms. The researcher used the same questions from the focus groups for the individual staff interviews. The participants included a learning support teacher, a kindergarten paraprofessional, a special education paraprofessional, and a behavior specialist. The staff members received a copy of the questions prior to the interview (Appendix E). The researcher invited staff to participate via email (Appendix F). The meetings were held via Zoom and recorded and transcribed to provide a written document for each interview.

3.6.1 Staff Interview Analysis

The qualitative data from the individual interviews was coded utilizing Erlingsson and Brysiewicz's (2017) hands-on guide to content analysis. The staff interview data was analyzed to

compare and contrast perspectives shared by each focus group and determine if they are aligned with the grade-level focus groups and administration.

4.0 Results

The purpose of this study was to complete a program evaluation of an elementary classroom implementation of SWPBIS and a) to gain feedback and perspectives from teachers and staff and b) to understand how the implementation relates to exclusionary discipline practices.

4.1 Surveys

The survey was completed by 14 out of 17 teachers who were invited to participate, yielding a response rate of 82 percent. All 14 teachers completed the entire survey. The demographic information provided by the teachers included teaching experience, certification, and SWPBIS training level information. The tables below include a breakdown of the demographic information.

Table 8. Teaching Experience

Number of Years	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1-3	0	0%
4-6	3	21%
7-10	2	14%
11-15	3	21%
16-20	0	0%
20-25	2	14%
26 or more years	4	30%

Table 9. Certification Information

Certification	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Early Childhood Education	6	21%
Elementary Education	8	28%
Special Education	8	28%
Reading Specialist	4	14%
Health and Physical Education	1	3%

Art Education	1	3%
Educational Leadership	1	3%

Number of Certifications	Number of Teachers	Percentage
One Certificate	3	21%
Two Certificates	7	50%
Three Certificates	4	29%

Table 10 SWPBIS Training Level Information

SWPBIS Trained	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Yes	13	93%
No	1	7%

Teachers who participated in the survey had at least four years of teaching experience and have a variety of teaching certifications; 79 percent of the teachers who participated in the study have at least two certifications. Finally, 93 percent of the teachers who participated in the study have received professional development in the area of SWPBIS.

4.1.1 Survey Responses

The survey was based on exemplary models utilized by the Pennsylvania PBS Network, which uses the exemplary models from the Center on Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Results of the survey categories are listed below.

4.1.1.1 Classroom Systems

The first survey item was "Classroom routines and procedures are explicitly identified for activities where problems often occur (e.g., entering class, asking questions, sharpening pencil, using restroom, dismissal)." One hundred percent, or all 14 respondents, stated that classroom routines and procedures are in place.
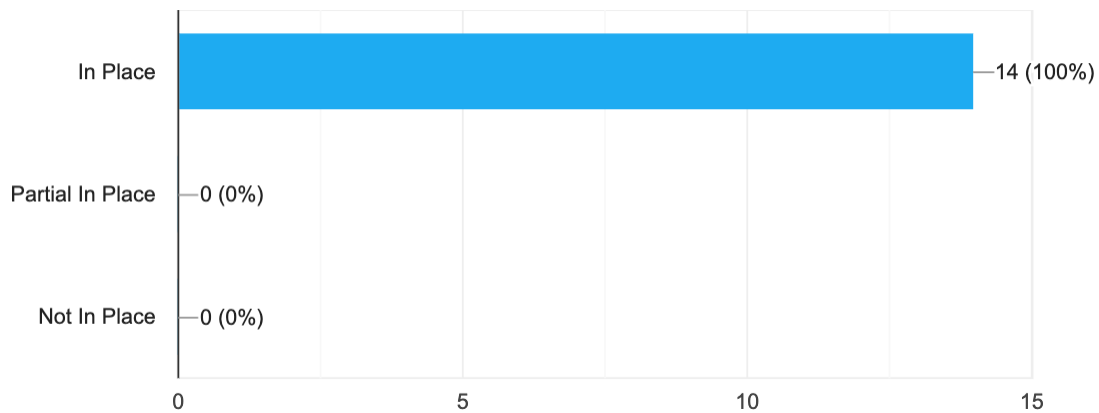
Figure 1. Routines and Procedures

One hundred percent (n=14) of respondents noted for the second statement that classroom rules are defined for each of the school-wide expectations and are posted in classrooms and in place. This could be due to the fact that at the start of the school year, each classroom received the SWPBIS R.A.M.S. Rules poster, a classroom expectations chart, and voice level signs by the SWPBIS team.
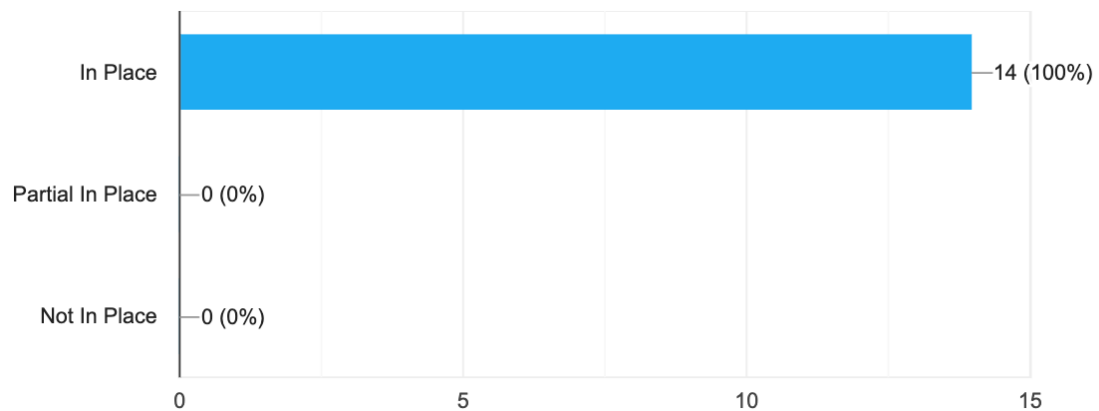
Figure 2. Classroom Rules

The third item asked participants if expected academic and social behaviors are taught directly to all students in classrooms. Thirteen out of the 14 respondents stated that the teaching

of expected behaviors was in place, and one respondent stated that the teaching of expected behaviors was partially in place. It is important to note that the SWPBIS team does include a reminder in the weekly bulletin of what expectation should be taught each week.
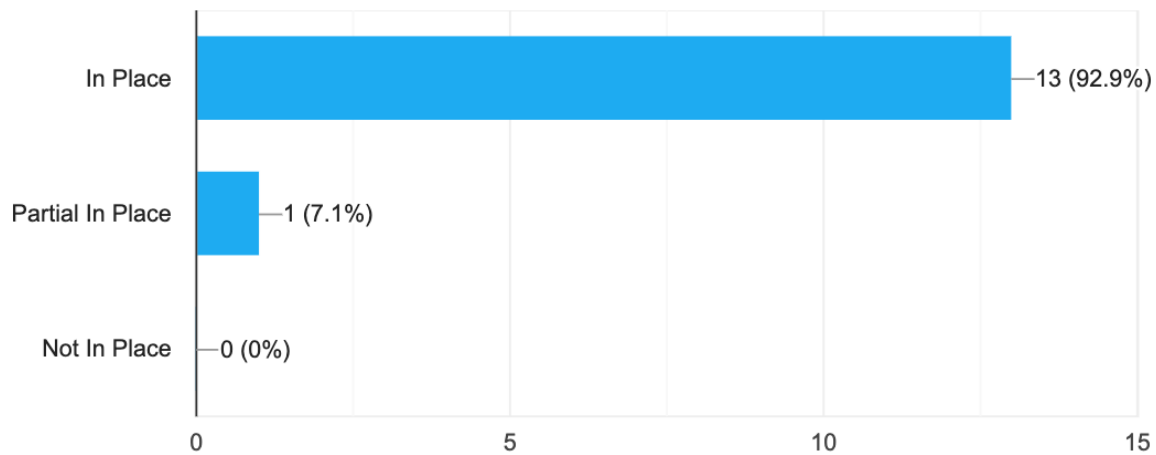
Figure 3. Behavioral Expectations

One hundred percent, or 14 out of 14 classroom teachers, stated that the use of immediate and specific praise was in place in their classrooms. During administrative walk-throughs, verbal praise was observed in all of the primary classrooms to the whole class and individual students.
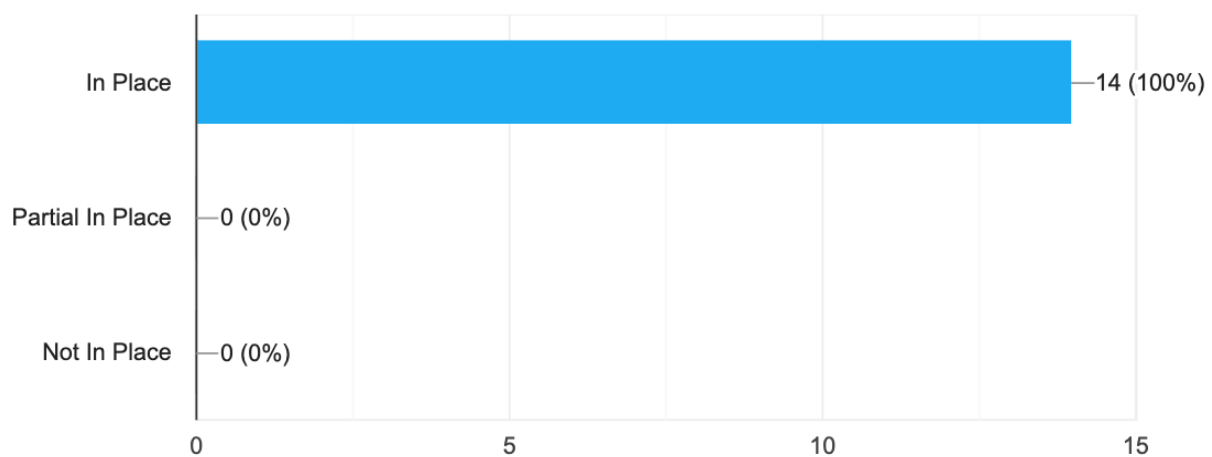
Figure 4. Use of Praise

