

Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of School-Wide
Positive Behavior Support

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2024

Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

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ABSTRACT

What do teachers perceive to be the impact of positive behavior management systems on supporting teachers, students, and families? This research investigated the implementation and impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems as a crucial approach to addressing behavior challenges and supporting both teachers and students. Recognizing the significant challenges teachers face in managing student behavior alongside their essential duties, this study delves into the potential benefits of positive behavior support systems as an alternative to punitive discipline methods.

Building upon previous research, the results of this investigation underscored the positive outcomes associated with school-wide positive behavior support systems. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological case study involving 12 diverse educators, providing valuable insights from those directly responsible for classroom management.

The findings revealed that these systems effectively reduced situations involving exclusionary practices, enhanced student-teacher relationships, and contributed to the establishment of a positive classroom culture and climate. Supported by observations, interviews, and artifact collection, the participants identified key factors influencing the success of positive behavior support systems, including administrative and parental support, access to professional development opportunities, and collaborative experiences among teachers and school administration.

The study further highlighted the importance of consistent school-wide expectations, procedures, and guidelines in managing student behavior and advocates for tailored support for students with diverse backgrounds. Notably, positive restorative practices and training for

teachers contribute to meeting the needs of all students and result in increased overall student achievement.

Despite the evident benefits, the need for ongoing refinement of school-wide positive behavior support systems, especially in addressing escalated behavior concerns was identified. Teachers expressed a desire for regular opportunities to evaluate and revise these systems, emphasizing the dynamic nature of behavior support in educational settings. The research contributed valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to enhance positive behavior support systems to benefit teachers and students.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

Schools must work to create an environment in which all students will thrive. Elementary school education supplies the foundation for students to develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills needed to reach their full potential and be successful members of society. Teachers play a role in the environment that supports students' learning (Bardach et al., 2022). All teachers, including elementary school teachers, are challenged by the additional factors that impact their day-to-day expectations. Students' disruptive behavior in elementary schools is pernicious to students and teachers and impacts society. Historically, schools have instituted disciplinary practices, including suspension and expulsion, to manage behaviors that disrupt student learning (Fadus et al., 2021; Schiff, 2018). Some teachers feel these measures are insufficient and have become increasingly challenging to manage (Fadus et al., 2021).

A startling 84% of educators agree that the pandemic has negatively impacted students' behavioral development (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2022), creating more challenges in classroom management. The National Education Association (NEA) reported that 55% of teachers leave the profession earlier than planned (Walker, 2022). This number has only increased since the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as more than half a million teachers have left the profession since 2020 (Walker, 2022). Teachers who leave the education profession may do so because the challenges that they experience outweigh the benefits they receive (Jerrim et al., 2021). The top three reasons for leaving the teaching profession are as follows: inadequate pay, stress, and lack of respect/value (PDK Poll, 2019). The same PDK Poll (2019) found that 9% of

teachers surveyed left because of student behavior and lack of discipline, the fourth largest reason. Many factors contribute to the disruption of the school environment, including disruptive behavior in the classroom (Sulak, 2016). This disruptive behavior is challenging for teachers (Embse et al., 2019; Stormont et al., 2008). In fact, it is noted as one of the most challenging issues for teachers who are open about being frustrated and stressed with their careers (Wink et al., 2021). Many teachers are, in fact, so frustrated that they are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Walker, 2022).

Positive behavior support systems have been widely adopted in elementary classrooms to reduce disruptive behaviors and improve students' overall academic performance (Yeung et al., 2016). In the United States, most schools have adopted the multilevel approach known as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Bastable et al., 2021; Yeung et al., 2016). Researchers have observed that some positive behavior support systems, including PBIS, should be better supported for greater sustainability (Yeung et al., 2016). Teachers find themselves increasingly frustrated as they are still dealing with some of the more challenging behaviors in the classroom. Teachers want to be heard regarding their perceptions around specific issues related to their primary function and responsibility: meeting the needs of students.

From Less Support and More Stress to More Support and Less Stress

A startling number of studies suggest that teachers have worse mental health and well-being than those who work in other jobs (Jerrim et al., 2021). Teachers rate student behavioral challenges as one of the most prevalent sources of teacher stress and stress-related illnesses (Bardach et al., 2022; Jerrim et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021). Stress is determined by the person's assessment of the demands in the environment paired with their overall capacity for meeting those demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Teaching is a highly

stressful profession, as teachers are responsible for meeting the demands of managing a wide range of challenges both in and outside the classroom (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Work-related stress influences teachers' perceptions of their ability to successfully meet the needs of students.

Teacher stress and student behavior are strongly linked (Embse et al., 2019; Jerrim et al., 2021). While teachers reveal that student behavior challenges are a source of stress, they also manage those student behavior challenges differently under elevated levels of stress (Embse et al., 2019). What can schools do to support teachers during this time of elevated stress?

Researchers found that professional development and teacher education programs that equip educators with specific emotion regulation strategies, particularly genuinely expressed emotions, will increase teacher satisfaction and lessen burnout (Bastable et al., 2021).

School leadership teams design behavior management systems to parallel the needs, culture, and climate of their school, develop consistent school-wide discipline expectations and processes, and establish a consistent process of data-based decision-making (Lloyd et al., 2022). Lloyd et al. shared that schools can provide resources to support teachers by establishing school-wide support systems. This is just one resource that schools can use to support teachers who are already stressed and leaving the profession. There is room for improvement for schools to understand the impact of school resources and teachers' perceptions (Wang et al., 2021). Perhaps understanding will lead to less teacher burnout, which develops due to chronic stress in the work environment (Bardach et al., 2022). Schools must pay attention to trends in teacher attrition as well as teacher retention (Bardach et al., 2022).

Disparities in Discipline Practices

Unfortunately, there are historical levels of disparity among disciplinary practices, particularly among Black and Hispanic students, students living in single-parent homes, and

students with special needs (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Lace et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Even when involved in the same disciplinary infractions, Black students and students with disabilities were significantly more likely to receive exclusionary discipline consequences (Lace et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021). These disproportionate disciplinary measures lead to more negative outcomes, including academic failure and what is known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Lace et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021). The school-to-prison pipeline is the direct link between disciplinary issues in school-age children to the same children being part of the prison system as adults (Morgan, 2021). Research on the school-to-prison pipeline shows that certain proactive practices would likely alleviate this problem of high rate of incarcerated people of color, such as better teacher support and preparation as well as restorative disciplinary practices, such as positive behavior support systems (Lace et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021).

To counter this narrative of disparity of exclusionary practices, schools are implementing school-wide positive behavior management systems (Schiff, 2018). These positive behavior systems are designed to acknowledge students for meeting behavioral expectations and boost positive and productive relationships between students, their peers, and teachers (Lloyd et al., 2022). These systems build the foundation for schoolwide behavioral expectations that show students what it looks like to meet the expectations for behavior in and outside the classroom (Lloyd et al., 2022).

School-wide Support Systems

“When students are sent to the office, administrators just give them warning after warning. The students know there are never any REAL consequences -Irritated Teacher” (Walker, 2022). This is an educator’s post in the comment section of an article by the National Association of Educators. Establishing school-wide support systems is one way that elementary

schools attempt to prevent exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions, thereby reducing teacher stress and keeping top-tier educators in our schools. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is one framework established to lessen or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices, strengthen the school climate and culture, and improve student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Yeung et al., 2016). Over 20,000 schools have implemented this system of behavior support (Yeung et al., 2016). This is a proactive approach to supporting socially conscious behavior in schools. Though widely used in elementary schools, it can also be implemented in middle and high schools. Implementing PBIS involves equipping teachers with tools to help them embed the teaching of prosocial behaviors and social skills into the curriculum.

Problem Statement

The study addressed the problem of the lack of hearing elementary educators' perceptions of the impact of school-wide implemented positive behavior support systems. In the last decade, positive behavior systems have resulted in improvements in student behavior and academics in schools around the world (Bastable et al., 2021; Yeung et al., 2016). There is also research to support the claim that behavior challenges in the classroom increase the frequency of exclusionary discipline practices, negatively impact the classroom culture, and affect student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Sulak, 2016). There is plenty of research related to students' impact of positive behavior support systems (Lloyd et al., 2022; Yeung et al., 2016). In fact, compared to middle school and high school studies, elementary-related studies rank highest (Lloyd et al., 2022). However, previous research ignores the perceived impact from the viewpoint of elementary teachers. Additionally, research does not relate to the long-term sustainability of these positive behavior support systems (Yeung et al.,

2016). According to Lloyd et al. (2022), there is twenty-plus years' worth of research on the effects of positive behavior support systems on students' achievement and behavior. Recent studies have identified the viability of current positive behavior intervention programs as a major concern (Yeung et al., 2016). After twenty-plus years of research and implementation, it is timely and essential that elementary teachers are asked how they feel about positive behavior support systems and their impact on students, their classrooms, and the larger school community. Giving teachers a voice to express their perceptions on the importance of positive behavior support systems will help schools to evaluate their practices and make necessary improvements.