The next statement inquired about the amount of positive and negative feedback that was provided to students in classrooms. Eleven respondents stated that the acknowledgment of students demonstrating adherence to classroom rules and routines occurs more frequently than acknowledgment of inappropriate behaviors is in place in within their classroom, and four of the respondents stated that it was partially in place within their classroom.
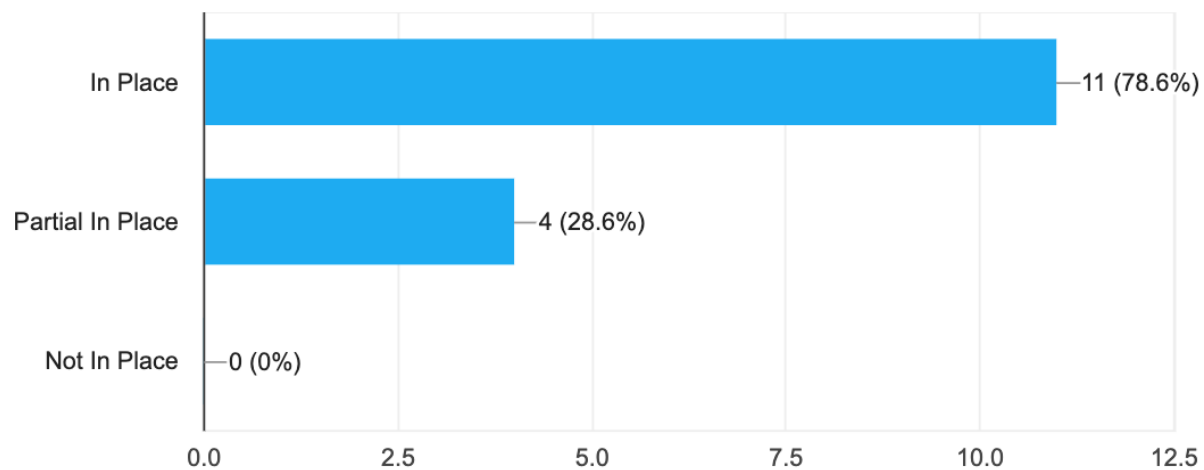
Figure 5. Positive and Negative Feedback

One hundred percent, or 14 out of 14 respondents, stated that school-wide expectations, routines, acknowledgements, and in-class continuum of consequences are implemented in classrooms and consistent with school-wide systems are in place.
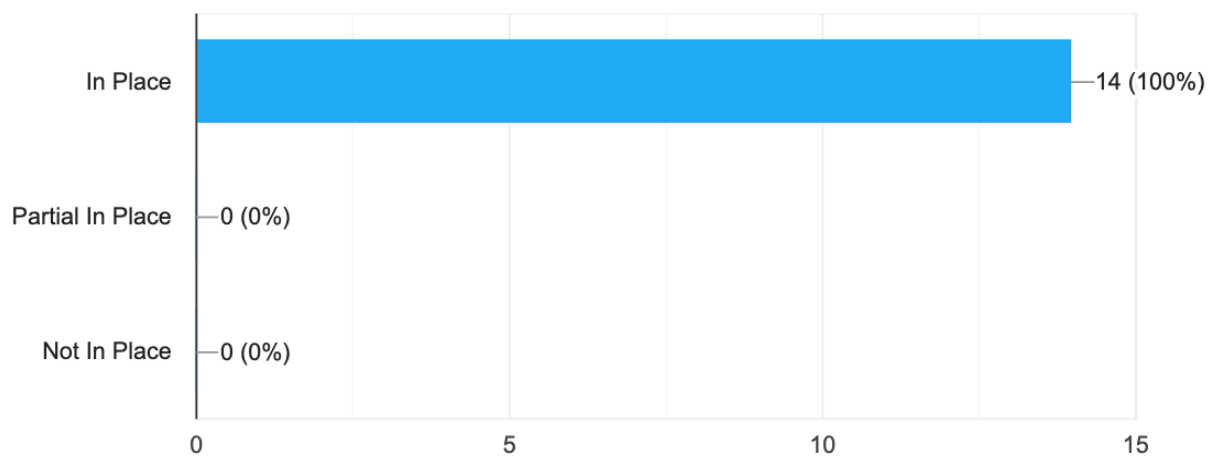
Figure 6. Expectations and Consequences

Eleven respondents stated that classroom-based options exist to allow classroom instruction to continue when problem behavior occur within their classroom, and four of the respondents stated that it is partially in place.
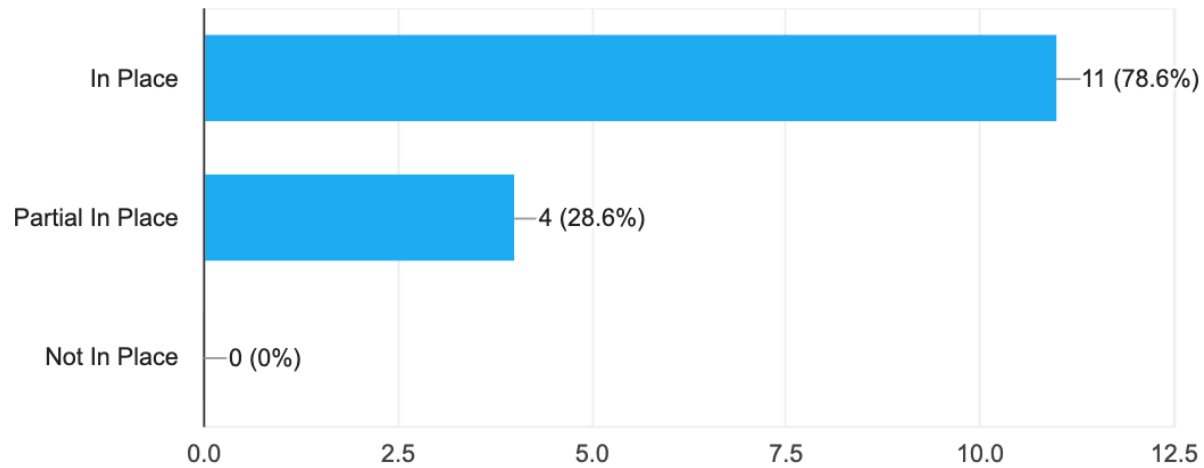
Figure 7. Classroom-Based Options

Finally, the last set of questions listed below were added to gain more information regarding classroom management systems and exclusionary discipline practices. For the first two questions, teachers were to select from the following responses: "Not at all," "Minimally," "Moderately," Extensively," and "Don't Know." Teachers were to select from the following responses for the last three questions: "Not Confident," "Somewhat Not Confident," "Neutral," "Somewhat Confident," and "Confident."

When respondents were asked to what extent do student suspensions and/or expulsions exist in their school, 14.3 percent, or two respondents, stated not at all; 71.4 percent, or 10 respondents, stated minimally; and 21.4 percent, or three respondents, stated don't know.
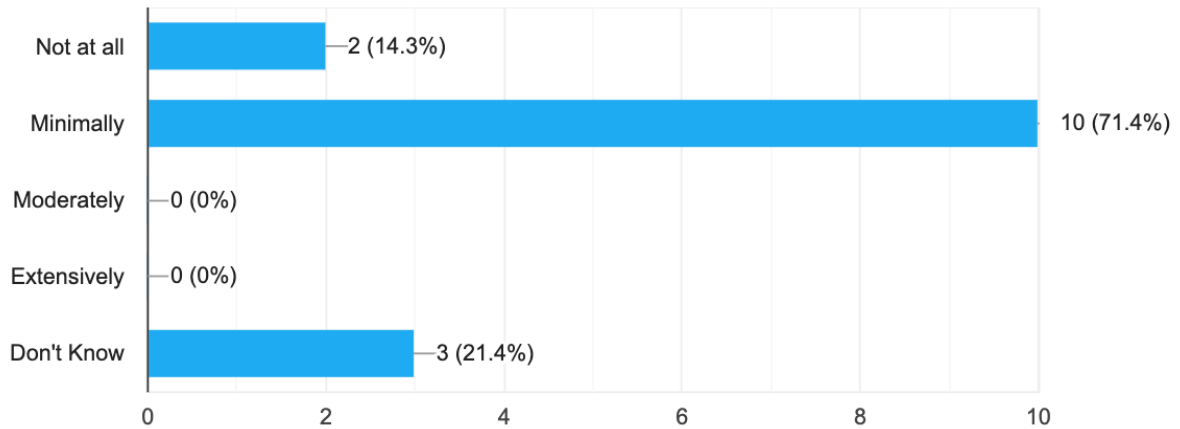
Figure 8. Exclusionary Discipline at the Participant's School