There is a trend of frustrated educators leaving the teaching profession, leaving schools scrambling to fill positions (Mérida-López et al., 2020; PDK Poll, 2019). The number of educators dropped from 10.6 million to 10.0 million educators (Walker, 2022). High rates of stress, emotional burden, burnout, salary, classroom management, and low job satisfaction add an additional layer of burden to many teachers' experiences (Jerrim et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021). Pressures such as these can generate work-related disquietude and stress and, in turn, are considered deleterious to teachers' mental and physical health. Additionally, many classroom teachers express their discontent due to feeling a lack of classroom management and the absence of a platform from which to share their concerns (Jerrim et al., 2021).

Disruptive student behaviors impact the classroom environment, thereby disrupting the learning of students (Sulak, 2016). A teacher's perception of their inability to manage student behaviors and disruptions is associated with teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, and lowered professional confidence (Bardach et al., 2022). Alternately, their perception of their ability to prevent misbehavior and manage disruptive behavior challenges is a significant factor in preventing burnout (Bardach et al., 2022). Schools are attempting to address these issues by

establishing school-wide behavior management systems in the hope of lessening exclusionary practices (such as suspension and expulsion), strengthening the school culture and climate, and strengthening student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018). These school-wide systems are not without challenges (Gregory & Evans, 2020). In some cases, there is limited time for training and professional development, unclear expectations communicated by school leadership, and competing educational initiatives (Bastable et al., 2021; Gregory & Evans, 2020). All of these factors have negatively impacted the school-wide adoption of positive behavior support.

Next to students, teachers are most directly impacted by behavior support systems (Mérida-López et al., 2020). Teachers are the people ultimately responsible for managing the plan that was established by the schools. It is integral that schools listen to those most impacted by systems and structures created in our schools in an effort to understand the full scope of positive behavior support systems. Schools must continue to solicit input and listen to teachers to understand their perceptions of issues and ensure that they feel supported by school leaders (Mérida-López et al., 2020). Not doing so is an injustice to those who ultimately matter most--our children.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand elementary school teachers' experiences and their perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. More specifically, this study seeks to determine how elementary school teachers feel these positive systems affect exclusionary practices, classroom culture and climate, as well as student-teacher relationships. Two factors commonly associated with positive behavior support systems not working as planned are a lack of administrative support and professional

development resources (Yeung et al., 2016). The research related to positive behavior support systems does not relate to long-term sustainability or the degree to which these systems are implemented as intended (Yeung et al., 2016). Understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions will help schools improve practices related to the effect of behavior support systems, particularly around continued professional development practices and ways to ensure educators feel supported. This study will contribute to the current body of knowledge so schools can continue to find ways to keep teachers educated and feeling motivated enough to continue to perform the essential duty of their job: educating our students.

Research Questions

The following questions steered the study and were designed to elicit stories of the experiences of elementary school teachers. The central research question for the study is as follows:

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be the impact of positive behavior management systems in terms of supporting teachers, students, and families?

The following sub-questions were used to support the central question: As part of the interview, the following questions were asked of elementary school educators:

Sub Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

Sub Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

Sub Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

An established qualitative methodology was used to interview these elementary school educators to garner an understanding of their experiences with positive behavior support systems.

Methodology

The design of this study is an intensive case study. Case studies are among the most common qualitative designs (Trochim et al., 2016). To strengthen the external validity of the study, the researcher went through a thorough sample selection process. Additionally, the researcher attempted to keep the same number of subjects throughout the study.

For this qualitative study, elementary school educators in North Carolina were selected for interviews, observations, and artifact collection with the researcher. Findings from the research were used to better understand the impact of positive behavior management systems after their school-wide establishment. The research allowed the researcher to gain insight from the selected elementary school teachers to best understand their experiences with school-wide positive behavior support systems. Expert sampling is a type of purposeful sampling that is used when there needs to be more data on the topic of research (Trochim et al., 2016). The interview questions asked were related to the perceived impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems in elementary schools. When applicable, teachers were asked to share examples of specific experiences to support their answers. The observation and artifacts allowed the researcher to see how teachers proactively and reactively support student behaviors using school-wide positive support systems. The instruments used in this study are demographic survey questions, one-on-one interviews, observations, and artifact collection in which a group of elementary school teachers will be asked to participate as experts in the field of early childhood education. These teachers work in an elementary school that has established school-wide positive behavior support systems.