When respondents asked to what extent do response to conflict and problem solving exist within their classrooms, one respondent (7.1%) stated not at all, three respondents (21.4%) stated minimally, three respondents (21.4%) stated moderately, six respondents (42.9%) stated extensively, and one (7.1%) respondent stated don't know.
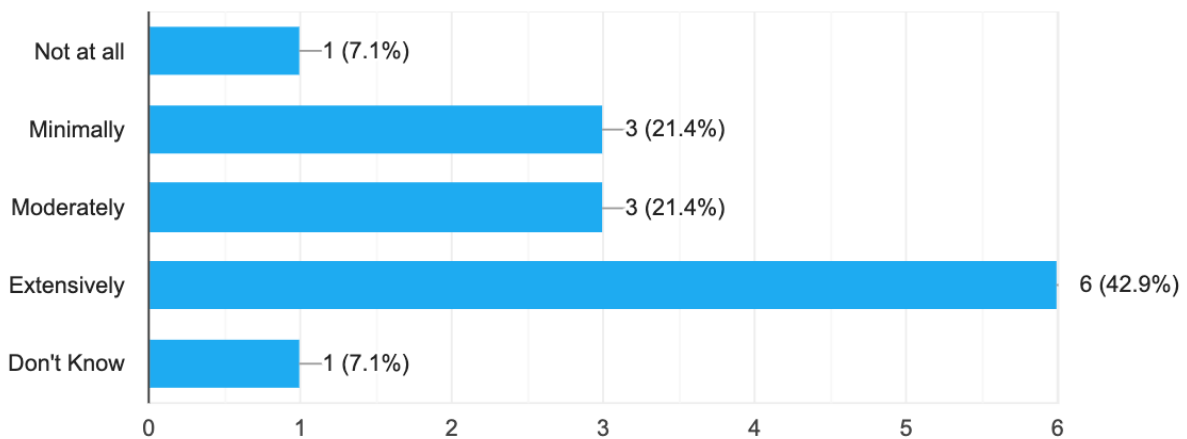
Figure 9. Survey Questions Regarding Conflict and Problem Solving

The next question asked how confident respondents were in determining whether a discipline is a minor or major infraction, and 7.1 percent, or one respondent, stated somewhat unconfident; 21.4 percent, or 3 respondents, stated neutral; 42.9 percent, or six respondents, stated somewhat confident; and 28.6 percent, or four respondents, stated confident.
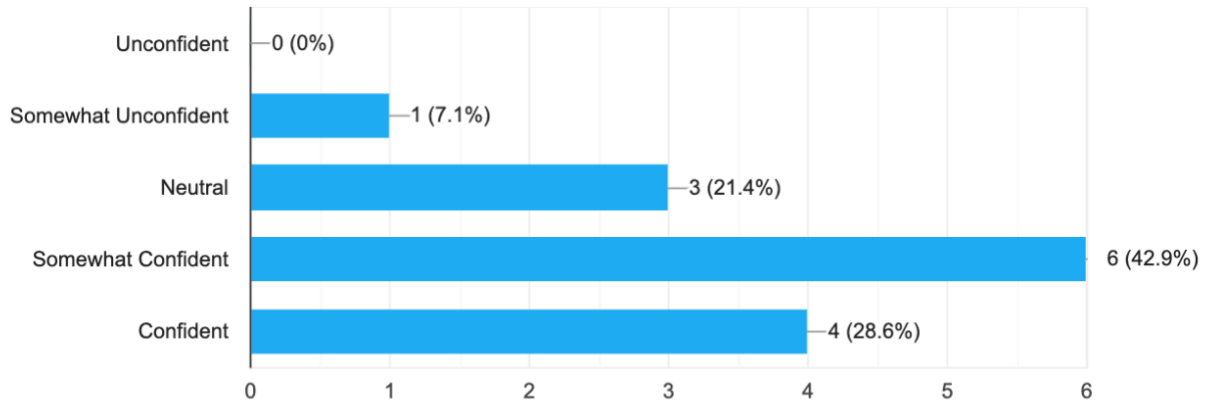
Figure 10. Distinguishing Major Versus Minor Infractions

When respondents were asked how confident they are in utilizing the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (SWPBIS) classroom management information in their classroom, 7.1 percent, or one respondent, stated that they were not confident; 7.1 percent, or one respondent, stated that they were neutral; 42.9 percent, or six respondents, stated somewhat confident; and 42.9 percent, or six respondents, stated confident.

Figure 11. Confidence Implementing SWPBIS

The final question of this section asked respondents how confident they are in their ability to create positive behavior plans for individual students in their classroom. One respondent (7.1%) stated not confident, one respondent (7.1%) stated somewhat not confident, three

respondents (21.4%) stated neutral, one respondent (7.1%) stated somewhat confident, and eight respondents (57.1%) stated confident. The data shows a need for some staff members to receive support in creating positive behavior plans in their classrooms.
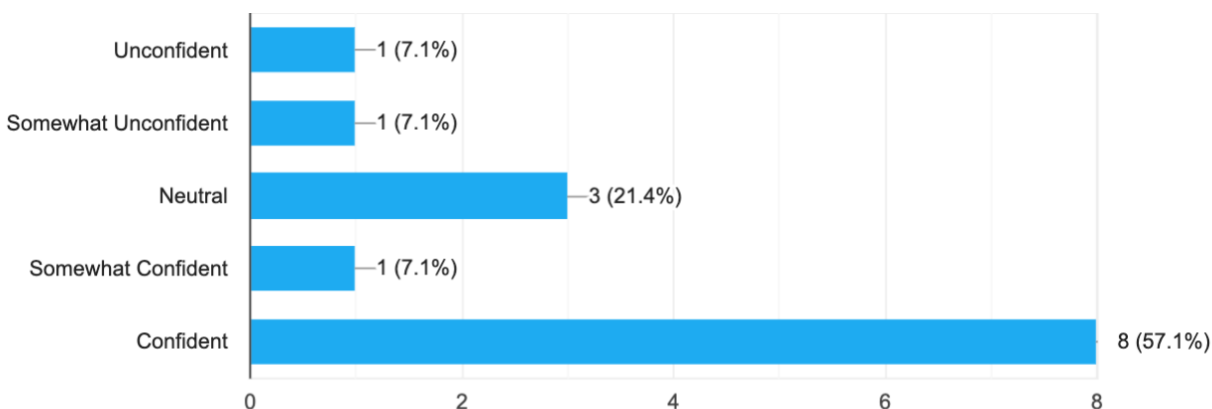
Figure 12. Confidence in Creating Positive Behavior Plans

4.1.1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

The last section of the survey included an open-ended question to gather insight on participants' perceptions on effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student behavior and classroom management. One theme that emerged from the responses was that due to virtual learning and quarantine protocols, teachers have found that they continually must re-teach and review classroom management and behavior expectations. Another theme that emerged was the disruption in preschool education for students. Due to the pandemic, primary students were not able to experience a consistent in-person program for preschool. Staff shared that students did not have many experiences with partner work, teamwork, and play, which resulted in teachers taking time away from academic instruction to teach, model, and re-teach behavioral expectations for class.

4.1.2 Conclusion

The survey responses showed that a majority of staff members found that classroom systems that are aligned to the SWPBIS system are in place, except for the ratio of positive praise to negative praise given in the classroom and options in the classroom to continue instruction when negative behaviors occur. Teacher responses varied regarding their confidence levels in determining if a discipline infraction was minor or major and using the SWPBIS information in their classroom, as well as creating individual behavior plans for students.

4.2 Focus Groups

The focus groups consisted of classroom teachers for the three primary grade levels (kindergarten, first grade, and second grade). In the 2021-22 year, there were four homeroom teachers for kindergarten, two homeroom teachers for first grade, and three homeroom teachers for second grade.

4.2.1 Focus Group Demographics

The kindergarten focus group consisted of four regular education teachers. Three of the four teachers had been teaching between four to six years, and the fourth teacher had been teaching between 20 and 25 years. All four of the teachers also have a certification in Special Education. The teacher who had between 20 and 25 years in education had spent most of her career teaching

kindergarten. One teacher had spent the prior four years teaching kindergarten, and the other two teachers were in their first year of teaching kindergarten.

The first-grade focus group consisted of one teacher, as the other first grade teacher was not able to participate due to personal leave. The first-grade teacher had between 11 and 15 years of experience in education and is certified in Special Education. The teacher had spent the prior three years teaching first grade.

The second-grade focus group consisted of three regular education teachers. All three teachers do not have a Special Education certification. All three teachers had 26 years or more teaching experience at the time of this study. All three teachers had been teaching second grade for the prior seven years.

4.2.2 Classroom Management Systems

4.2.2.1 Tell me how your classroom management system works.

This question was designed to gain insight on individual classroom systems at each grade level. The kindergarten and second grade focus groups mentioned that their classroom management system was aligned to the SWPBIS R.A.M.S. Rules and classroom chart. All three of the focus groups shared individual examples of their classroom management systems. Two of the kindergarten teachers shared that they use the term "body basics" to remind students of expected behaviors in class. A first-grade teacher shared that she utilizes "whole brain teaching" as part of her classroom management system. All three of the second-grade teachers shared classroom reward examples that they use in the classrooms that include a root beer float party, prize box reward, and extra recess.