Significance and Rationale of the Study

This study is important because the teacher's voice is critical during this time when many educators are open and honest about their frustrations related to behavior support systems. Teachers are the ones enacting behavior systems, and they are the ones whom we need to listen to know what steps we need to take. Previous research ignores elementary teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. It is argued that in order to maintain the positive effects of these behavior support systems, there needs to be an emphasis on administrative support and ongoing professional development that is of a high caliber (Yeung et al., 2016).

There are many studies (Yeung et al., 2016) related to positive behavior support systems and their implementation in the school; however, fewer studies focus on elementary schools and teachers' perceptions. Additionally, these studies are more focused on the initial success of its implementation (Yeung et al., 2016). Given the developmental differences between elementary, middle, and high school-aged children, it is inappropriate to assume that findings from middle and high school studies would directly apply to elementary school classrooms. To that end, this study specifically examined teachers' perceptions of the perceived impact of positive behavior support systems in elementary schools. This study will strengthen the knowledge base for educational leaders, who are ultimately responsible for ensuring that teachers have the right tools in place to meet the goal of education. Drawing directly from teachers, school administrators and other educational leaders may be able to identify ways to support teachers and students to slow or reduce teacher attrition. Additionally, school administrators and leaders will be able to use the findings of this study to inform best practices for creating a school climate and culture that supports students. Teachers having a voice in how schools can support teachers through school-

wide positive behavior support systems will only strengthen collective efficacy, which is their shared belief that they can better meet students' behavioral support needs (Peng Liu, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

In this study of teachers' perceived impact of the school-wide implementation of positive behavior support systems, the researcher conducted a qualitative study using expert sampling research methods. As a qualitative researcher, the researcher was intentional about having an instrument of questions that formulates data that can be used to make sound and informed decisions around positive behavior support systems. The researcher located and enlisted the complete cooperation of participants. The researcher was mindful to select a sample of elementary educators, given their relationships with several educators. The researcher communicated the importance of this research and the implications of how the information gleaned from this research can inform best practices for schools and educators. Additionally, the researcher followed the order of questions, asked every question, and asked for elaboration and clarification as needed. The researcher will elevate the research on teachers' perspectives. As an open-minded researcher, the researcher was honest about confronting the biases and assumptions that exist and how they can skew data taken from a qualitative study. This avoided leading the participant to a desired answer or response.

In this study, the researcher candidly and informatively inquired about objections and concerns that may be raised by participants. The researcher worked cyclically with the data collected, identifying trends and constructing deeper meaning. This means that the researcher must judge the quality of the information received. As a former elementary classroom educator and current Dean who manages student behavior support, the researcher is mindful of reactivity, positionality, and interpretation of data based on opinions, values, and experiences.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study includes researcher bias. This is when the researcher consciously or unconsciously focuses on data that supports the researcher's existing beliefs and expectations (Trochim et al., 2016). The researcher was mindful of inductive reasoning by looking for meaning in the participants' responses. The researcher assumed that the selected participants provided open and honest feedback. This feedback is not masked as a sense of frustration related to different factors and responsibilities of their teaching positions -- such as teacher pay or additional job responsibilities. The researcher assumed that the selected participants are participating in hopes of helping schools best meet the needs of students.

Another limitation is generalizability, given that the sample population was limited to one state in the country. The sampling was limited to elementary school educators in one state in the United States, North Carolina, during the 2023-2024 school year. Schools across the country are experiencing, defining, and collecting data regarding behavior challenges differently. Additionally, the schools may provide different levels of support regarding behavior management and behavior support systems. This support could include professional development and administrative support for teachers and students. The sample of educators included ___ participants in public and private elementary schools across the state. The experiences of teachers in various schools provided a variety of data. However, the smaller sample size of randomly selected educators may lead to difficulty in locating significant trends or relationships in the data collected.

This topic was selected because of the researcher's experience with positive behavior support systems during her time as an elementary teacher. As a former classroom teacher who is now an administrative one who handles disciplinary matters, the researcher understands the

importance of listening to teachers' voices. Their perceived impact of behavior management systems will help schools evaluate the use of these systems and their effectiveness in meeting the behavioral needs of students in elementary classrooms. Additionally, the data gathered will help schools prepare teachers for behavioral challenges through needed professional development and clear protocols and procedures. Elementary teachers were selected because elementary schools set the foundation for the youngest learners.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used operationally in this study:

Challenging behavior: behavior that disrupts the learning of self and others and is not aligned with classroom or school rules and policy (Caldarella et al., 2021; Reno et al., 2017; Wink, 2021). These behaviors can include but are not limited to injury to self or others, destruction of property, screaming, physical altercation, not following directions, and other antisocial behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2021). This behavior has a negative impact on the student and those in the environment, including the teacher and peers. The terms “disruptive behavior” and “problem behavior” are also used interchangeably throughout the study.