The kindergarten and second grade focus groups shared that they also take time off of recess as a part of their classroom management system. For example, one teacher stated:

I use the behavior chart and if a student moves up they get a stamp, but if they move down it would be time off of recess to just kind of talk about the behaviors and how to adjust them.

Another teacher stated:

I sometimes just basically take a couple of minutes off of recess and they just sit and talk to me and they can tell me what they are going to change.

One of the components of the SWPBIS program is not to use recess as form of punishment for negative behaviors. It is interesting that two of the three focus groups shared that they continue to utilize the loss of recess as a form of punishment for negative behaviors.

4.2.2.2 Tell me how your classroom management system is aligned to the SWPBIS system.

All three focus groups shared that they use the SWPBIS behavior chart as part of their individual classroom management system. All three groups also referenced that individual students can move up and down the chart throughout the day. One teacher shared:

Students can move up and move down, but the thing about it is that you always have the opportunity to try to be a better person and work your way back up.

Another teacher shared:

If students make wrong decisions throughout the day, they can have time to think about what they've done and how to correct it.

The kindergarten focus group also emphasized that their classroom management systems allow for students to have a fresh start each day and that they do not carry over to the next day.

The kindergarten focus group also discussed the importance of modeling expectations for students. For example, one teacher stated:

> *I try to talk about what a good listener looks like; this is what you should be doing at that center or at that place. You know, a lot of role playing of what that should look like, you know, modeling good behavior.*

4.2.2.3 Tell me how you determine if a discipline is a minor or a major discipline infraction in your classroom.

All three focus groups mentioned that physically unsafe behaviors would be considered a major discipline infraction. The first grade and second grade focus groups both mentioned the importance of communicating with parents and sharing the behavioral concerns with the parents to reduce the minor discipline infractions. Kindergarten teachers mentioned that most of their issues are minor infractions because students are still learning.

It is important to note that although teacher perception is that most of the primary level discipline infractions are minor, discipline data for the 2021-22 school year indicates that 61 percent of the major discipline referrals came from the primary grades, which is a similar percentage from the 2018-19 school year of 60 percent. Specifically, 34 percent of the major discipline referrals for the 2021-22 school year are kindergarten students.

4.2.3 Exclusionary Discipline

4.2.3.1 Tell me about your view of exclusionary discipline practices at the elementary level.

All three focus groups agreed that they had not recently seen suspensions at the elementary level. For example, one teacher stated:

I don't think we suspend students very often.

Another teacher stated:

It doesn't happen very often; it has been years since I have had a kid suspended.

Furthermore, all three focus groups stated that the main reason for removal of students for class is to provide a break for students due to their emotional needs as opposed to behavior issues. One second grade teacher shared:

They are not gone too long. There is a quick turn around when a student goes to the office.

A kindergarten teacher shared:

If a student is removed, it is more for their emotional state than a discipline.

Finally, a first-grade teacher shared:

Sometime students need to be excluded because they are all hyped up.

Even though all three focus groups stated that the removal from class is more for a timeout from an activity and a learning experience, teachers were still submitting the same number of discipline referrals as in previous school years. When a student receives an office referral, they are either sent to the office by the teacher at that time or they are called to the office at some point during the school day to discuss the referral. This indicates that the teacher perception of the behavior is discipline as opposed to an alternative to discipline.

4.2.3.2 Tell me about how exclusionary discipline practices are connected to academics.

All three focus groups shared that when a student is removed from class for any reason, it has a negative impact on student learning. A kindergarten teacher stated that she believes it also have a negative impact on the social aspect of school:

I also think it affects their social emotional skills when they are pulled; they miss out on their instruction with their peers and getting a chance to interact with them.

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A first-grade teacher elaborated by saying:

If we are learning a new concept, they completely miss it and I have to go back and catch

them up.

The second-grade focus group shared different reasons for students acting out. One of the reasons shared is that students could be struggling academically and may misbehave to be removed from the classroom to avoid the academic work. Another reason the second-grade focus group shared is that a student may have poor attendance and feels overwhelmed and may therefore misbehave to avoid school work.

4.2.3.3 Have you used alternatives to exclusionary discipline in your classroom? If yes, how

effective has it been?

All three focus groups shared that they have not used alternatives to exclusionary discipline in their own classrooms. A first-grade teacher shared that even though she has not utilized any alternatives, she tries to utilize group proactive approaches such as meditation to start the school day.

4.2.4 Data

4.2.4.1 Tell me how you track discipline data in your classroom.

All three focus groups stated that parent contact is how they track discipline data in their classroom. All three focus groups mentioned phone calls as a way to communicate with parents. The kindergarten and second grade focus groups stated that they also use emails and Remind (text messages) to communicate with parents. The kindergarten focus group also referenced using the SWPBIS stamp folders as a way to track discipline. One teacher shared that it is a way to review

positive behavior progress. Two other kindergarten teachers shared that they utilized individual behavior charts to track discipline. One teacher noted:

I usually jot down notes throughout the day on specific behaviors that may occur, and I usually send a copy to the parent and I make a copy for myself so I can go back to see if the child's behavior increases or decreases each week.

4.2.4.2 Tell me how you analyze discipline data in your classroom.

Each focus group shared a different method of analyzing data. The kindergarten team shared that they review the behavior charts that they created for some individual students in their classrooms. The second-grade focus group discussed analyzing the time of day when the behavior occurs and trying to determine what factors occur during that time, such as whether it occurs during structured or unstructured times. The first-grade focus group discussed reviewing repeat offender information as a way to analyze data.

4.2.4.3 Tell me about disproportionalities of discipline in your classroom regarding race and gender.

All three focus groups stated that they see more discipline referrals for boys than girls in their classrooms. The focus groups attributed the increase in referrals for boys due to a variety of factors. One first grade teacher stated:

Boys will be boys and girls will be girls.

A second-grade teacher stated:

I think I have more trouble with males than females.

A kindergarten teacher stated:

The males seem to be a little rowdier and a little, I don't know. Statistics show that males do mature a bit later.

Another kindergarten teacher noted that it may be due to her perceptions about boys and that she must be cognizant of how she treats boys in her class versus girls.

Data for the 2021-22 school year indicates that boys are over-represented in discipline referrals. Fifty-four percent of the student population is made up of boys, and they make up 83.9 percent of the discipline referrals.

All three focus groups indicated that they do not believe that disproportionalities exist within discipline regarding race. One first grade teacher stated:

It doesn't matter if they are black or white. It doesn't matter, ya know. I don't see black and white.

A second-grade teacher added:

My expectations are the same for all kids, for matter what their color, no matter what their sex. I expect that same from all of them.

A second-grade teacher stated that she believes a student's socioeconomic status and home life have more of an impact on discipline than race or gender.

Discipline data for the 2021-22 school year indicates that 70 percent of the student population's race is White, and they make up 63 percent of all of the discipline referrals; 15 percent of the student population's race is Black, and they make up 16.1 percent of all of the discipline referrals; and 13 percent of the student populations race is multiracial, and they make up 19.6 percent of all of the discipline referrals. The data indicates a slight over-representation of multiracial and Black students.

4.3 Individual Interviews

Four semi-structured interviews were completed with staff members who work directly in the primary general education classrooms and included a special education teacher, a special education paraprofessional, a kindergarten paraprofessional, and a behavior specialist. All four staff members who were invited to participate in the study agreed to participate. Each participant was asked the same nine questions and received the questions prior to the interview.

4.3.1 Participant Demographics

The four participants were selected to participate since they are all staff members who are not classroom teachers, and they have the most direct access to kindergarten through second grade classrooms. Due to the movement of staff from the addition of a teaching position in October, there was a change in special education staffing. The special education teacher who was interviewed was hired in October for the position. The teacher worked in the district during the 2020-21 school year as an elementary building substitute. The special education paraprofessional had worked in her same position for the prior 10 years. The kindergarten paraprofessional had over 20 years of experience as a paraprofessional and had worked with the kindergarten classrooms for the prior 13 years. The behavior specialist has three years of experience working with students and teachers at the elementary level.

4.3.2 Interview Questions

4.3.2.1 Tell about the classroom management systems for the different classrooms you

   support.

All four of the four participants commented about the SWPBIS charts being utilized in the classrooms that they support. Specifically, two of the participants shared that students are able to move up and down the chart throughout the day. Two of the four participants also shared that the teachers in the classrooms support review behavior expectations by using the terms "body basics" and "ready hands." Three out of the four participants also shared the different types of positive support in the classrooms that they support. The type of support includes reminders, verbal praise, and a ticket system. Two of the participants also commented on how each teacher has their own style of classroom management. For example, the kindergarten paraprofessional stated:

   Each has their own style and it all seems to work for their classroom.

The special education teacher stated:

   It is really interesting because I get to go into all three second grade classrooms now so I

   get to see how each teacher has their own management system; they all have a similar,

   similar core belief, but it is interesting as each on implements it differently.

It is important to note that none of the four participants provided specific classroom management tools that were not in addition to the tools provided by the SWPBIS team.

4.3.2.2 Tell me how the classroom management systems are aligned to the SWPBIS system.

All four of the participants referenced the SWPBIS classroom charts. Two of the participants reiterated that students have the ability to move up and down the chart. One participant stated:

The teacher explains the behaviors of concern and reminds the student that they can move

up the chart throughout the day.