Classroom management: the process for schools and teachers to foster an environment conducive to learning (Dillon et al., 2019; Kowalski & Froiland, 2020). This can be a system that emphasizes rewards and consequences for behavior (Kowalski & Froiland, 2020).

Consequence: the reaction or event that occurs immediately following a specific behavior. (Fadus et al., 2021; Kowalski & Froiland, 2020)

Discipline: the process by which a consequence immediately follows a behavior decreases the likelihood of that behavior occurring in the future (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Fite et al., 2017; Reno et al., 2017). In the context of this study, discipline is handled

by an authority figure, including a teacher, administrator, or parent. Discipline can come in the form of a reprimand, often intended as a form of punishment (Caldarella et al., 2021)

Disparity: the condition of inequality from one group to another (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Fadus et al., 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2019; Lace et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Disparity refers to unequal treatment that results in different conditions and outcomes (Jacobsen et al., 2019; Lace et al., 2019; Young et al., 2018). In the case of this study, disparity relates to the treatment of different groups of children based on any factor of their identity.

Exclusionary discipline practice: an action that results in a student being out of their regular educational setting for a determined period of time (Fadus et al., 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2019; Lace et al., 2019; Morgan, 2021; Young et al., 2018). This could result in the student being home, in detention, juvenile detention center, or serving an in-school suspension in an alternative setting (Jacobsen et al., 2019; Young et al., 2018).

Positive behavior support: a system meant to transform classroom environments in a way that lessens or eliminates challenging behaviors (Lee & Gage, 2020; Stormont, 2008). It also teaches students self-regulation skills which also lessens challenging behaviors in the classroom (Dillon et al., 2019; Stormont, 2008).

Positive reinforcement: a type of reinforcement where the behavior is followed by the presentation of a stimulus (Dillon et al., 2019; Lee & Gage, 2020). This increases the future probability of that behavior in the future.

Proactive: the knowledge of skills, tools, and resources to lessen or prevent problem behavior from happening in the future (Fite et al., 2017).

Restorative practice: a framework for creating and nurturing a relationally driven school community (Kervick et al., 2020). Across the United States, schools are using restorative practices to lessen or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices and improve the school climate (Kervick et al., 2020). The terms “culturally restorative discipline” and “restorative discipline” are also used interchangeably throughout the study.

School climate: School climate is composed of the experiences of those within the school. This includes the learning environment, relationships, and collective beliefs within the school (Lopez et al., 2022). It can also be described as the experience or feeling of the school as those who are with it. School climate is a building block of a school’s culture (Lopez et al., 2022).

School culture: School culture is the mission, values, unwritten and written norms, traditions, rules, and expectations of the school (Lopez et al., 2022; Reno et al., 2017). The terms school culture and school climate are often used interchangeably. However, climate relates to the perception-based attitude or mood that impacts how people feel about the school, while culture is the grounded beliefs and shared values of the school that impacts how people act in the school (Lopez et al., 2022).

School-to-prison pipeline: a national trend where students with a history of challenging behavior and pattern of exclusionary discipline practices transition into the juvenile and potentially criminal legal system (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018).

School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS): a multi-tiered behavior support framework that is designed to lessen or eliminate or lessen challenging behaviors while also increasing prosocial behaviors (Lee & Gage, 2020). This school-wide approach is implemented by the school, and resources are shared school-wide.

Student-teacher relationship: the regular interactions between the student and teacher in the classroom (Harvey et al., 2022; Reno et al., 2017; Wink et al., 2021). Student-teacher relationships are marked by three characteristics: closeness (degree of relational warmth and openness), conflict (unpleasant interactions), and dependency (need for reassurance) (Harvey et al., 2022).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 outlines background information on challenges related to student behavior. It makes a case for why schools should move toward positive behavior support systems. The subsequent Chapter 2 outlines the current research around student behavior, the disparity in discipline practices, and the history and impact of positive behavior support. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, research design, and procedures for this qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. Chapter 4 details a complete analysis of the information received from demographic surveys, teacher interviews, teacher observations, and artifact collection and provides a written summary of the information received through educator interviews. This section is scheduled for completion in December 2023. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation and discussion of the results related to the research questions related to the impact of positive behavior support systems. This section is scheduled for completion by March 2024.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

All students deserve access to safe, supportive schools and classrooms. Discrimination and the use of exclusionary discipline can negatively impact students' abilities to learn, grow, and thrive. We're seeking information so that . . . schools and educators confront disparities and create inclusive school environments that set all students up for success.