One of the participants referenced the stamps that students can earn if they end on the two highest areas of the chart at the end of the school day. All four participants used the term "positive" when describing the alignment of the classroom management systems to the SWPBIS system. For example, one teacher stated:

All the teachers use this system and all the classroom management is done in a positive

way in a manner which is aligned with the SWPBIS system.

4.3.2.3 Tell me how a discipline is determined as a minor or a major discipline infraction

    each classroom.

Two of the participants shared that aggressive behaviors would be considered a major discipline. As one participant stated:

A major is if somebody hits somebody.

One participant shared that for a minor infraction, students move down on their chart or lose five minutes of recess. The participant shared that she does not see a lot of major infractions, but when there is one the teacher normally calls the Dean of Students to remove the student from the classroom. The behavior specialist stated that she does not know what constitutes a minor or major as she doesn't handle the discipline for the classroom. When probed on what behaviors she has observed in classroom handled by the teacher and what behaviors removed students from the classroom, the behavior specialist did state that she had observed negative language or task refusal being handled in the classroom and aggressive behavior as when a student was removed from the classroom.

Only one participant shared that a repeated minor behavior would warrant a major discipline referral:

The first few times it is a minor, but if a behavior is repeated and continues even after a teacher takes off recess, it turns into a major and they send the student to the office.

4.3.2.4 Tell me about your view of exclusionary discipline practices at the elementary level.

Four out of the four participants referenced suspensions in their responses. Two participants referenced the need for suspensions for physically aggressive behavior.

The kindergarten paraprofessional stated that exclusion and discipline is necessary, and it makes the student understand what is expected of them. The behavior specialist stated if a student becomes physically aggressive, it should warrant a suspension. The participant also shared that possibly before the suspension, a student should come to the office to talk to the guidance counselor. The special education paraprofessional shared that if a student is suspended, it could be a negative because it is an excuse for the student to be at home and will not change the behavior. The special education teacher shared that they are not aware of students being suspended or pulled out for a long amount of time. The participant shared that most of the time the student is removed from the classroom and is spoken to by an adult and then quickly returned back to class. Another participant stated that removing students gives them a chance to calm down. The participant also stated:

If a student is removed from the classroom it takes away the audience. I think that helps because if a student is in the classroom a lot of times, they are looking the other kids to react to them.

4.3.2.5 Tell me about how exclusionary discipline practices are connected to academics.

Responses regarding the connection to exclusionary discipline and academics varied from each participant. The special education teacher shared that whenever students are pulled out of their classrooms, they do not have the ability to work with their peers. However, sometimes removing the student eliminates the distraction for the other students and the student who is removed can calm down and focus on their work. The special education teacher did share the concern that students are not receiving the same type of teaching if they are removed from class.

The special education paraprofessional stated when students are removed, they are missing out on academics, which can have a negative impact on their learning. The special education paraprofessional discussed the need to address behaviors early:

If you can see the triggers, don't let them build up and you can take care of them before

they get worse.

The behavior specialist said that there are positive and negative connections to academics. The negative is that when a student is pulled out of class, they can miss what was taught and have gaps in their learning. However, it can be a positive if they can work with a counselor while they are out of class on how to change their behavior. Finally, the kindergarten paraprofessional said she does not think that exclusionary discipline has a negative impact at the kindergarten level.

4.3.2.6 Have alternatives to exclusionary discipline been used in the classrooms you

     support? If yes, how effective have they been?

The kindergarten paraprofessional and the behavioral specialist stated that they had not seen alternatives being used in the classrooms that they support. The special education paraprofessional stated that the teachers she works with use praise and prizes as alternatives as

well as modeling appropriate behavior. The special education teacher stated that she had seen effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as adjusting the seating chart and giving reminders of rules.

4.3.2.7 Tell me about the kinds of discipline data within the classrooms you support.

Two of the four participants shared that they know how discipline data is analyzed in the classrooms that they support. The kindergarten paraprofessional and the special education teacher stated that they do not know about the discipline data in the classrooms that they support. The special education paraprofessional said that teachers have used individual behavior charts for students as well as tally charts to track off task behaviors. Finally, the behavior specialist stated that she had observed teachers using a clipboard to track student data with paper and a pencil.

4.3.2.8 Tell me about how discipline data are analyzed in the classrooms you support.

Only one of the four participants stated that they know how discipline is analyzed in the classrooms that they support. The special education teacher stated that she had seen teachers take a picture of their charts with their iPads at the end of the day to track discipline.

The kindergarten paraprofessional, special education paraprofessional, and behavior specialist did not know how the discipline was analyzed within the classrooms that they support.

4.3.2.9 Tell me about the disproportionalities of discipline in the classrooms you support
    regarding race and gender.

Three out of the four participants stated that they believe that the discipline data is disproportionate to males, and all four participants stated that they do not see any disproportionalities regarding race. The kindergarten paraprofessional stated:

I think boys are more energetic and they have a hard time focusing, where girls like busy

work and like school.

The special education teacher added that she sees a lot more boys who are not able to sit in school and fidget a lot. The special education paraprofessional stated that she notices that girls in the classrooms she works with respond better to verbal cues and redirection, which could be a reason why boys are disciplined more. The behavior specialist stated that she does not see any biases when it comes to race and gender and that the discipline is strictly based on behavior.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter contains the research study findings that are associated with the problem of practice, as well as suggestions for improvement of the SWPBIS program at the classroom level that is currently in place at North River Elementary School.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to complete a program evaluation of the North River Elementary classroom implementation of SWPBIS to gain stakeholder feedback and understand how the implementation is related to exclusionary discipline practices. The study utilized mixed methods to collect and analyze data. Quantitative data was collected through demographic information, current and historical discipline data, and prior SWPBIS data. Qualitative data was collected through individual interviews with a special education teacher, behavior specialist, and paraprofessional staff as well as grade-level teacher focus groups.

5.1.1 Survey

The demographic information showed that 65 percent of the teachers who participated had 11 or more years of teaching experience. The other 35 percent of teachers had between four and 10 years of teaching experience. Seventy-nine percent of teachers who participated in the survey held at least two different teaching certifications, and 66 percent of the teachers who participated

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in the study were certified in elementary and or early childhood education as well as special education. This is important to note as a large number of participants who are currently teaching in a general education setting are also certified in special education. Finally, 93 percent of the teachers who participated in the survey stated that they have received SWPBIS professional development. In summary, all teachers who participated in the survey are tenured as they have at least four years of teaching experience; a large number of staff members have at least two teaching certifications, which is beneficial in support diverse student needs; and a large number of staff has received professional development in SWPBIS.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that teachers at North River Elementary who work with students at the primary level have classroom routines, rules aligned to the SWPBIS, and immediate praise in place at the classroom level as 100 percent of respondents agreed that these systems are in place. In contrast, only 78.6 percent of participants rated acknowledgement of positive behaviors occurring more frequently than acknowledgement of inappropriate behaviors was fully in place. Frequent positive praise is essential in an SWPBIS program, following Reinke et al.'s (2013) recommendation of the ratio of four positive interactions to one negative interaction with a specific description of the behavior to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom.

Respondents' confidence levels regarding classroom systems were also inconsistent. Only 28.6 percent of the participants stated that they were confident in differentiating between a minor and a major discipline referral. Six out of the 14 respondents, or 42.9 percent, stated that they were confident utilizing the SWPBIS classroom management information in their classroom. Finally, only 57.1 percent of participants rated that they were confident in creating individual positive behavior support plans for students in their classrooms.

Thirteen out of the 14 participants shared that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on student behavior and classroom management. Participant feedback indicated that the learning disruptions caused by the pandemic included students not having the proper preschool experiences and being unprepared for kindergarten, both socially and academically. Participants also shared that due to the restrictions, even when at school students were not able to have the same social interactions and learning experiences with their peers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of students did not have any in-person preschool experiences that could result in an increased amount of discipline referrals. The lack of "schooling" experiences and preparation for kindergarten may have been misrepresented as student misbehavior.

To summarize, teacher survey responses indicated the following recommendations for the SWPBIS program:

- Provide professional development to staff on specific praise ratio (4) to negative interactions (1).

- Adjust the current minor/major discipline flowchart to provide more specific information for both categories.

- Provide professional development in creating individual student positive behavior plans.

- Involve staff in planning and designing social and emotional learning opportunities at the primary level due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1.2 Focus Groups

The focus groups consisted of three grade levels: kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. General education classroom teachers were invited to participate in the focus groups. For kindergarten, all four teachers agreed to participate in the focus group. For first grade, both teachers

agreed to participate. However, due to an unexpected leave of absence, one teacher was not able to participate in the study. The three second grade general education teachers agreed to participate in the study. Each focus group received the questions prior to the sessions.

The focus group comments aligned with the survey responses regarding the alignment of the SWPBIS information in each classroom system. Each focus group mentioned the SWPBIS classroom charts and students' ability to move up and down the chart throughout the day as their behavior changes. However, during the focus group sessions, teachers also mentioned taking time off of recess for negative behaviors. The current SWPBIS behavior model does not permit taking away recess as a form of discipline as students need movement time during their school day; therefore, it should not be used as a punishment.

The focus group participants also mentioned that they normally only send students to the office for physical behaviors and that it had been years since a student at the primary level had been suspended. The number of students suspended has decreased throughout the years as alternative measures to exclusionary discipline practices have been implemented at the office level since the 2019-20 school year. However, only 1.7 percent of the major discipline referrals for the 2021-22 school year were for excessive physical contact. The teacher perceptions of reasons for major referrals do not align with the current discipline data. Furthermore, the focus groups indicated that they currently do not have any alternatives to exclusionary discipline in place in their classrooms. The large number of major office referrals for other reasons besides physical contact may decrease if alternatives are implemented at the classroom level.

Finally, the focus group participants mentioned that there is not a set way to analyze discipline data at the primary levels. All three focus groups did not reference analyzing data using the school data warehouse system in their classrooms. Due to not having a formal system of

analyzing data in place, teachers were not aware of the disproportionalities that may exist in their classroom regarding race and gender.

The teacher feedback shared in the focus groups resulted in the following recommendations:

- Provide professional development in the area of alternatives to exclusionary discipline in the classroom that do not include the loss of recess.

- Provide coaching by the SWPBIS team to review individual classroom data monthly using the data warehouse.

- Provide staff with current research regarding discipline disproportionality regarding race and gender.

- Provide staff will current research regarding why the loss of recess should not be a form of discipline.

5.1.3 Interviews

The last set of data collection was individual interviews with staff members who work directly in the primary general education classrooms. The participants included a special education teacher, a special education paraprofessional, a kindergarten paraprofessional, and a behavior specialist. Each participant received the questions prior to their individual interview.

Similar to the focus groups, all four participants stated that each classroom they work with utilizes the SWPBIS classroom management information in their classroom, and each of the four interview participants mentioned the SWPBIS classroom charts during their interview. However, specific classroom management systems in addition to the SWPBIS systems were not shared by any of the four participants.

Similar to the survey information, the participants in the individual interviews were not able to give a clear definition of the difference between a minor and major discipline infraction. It is important to note that all four of the participants in the individual interviews did not reference the use of the major/minor flowchart in their interviews. Another similarity to the focus groups was the interview participants sharing that they had not seen alternatives to exclusionary discipline being used in the classrooms that they work with during the school day.

One concern mentioned in the individual interviews was that the participants were not aware of a formal plan for gathering and analyzing data for the classrooms that they support. Even though the staff was not involved in data analysis, three out of four of the participants stated that they believe boys are overrepresented, and four out of the four participants stated that they did not believe there was any disproportionality to race regarding discipline.

The following recommendations for programming were based on feedback from the individual interviews:

- The need to include all stakeholders within the school when reviewing and adjusting the minor/major discipline flowchart.
- Include all staff members in analyzing individual classroom data monthly.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Consideration

The following recommendations are for future consideration for improving SWPBIS at the elementary level for the research site and for other schools that utilize SWPBIS. The recommendations could improve any school that has implemented a SWPBIS program. The survey, focus groups, and individual interviews provided the opportunity for the researcher to

review input from key stakeholders regarding the SWPBIS classroom management systems and exclusionary discipline practices at the primary level. The following recommendations are proposed: ongoing professional development in positive praise at the classroom level, professional development in creating positive behavior plans for individual students, including all stakeholders in the review and development of the minor/major discipline infraction flowchart, and providing coaching support to staff to analyze individual classroom data monthly to identify disproportionalities in the data.

As a whole, proactive classroom management and positive student/teacher relationships play a major role in reducing office discipline referrals. Classroom management is one area that is supported with the SWPBIS program, but research has shown that even in schools that have implemented their SWPBIS program with high fidelity, there is still a need for teachers to provide positive reinforcement for student behaviors. Sherrod, Getch, and Ziomek-Daigle (2009) found that the use of positive behavior supports decreased the number of discipline referrals by 26 percent. The use of positive behavior supports at the classroom level that are individual to their own class, but aligned to the school-wide system, is a critical component of not only North River Elementary SWPBIS system but all schools in the United States.

In the area of professional development, North River Elementary currently receives support through its local intermediate unit as well as PaTTAN. The elementary principal has the capacity to coordinate professional development with the local intermediate unit at no cost. The professional development could be scheduled during staff in-service days, or it can be held during monthly faculty or grade level/team meetings to ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to receive the training.

The North River Elementary SWPBIS team has the capacity to invite staff members to a monthly meeting to review the current minor/major discipline flowchart. The SWPBIS team can use the *Pennsylvania's School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support System: Defining and Managing Challenging Behaviors Pamphlet* provided by PaTTAN as a resource to utilize for best practice (*Pennsylvania's Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports System: Defining and Managing Challenging Behaviors* 2018). By inviting all stakeholders to participate in the review, the SWPBIS team is recognizing the need to get "buy-in" from all stakeholders by listening to their input and ideas.

Finally, the researcher determined that there is a need for all schools to have ongoing discipline data analysis for disproportionalities regarding race, ethnicity, and gender. African-American students continue to be disciplined more than White students (Smolkowski et al., 2016). In regard to gender, Welsh and Little (2018) found that Black males receive the most discipline infractions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Many researchers have highlighted the percentages of disproportionalities and discussed the need to reduce that number. It has been recommended that schools continuously examine their discipline data and look for disproportionalities and identify ways to address the disproportionalities within their systems.

The research from the study has identified a need for individual classroom teachers to review and analyze discipline data in their classrooms on a monthly basis to identify disproportionalities. It is also important for staff members who work directly in specific classrooms to be a part of the discipline data review, as their input is important as well. Staff will need coaching on how to analyze their data. This coaching can be done through the data warehouse company since the district has already purchased professional development hours from the company. The building principal will need to create a schedule for the coaching. Once the coaching

is completed, the building administrator will need to provide staff with research information on discipline disproportionalities at the elementary level as the study findings indicate that staff does not have much experience and/or understanding of how to analyze discipline data for disproportionalities.

5.3 Further Implications

It is imperative that all Pennsylvania schools that have implemented an SWPBIS program continue to assess the program at the classroom level by using the PAPBS adopted instruments from the Center on Positive and Behavioral Interventions and Supports to measure fidelity. The instruments include the Implementation Checklist (TIC), which is used in the action planning stage prior to implementation; Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), which is used annually to assess implementation fidelity; Schoolwide Evaluation Tool (SET), a tool that is used to assess the fidelity implementation; and Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), another tool that is used to assess implementation at each tier (Runge et al. 2016). The information provided by these assessments will provide yearly feedback to the SWPBIS team. It is also essential that the SWPBIS team takes into consideration the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student discipline practices and discipline data. With more student mental health concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for school districts to address mental health concerns within their SWPBIS programs. In order to support the additional needs, funding is needed at the state and local levels. The funding will provide schools with the necessary tools and resources to support the implementation.

A strong commitment from the building administrator is needed to develop a professional development schedule so that staff receive the appropriate professional development in SWPBIS supports and data analysis. The building administrator must also ensure that time is provided monthly for staff to analyze the discipline data.

Also, study findings indicate the need to review and revise the current minor/major discipline flowchart to create a document that staff can use to identify discipline infractions consistently. It is recommended that the SWPBIS team include a variety of stakeholders in the review to ensure staff "buy-in" to utilizing the chart.

The researcher is looking forward to sharing the findings of the study with the staff and administration at North River Elementary. Furthermore, the information from the research study can prove to be useful for schools when evaluating SWPBIS program effectiveness at the classroom level.

Appendix A Survey

The survey below can be accessed via Google forms: **https://forms.gle/5XFcE3MhdfdxeAiK9**

Classroom System Information
Please answer the following questions based on your individual experiences within your classroom.

1. Please list your years of teaching experience. *

Your answer

2. Please list your areas of certification. *

Your answer

3. Have you received professional development in School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

4. Classroom routines and procedures are explicitly identified for activities where problems often occur (e.g. entering class, asking questions, sharpening pencil, using restroom, dismissal). *

- ☐ In Place
- ☐ Partial In Place
- ☐ Not In Place

5. Classroom rules are defined for each of the school-wide expectations and are posted in classrooms. *

- ☐ In Place
- ☐ Partial In Place
- ☐ Not In Place

6. Expected academic and social behaviors are taught directly to all students in classrooms. *

- ☐ In Place
- ☐ Partial In Place
- ☐ Not In Place

7. Classroom teachers use immediate and specific praise. *

☐ In Place

☐ Partial In Place

☐ Not In Place

8. Acknowledgment of students demonstrating adherence to classroom rules *
and routines occurs more frequently than acknowledgment of inappropriate
behaviors.

☐ In Place

☐ Partial In Place

☐ Not In Place

9. School-wide expectations, routines, acknowledgements, in-class continuum *
of consequences are implemented within classrooms and consistent with
school-wide systems.

☐ In Place

☐ Partial In Place

☐ Not In Place

10. Classroom-based options exist to allow classroom instruction to continue *
when problem behavior occurs.

☐ In Place

☐ Partial In Place

☐ Not In Place

11. To what extent are student suspensions and/or expulsions exist in your school?

☐ Not at all

☐ Minimally

☐ Moderately

☐ Extensively

☐ Don't Know

12. To what extent do response to conflict and problem solving exist within your classroom?

☐ Not at all

☐ Minimally

☐ Moderately

☐ Extensively

☐ Don't Know

How confident are you in determining whether a discipline is a minor or major infraction?