-United States Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, 2021

Introduction

All children deserve equitable access to classrooms and schools that are affable, supportive, and safe (Sulak, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Educators hold part of the great responsibility of equipping our students with the tools needed to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. A positive school climate promotes student achievement, while an adverse school climate, defined by a surfeit of behavior challenges and disciplinary issues, can devitalize student achievement (Sulak, 2016). To meet the needs of the whole child, the environment must set the students up for success by meeting their academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs (Sulak, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). In an ideal educational system, each student would thrive as a wholehearted learner and contributor to society. This ideal system would have zero disruption to the environment constructed to help our students thrive. Standing in the way of the ideal classroom environment is a variety of factors -- from lack of resources to high-stakes testing pressure to challenging behavior. Research on school climate shows a relationship between academic achievement and the classroom environment (Sulak, 2016).

Many teachers report that managing students' disruptive and other problem behaviors in the classroom is a challenge within itself and has been a source of concern for decades (Bastable et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021). Sulak (2016) found a correlation between behavior and student achievement. Attempts to effectively and efficiently disrupt these challenging behaviors interfere with teachers' time and attention spent on the true mission of education (Sulak, 2016). A 2005 study revealed that teachers' single most common request is related to resources on student behavior and effective classroom management (Rose & Gallup, 2005). In a recent study, 60% of teachers listed behavior as the main reason they are considering leaving the teaching profession altogether (PDK Poll, 2019). The Institute of Educational Sciences (2022) reported that during the 2021-22 school year, teachers reported an increase in the following student behaviors:

- Classroom disruptions from student misconduct - 56%
- Acts of disrespect toward teachers and other school employees - 48%

Challenges around discipline and behavior support remain ubiquitous, affecting many students, educators, and communities across the United States (Bastable et al., 2021). Fifty-one percent of teachers reported that they need support from schools on training for classroom management and behavior support strategies (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2022). To aid in this effort, schools have worked to create cohesive systems to manage disruptive behaviors (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Many of these school-wide systems are established to positively and proactively support behaviors. Research-based evidence stated that positive behavior support and interventions can significantly decrease disparities related to discipline (Bradshaw et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). However, implementing these school-wide approaches has been challenging (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Wink et al., 2021). Despite a wide range of tools and

strategies provided to teachers, meeting the needs of students with challenging behaviors still needs to be improved (Wink et al., 2021).

Despite the challenges that may impede learning, educators must fundamentally believe in the rudimentary goodness of children. Each student enters the classroom with a unique identity, influenced by a variety of background factors (Vygotsky, 1978). Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory sees cognitive functions as being affected by a person's beliefs, values, and tools of the culture in which a person develops and are socially and culturally determined (Stewart, 2022). Students bring these background connections to the classroom each day. A teacher's ability to empathize with students' experiences and backgrounds can impact how they approach a student's challenging behavior (Wink et al., 2021). Teachers who feel more competent or those with better coping and stress management skills are better able to respond to students with challenging behavior concerns (Wink et al., 2021).

Student behavior can also influence academic achievement (Sulak, 2016). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is used to examine student behavior's impact. This will be used as a lens to reflect on student behavior and how it influences teacher relationships. Children are influenced by their relationships with their teachers (Archambault et al., 2017). The relationships influence student behavior and overall school engagement (Archambault et al., 2017). Engagement is students' investment in their learning. Archambault et al. (2017) linked early student engagement with student perseverance and success.

The first section of the literature review covers the theory that provided the framework for this study: Sociocultural Theory. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is used to look at the impact of students' behavior on their relationships with teachers. The second section of the literature review highlights the role that school-wide positive behavior support systems play in

three overarching areas: teacher-student relationships, lessening or eliminating exclusionary practices, and improving the school culture and climate. Building a solid foundation and relationships with others helps our students thrive in our schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is used to examine the impact of students' environment on their behavior. This was used as a lens for its effect on student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher relationships are one of the three areas of teacher perceptions that are researched in this section. Additionally, B. F. Skinner's behaviorism theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for school-wide positive behavior support systems and the establishment of a positive classroom culture and climate. By leveraging behaviorist principles, such as reinforcement, clear expectations, data-driven decision-making, and consistency, educators can create environments where students are motivated to exhibit positive behaviors and where disruptive behaviors are addressed effectively (Evertson et al., 2021).