☐ Unconfident

☐ Somewhat Unconfident

☐ Neutral

☐ Somewhat Confident

☐ Confident

How confident are you in utilizing the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (SWPBIS) classroom management information in your classroom?

☐ Unconfident

☐ Somewhat Unconfident

☐ Neutral

☐ Somewhat Confident

☐ Confident

How confident are you in your ability to create positive behavior plans for individual students in your classroom?

- ☐ Unconfident
- ☐ Somewhat Unconfident
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Confident
- ☐ Confident

Please share your insight on the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had one student behavior and classroom management.

Your answer

Appendix B Survey Email

Faculty and Staff,

As part of my doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh, I am inviting you to participate in my research study by completing the survey below. The study is a program evaluation of the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports at the classroom level for primary grades in an effort to reduce exclusionary discipline. For this study, participants will complete a Google Form survey. The survey includes classroom management questions compiled from Pennsylvania's PA PBS Network SWPBIS surveys as well as a few open-ended response questions. The survey will require approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

There is no compensation for responding and there is not any known risk involved. Staff is encouraged to answer survey information as honestly as possible as survey submissions are anonymous and will remain confidential.

Please use the link below to complete the survey:

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Amanda Cwynar
Doctoral Student
University of Pittsburgh

Appendix C Focus Group Questions

December Focus Group Questions (Classroom Management Systems)
1. Tell me how your classroom management system works.

2. Tell me how your classroom management system is aligned to the SWPBIS system.
3. Tell me how you determine if a discipline is a minor or a major discipline infraction in your classroom.

January Focus Group Questions (Exclusionary Discipline)
1. Tell me about your view of exclusionary discipline practices at the elementary level.

2. Tell me about how exclusionary discipline practices are connected to academics.

3. Have you used alternatives to exclusionary discipline in your classroom? If yes, how

   effective has it been?

February Focus Group Questions (Data)
1. Tell me how you track discipline data in your classroom.

2. Tell me how you analyze discipline data in your classroom.

3. Tell me about disproportionalities of discipline in your classroom regarding race and

   gender.

Appendix D Focus Group Email

Faculty and Staff,

As part of my doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh, I am inviting you to participate in my research study by participating a grade level focus group. The study is a program evaluation of the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports at the classroom level for primary grades in an effort to reduce exclusionary discipline. For this study, participants will attend three grade-level focus group. The focus groups will take place during the monthly grade level team meeting times on Zoom. The meetings will be recorded for transcription purposes. The focus group questions will be shared with grade level teams prior to each meeting. There is no compensation for participating and there is not any known risk involved.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Amanda Cwynar
Doctoral Student
University of Pittsburgh

Appendix E Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell about the classroom management systems for the different classrooms you support.

2. Tell me how the classroom management systems are aligned to the SWPBIS system.

3. Tell me how a discipline is determined as a minor or a major discipline infraction each classroom.

4. Tell me about your view of exclusionary discipline practices at the elementary level.

5. Tell me about how exclusionary discipline practices are connected to academics.

6. Have alternatives to exclusionary discipline been used in the classrooms you support? If yes, how effective have they been?

7. Tell me about how discipline data within the classrooms you support.

4. Tell me about how discipline data analyzed in the classrooms you support.

5. Tell me about the disproportionalities of discipline in the classrooms you support regarding race and gender.

Appendix F Individual Interview Email

Faculty and Staff,

As part of my doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh, I am inviting you to participate in my research study by participating an individual staff member interview. The study is a program evaluation of the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports at the classroom level for primary grades in an effort to reduce exclusionary discipline. For this study, participants who work directly with students in classrooms at the primary level will complete individual interviews with the researcher. The individual interviews will take place during an agreed upon time and will last approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be on Zoom and will recorded for transcription purposes. The interview questions will be shared with the staff member prior to the interview. There is no compensation for participating and there is not any known risk involved.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Amanda Cwynar
Doctoral Student
University of Pittsburgh

Appendix G Student Behavior: Code of Student Conduct

Appendix G.1 Attachment A

As members of this school, students are expected to follow the rules that are established for the welfare of the entire building. The North River Area School District maintains high standards for all students. The Code of Student Conduct was created to provide students and parents with a clear understanding of the school's expectations. While the majority of students consistently demonstrate acceptable behavior, there remains a need to define an acceptable behavior.

Certain behaviors are unacceptable in public life and our mission is to provide students with guidance and a clear set of expectations for their behavior before, during, and after school (including school sponsored events). All possible means will be utilized to improve student behavior; however, the student needs to recognize that he/she is responsible for his/her own actions.

School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
The goals of a positive behavior approach to discipline are to:
- teach students to make responsible decisions
- assist students in taking responsibility for actions when appropriate
- teach students to learn to communicate positively
- help students work cooperatively with others

North River Elementary has implemented School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports which will focus on our school-wide behavioral expectations: R.A.M.S. (Respectful, Accountable, Make a Difference, Success). The SWPBIS program is a proactive approach to school-wide discipline and will focus on creating and maintaining an environment for achieving social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviors through a collaborative team approach. The SWPBIS team will also be analyzing discipline related behavioral patterns and will respond to them by teaching the positive behaviors expected by our students.
Elementary Discipline Overview

Student Responsibilities

- Become familiar with building and classroom rules and behave accordingly utilizing the R.A.M.S. (Respectful, Accountable, Make a Difference, Success) Rules.

- Attend school and classes regularly and arrive to school on time.

- Understand and observe the rules of the school.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

- Send the child to school regularly, on time, and prepared to work.

- Communicate with the school regarding your child.

- Work as a team with the school staff in solving behavioral problems.

- Read the handbook to understand the school rules and policies.

Administration, Faculty, and Staff Responsibilities

- Each teacher has their own set of rules designed to ensure that the delivery of instruction takes place in an orderly and safe environment.

- Help students realize the importance of being responsible to himself/herself and others.

- Encourage and help the student to understand the rules of the school and to understand his/her role in the school community.

- Know and enforce consistently and fairly the rules and policies of the school and/or classroom.

- Use procedures appropriate for age, background, and level of maturity in dealing with students.

- Seek communication and work as a team with parents and other personnel in an effort to help students who present behavioral concerns.

Progressive Discipline

Progressive discipline is a system that gradually incorporates disciplinary steps as the student grows (i.e., student conferences, detentions, office detentions, SAP referrals/intervention referrals, parent conferences, etc.). In addition to this progressive system are disciplinary actions that are more severe, such as suspensions, hearings, expulsions, etc. These are in place for infractions that call for stronger actions, all of which are described in this handbook. The following action plan is in place for disruptions occurring at the North River Elementary School and is handled in a manner that preserves a quality educational environment.

Levels of Disciplinary Action

Level 1: Level One offenses are the type that disrupt normal operation of the school. In most cases, discipline will be handled by the teacher. If the student's misbehavior is chronic and/or does not cease in accordance with the teacher's corrective instructions, the teacher may send the student to the office for a conference. A level one offense can become a level two offense because of the frequency of infractions. These infractions, including contacting the parent/guardian, will be addressed by the teacher. Administrative action will typically not occur with these misbehaviors.

Level One Offenses include the following, but are not limited to:

- Classroom Disruption

- Inappropriate Language

- Horseplay

- Inappropriate Behavior

- Misbehavior for Substitute

- Unsafe behavior on the school bus or school property

- Disrespectful behavior

- Dishonesty

Level One Disciplinary Options:

- Verbal or written reprimand

- Parental notification (email or phone call)

- Confiscation of non-instructional item (returned at the end of the school day)

- Special Assignments (Reflective in nature)

- Loss of recess

- Change Seating

- Breakfast Detention

- Hall Pass Restriction

- Administrative Conference/Warning

- Time out at designated area in or out of the classroom

Level 2: Level Two offenses are more serious than those found in level one. The misbehavior is frequent or serious enough that it disrupts the learning climate of the school and/or endangers the health or safety of others. These infractions, which usually result from the continuation of Level One incidents require the intervention of office personnel because the prior consequences have failed to modify the behavior. Level two offenses will be sent to the office. The student's parents will be notified by the office personnel handling the situation.

Level Two Offenses include the following, but are not limited to:

- Left Area Without Permission

- Insubordination/Disrespect

- Inappropriate Use of Technology

- Misbehavior for Substitute Teacher-Habitual

- Bus Misbehavior (Minor)

- Abusive, obscene, or disrespectful language, writings, drawings, or gestures

- Bullying/Cyber Bullying

- Harassment

- Theft

- Vandalism

- Habitual Level 1 Referral

Level Two Disciplinary Options:

- Administrative Conference/Warning Parental Contact

- Parental Conference

- Loss of privileges

- Behavior Intervention

- Require the student to write an explanation of why actions taken were wrong and/or a plan for problem solving to address misbehavior from occurring again.

- Lunch Detention

- Office Detention

- Saturday Detention

- Suspension

Level 3: Level Three offenses are of the most serious nature. Level 3 includes acts that are frequent or serious in nature that disrupt the learning environment of the school or acts that pose a threat or danger to the health, safety, or welfare of others in the school. These acts will require administrative actions which could result in the immediate removal of the student from the school and possible intervention of law enforcement authorities. Level three offenses may be a single serious offense, or a series of infractions which indicate that the student does not intend to

take advantage of his/her educational opportunities, or that he/she intends to interfere with the rights of other students to obtain an education.

Level Three Offenses include the following, but are not limited to:

- Continuation of or extreme Level II misconduct

- Open Defiance - Major Insubordination/Disrespect

- Assault

- Fighting

- Verbal or Physical Threats

- Ethnic or racial slurs

- Sexual harassment

- Vandalism

- Destruction of property

- Possession of a weapon

- Possession of drugs or alcohol

- Other violation of federal, state, or local laws

- Bus Behavior (Major)

Level Three Disciplinary Options:

- Parental Contact or Conference

- Behavior Contract/Agreement

- Restitution

- Police Contact

- Suspension

- Informal Hearing

- Referral to outside agency

- Referral to policy or district magistrate

Note: Each behavior infraction carries with it a disciplinary action. Our philosophy in matters of discipline is that the student is ultimately responsible for his/her behavior; therefore, with a good balance of consequences and counseling, the student will be expected to improve his/her decision-making process that may have led to discipline referrals in the past. Over a reasonable period of time, behavior problems and poor decision-making by the student should lessen significantly. With parent involvement throughout this process, we hope to support and encourage the student, as well as provide consequences when necessary.

Office Detention/Saturday Detention Information

Office Detentions and Saturday Detentions require students to be at school during non-class hours for disciplinary purposes. Students will be supervised and will have to work on their studies. Students who do not conduct themselves properly while in detention may not receive credit for the time and may be reassigned additional disciplinary consequences. Parents/Guardians are responsible for student transportation home after detention has been completed. Failure to serve detention may also result in additional disciplinary consequences. Detentions will be scheduled on an as needed basis.

DETENTION POLICY

For disciplinary infractions, students at Rochester Area School District may be assigned a Teacher, Office or Saturday Detention:

TEACHER DETENTION- Teacher detentions may be given for minor disciplinary infractions either before or after school according to the teacher's discretion. Once a student has been assigned teacher detention and given a (24) hour notice, the student must serve that time on that day if in attendance at school. If a student is assigned detention and is absent that day, he/she will report for detention the first day he/she returns back to school. If a student does not show up for a teacher detention, he/she will be assigned an Office Detention. Any student assigned to detention must serve the detention on any given day before reporting to practice or any extracurricular activity.

OFFICE/IN-SCHOOL DETENTION- Office Detention may be assigned by an administrator and can take place any time throughout the school day.

SATURDAY DETENTION- A Saturday Detention may be assigned by an administrator and will take place on Saturdays from 8:00-11:00am. Students are to report to the Virginia Avenue entrance on time to be let into the building. Failure to report to a Saturday Detention will result in an In-School Suspension. Any student assigned to detention MUST serve the detention on any given day before reporting to practice or any extracurricular activity.

SUSPENSION POLICY
 For disciplinary infractions, students at Rochester Area School District may be assigned In-School Suspension (ISS) or Out-of-School Suspension (OSS):

IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION- Students assigned to ISS are to report directly to the ES Office after homeroom. No talking or sleeping will be permitted. Any disruption in the ISS will result in one (1) additional day of ISS. A second disruption and any subsequent disruptions of ISS will result in OSS. No eating or drinking is permitted with the exception of lunch. Lunch will be eaten at a designated time in the ISS room. Students will receive a bag lunch with minimal choices. ISS students are not permitted to purchase a normal school lunch.

Students who refuse to serve ISS will be issued three (3) days of OSS. If a student is absent the day he/she is to serve ISS, arrives late, or leaves school early, the missed time will be made up immediately upon the student's return to school. Homework is expected to be completed for class upon the day of return from a suspension.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION- Students who receive OSS are responsible for completing their assignments. Parents may call the ES Office at Ext. 1302 in order to make arrangements to pick up the school work. Homework is expected to be completed for class upon the day of return from a suspension.

SUSPENSION HEARINGS- A hearing with the parents and the student will be held with the Superintendent when a student has been suspended for ten (10) days due to a major discipline violation. The following is the procedure the Administration will adhere to for this type of suspension:

> 1.The Elementary School Principal will suspend the student for a period not to exceed 10 days.

> 2.The Elementary School Principal will then notify the Superintendent's Office of the violation within 48 hours of the time of the offense. A hearing will then be scheduled prior to the completion of the 10-day suspension.

> 3.An informal hearing will be provided for the students and parents. Present at the meeting will be the principal, the superintendent, the student and the parents. The purpose of the hearing will be: (a) to continue the suspension or expel the student from school or (b) to provide fair warning to the student and parents of the seriousness of the actions and to serve that a formal board hearing for possible expulsion may be scheduled.

Appendix G.2 Attachment B

Rochester Elementary Discipline Flowchart

Observe the
problem
behavior

Address with student   No   Is behavior   Yes   Ensure safety if necessary
privately and use   office
proximity   managed?

If the behavior continues   Write referral & escort or
arrange for student to go
to office

Determine appropriate
consequence

Administration will
problem solve with
necessary teachers and
students

- Redirection
- Loss of privilege
- Teacher/student
  conference
- Parent contact

Administration will
determine consequences

No   Habitual   Yes   Follow through with
behavior   consequences
5-7 times
a month

File necessary   Submit Office   Complete documentation
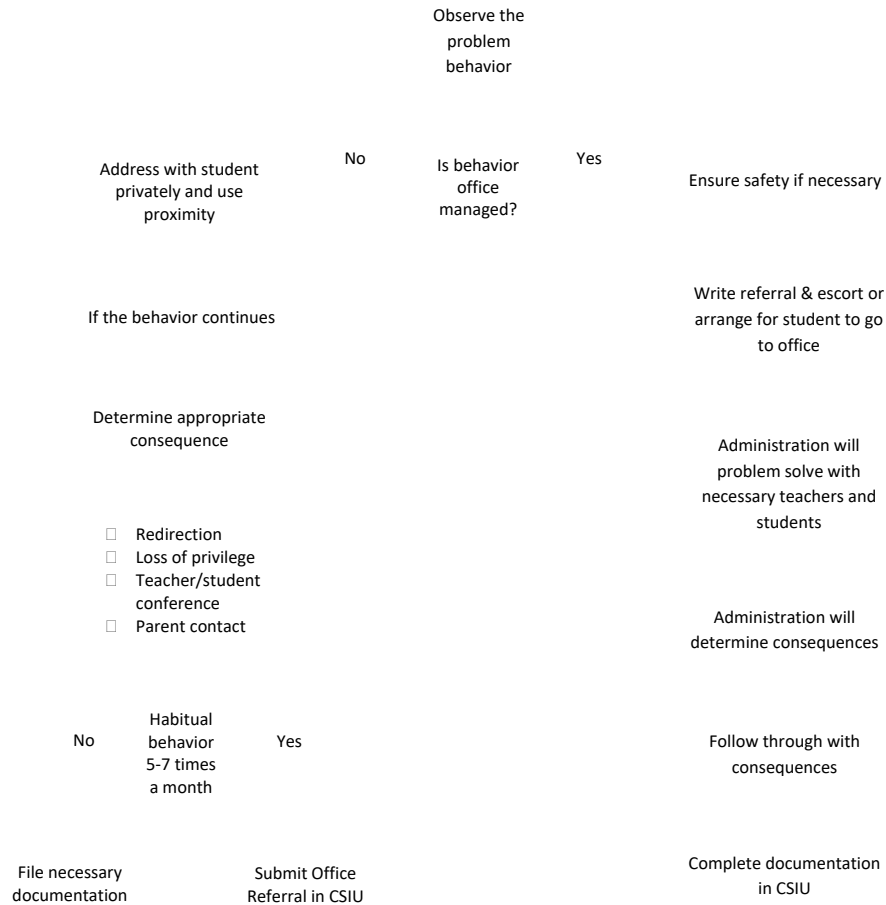documentation   Referral in CSIU   in CSIU

Figure 13. Discipline Flowchart

Appendix G.3 Attachment C

R.A.M.S. SWPBIS Expectation Chart

R.A.M.S. Expectations	Restroom	Cafeteria	Hallways	Recess	Classroom	Bus
Respectful	Use a Level 1 Voice Stay in your stall Eyes in your own space	Use a Level 1 Voice Follow adult directions Raise hand for help Say please and thank you	Use a Level 0 Voice Follow adult directions Maintain personal space	Use a Level 1 Voice Follow adult directions	Use a Level 0 or Level 1 Voice Keep classroom neat and clean Use classroom materials appropriately	Use a Level 0 or 1 Voice Listen to the bus driver Use proper language
Accountable	Go, Wash, Leave Keep feet on the ground Take Care of School Property Keep space clean	Stay in seat Keep space clean (throw trash away) Ask to use the restroom Use table manners	Take care of school property Go directly to your destination Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself	Use all equipment properly Listen for your teacher Take care of school property	Be on time and prepared Ask for help Work hard and do your best Use technology appropriately	Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself Take care of school property Keep all items in your backpack
Make a Difference	Be a good example for others	Wait patiently/quietly in line Make room for others at the table Include others in conversations	Assist others who may need help Walk in the hallway	Include others Be a team player Have fun!	Be polite Be a team player Be a good example to others Assist who may need help	Stay in assigned seat Face forward Follow directions Food Free Zone

Figure 14. SWPBIS Expectation Chart

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