Sociocultural Theory

The Sociocultural Theory developed from the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing a student's higher-order functions. According to Vygotsky, a student's learning directly connects to how that student interacts with others. The Sociocultural Theory of teaching and learning is a theory that is widely recognized in education and psychology (Stewart, 2022). Considered a primary developmental theory, the work of Vygotsky has become a foundation for work on children's cognitive development. This theory sees development as a socially influenced

process through which children acquire cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving abilities through interactions with others. Three rudimentary concepts make up the Sociocultural Theory:

- Social interaction emulates learning,
- language is an integral tool in the learning process, and
- learning takes place within the Zone of Proximal Development (Miller, 2011).

This study focused on the role of social interactions. Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, also known as social constructivism, states that children learn through interactions with others (Stewart, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theorists believe that learning is a social process. They also believe that much of our development is formed through our observations with others in our environment whose development is further advanced than our own, such as parents and teachers. Vygotsky's goal in research was to create an approach to understanding the human psychological process (Miller, 2011). Although his career was shortened due to a disease that eventually ended his life, his influence on the thinking behind cognitive development carries on. Vygotsky's work has influenced the work of philosophers such as Friedrich Engels, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Karl Marx (Miller, 2011).

A child's social interactions play an essential role in their learning, particularly in their higher-order thinking skills (Stewart, 2022). Sociocultural theorists believe that children are born with basic biological constraints that are shaped by social interactions. These interactions form meanings that are created by the child. Development flows from social interactions as cultural meanings are shared by the group and adopted by the individual. This development brings about changes in both the environment and the individual. Essentially, this theory states that the ways in which people interact with one another and their environment shape their cognitive development. Vygotsky shared, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears

twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

Therefore, a child internalizes those experiences and develops new problem-solving strategies and knowledge. An essential term in Sociocultural Theory is internalization, which is how we learn through observations and interactions (Stewart, 2022). Unlike fellow philosopher Jean Piaget, who was of the opinion that a child’s development precedes learning, Vygotsky believed that prosocial learning comes before a child’s development (McLeod, 2022).

Sociocultural Theory helps one to understand the need for communication and relationships between the participants. A person’s environment influences their cognitive development, including their behavior and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Stewart (2022), a person’s interactions, beliefs, background, experiences, perceptions, and worldviews are all factors that are a part of the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) believed that cognitive development depends on where one is within the Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). The social activity between a child and their teacher or parents helps to lay the foundation for how that child will think and do in subsequent situations. According to Stewart (2022), a person’s interactions, beliefs, background, experiences, perceptions, and worldviews are all factors that are a part of the learning process. These factors shape teacher-student relationships as well as how teachers and students make sense of the world around them. Essentially, students learn through their relationships with people who are close to them, such as their teachers and families. Vygotsky shared that learning first happens through these interactions as students internalize these social behaviors (Stewart, 2022).

Sociocultural Theory plays a key role in understanding teacher relationships and student learning (Stewart, 2022). The Sociocultural Theory touches on the importance of relationships

and how these relationships help students learn. When looking at behavior management, the relationship between the teacher and the student is pivotal in creating a classroom environment. A student learns to make sound decisions by interacting with a teacher who models that behavior and forms a positive relationship with students. Teachers have a better time reaching their students once relationships are formed. In order to form these relationships, teachers need an understanding of their students' backgrounds (Stewart). Increased cultural awareness produced more positive behavior management (Stewart). In a safe environment, students have a better school experience, thereby lessening the opportunity for exclusionary disciplinary practices.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism is credited to several key figures, but B. F. Skinner and John B. Watson are two of the most widely known contributors to the research. Behaviorism is a psychological theory that focuses on observable behaviors and their connection to environmental stimuli and responses (Skinner, 1938; Watson, 1913). Watson is often regarded as the founder of behaviorism after the publishing of "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It" in 1913. In this article, Watson proposed that psychology should focus more on observable behaviors and less on mental processes (Watson, 1913). This work was soon followed by fellow researcher Skinner, who in a 1938 book, shared findings of operant conditioning, which highlighted the role of reinforcement and punishment in the shaping of behavior. The behaviorism theory has significant implications for understanding and shaping student behavior in educational settings. Behaviorism claims that all behaviors, including those of students, are learned through interactions with the environment, and these behaviors can be modified or reinforced through various techniques and strategies (Evertson et al., 2021).

In the context of education, behaviorism connects to student behavior and learning outcomes. One fundamental concept of behaviorism is reinforcement (Skinner, 1938; Watson, 1913). This involves providing positive or negative consequences for student behaviors to strengthen or weaken them. For example, a teacher may use positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, to encourage desirable behaviors like active participation in class or completing assignments on time. Conversely, negative consequences, like loss of privileges or extra assignments, may be employed to discourage undesirable behaviors such as disruptive classroom conduct.

Another key aspect of behaviorism in education is the concept of operant conditioning. In summary, operant conditioning is a learning process that focuses on how behaviors are shaped and modified through the consequences that follow them, whether through reinforcement, punishment, or extinction (Skinner, 1938). It plays a significant role in understanding and influencing human and animal behavior. In summary, this theory hypothesizes that behaviors can be shaped through a system of rewards and punishments (Evertson et al., 2021; Skinner, 1938). Teachers often utilize operant conditioning principles by implementing classroom management strategies, such as token systems, where students earn tokens for good behavior that can later be exchanged for rewards (Evertson et al., 2021). This approach helps students associate positive outcomes with desirable behaviors, motivating them to repeat those behaviors. Additionally, behaviorism emphasizes the importance of clear and specific expectations for student behavior. Teachers must establish direct expectations and guidelines, thereby providing students with a clear understanding of what is expected. When students know what behaviors are desired and what consequences they may face for inappropriate actions, they are more likely to exhibit the desired behaviors (Evertson et al., 2021). It is important to note that behaviorism has its critics

and limitations, as it may oversimplify the complexity of human behavior and neglect internal cognitive processes.

Behaviorism theory plays a significant role in the development and implementation of school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) systems and the creation of a positive classroom culture and climate. Behaviorism's operant conditioning principles are at the core of SWPBS, aiming to reinforce positive behaviors among students by using rewards and consequences effectively (Evertson et al., 2021). In behaviorism, this process aligns with the idea of shaping behavior through reinforcement. SWPBS establishes clear and specific behavioral expectations for all students across the school (Evertson et al., 2021). Behaviorism also encourages the use of positive reinforcement to increase desired behaviors. In the classroom, teachers can create a positive culture by acknowledging and rewarding students for following class rules, participating actively, and demonstrating respectful behavior (Evertson et al., 2021). In a positive classroom culture, teachers consistently apply these principles to maintain a respectful and orderly environment. Teachers use behaviorist principles to teach students appropriate behaviors and provide opportunities for practice. While behaviorism traditionally focuses on individual behaviors, it can be extended to consider social learning. In a classroom setting, students may observe and learn from their peers, reinforcing the importance of positive behavior and contributing to a positive classroom culture (Evertson et al., 2021).

Behavior Support

Disciplinary Practices

Merriam-Webster defines discipline as “the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience” (n.d). The method of discipline has a longstanding negative connotation and is commonly associated with strict practices such as

control and punishment (Lawrence et al., 2019). Discipline systems have historically punished negative behaviors by eliminating or lessening them and rewarded those positive behaviors they want to encourage or continue (Clark, 2018). Neiman et al. (2014) found that discipline teaches children that actions have consequences, helps to keep them from harm, and promotes healthy development. Discipline guides each one to be an effective and productive citizen in an ever-changing world. The best approach to discipline is yet to be discovered. Discipline through behavior support is fundamental to our overall well-being, particularly when imparting knowledge and skill. Fadus et al. (2021) found that disciplinary actions can impede typical childhood development if not done with fidelity. These practices make students feel further disconnected from the school, particularly when students are repeatedly suspended (Schiff, 2018). Such actions can lead to irretrievable academic foundering, contemplation of dropping out, and significant emotional and psychological distress (Fadus et al., 2021; Schiff, 2018).

Teachers report that as many as one in five students display disruptive and aggressive behavior to which some type of intervention is needed (Stormont et al., 2008). Additionally, teachers in elementary schools report that up to 40% of their students show at least one behavior challenge that impacts their social skills, such as self-management, problem-solving, and getting along with peers (Stormont et al.). There is growing concern about disorderly and disruptive behaviors in schools across the country (Stormont et al.

Fite et al. (2017) noted that many students display reactive aggression (an aggressive behavior in response to a perceived threat) as the most common form of aggression. Reactive aggression is linked to undesirable emotional and behavioral actions (Fite et al., 2017).

Interventions that focus on emotional and behavioral regulation, such as problem-solving and relaxation training, are linked to less aggressive behaviors in children. School-wide targeted

behavioral support at an early age would support lessening these behaviors (Fite et al., 2017).

Schools utilize research-based strategies to address social behavior concerns such as:

- Parent education programs that promote positive, active interaction in child's education
- Strong academic programs that ensure student success, promote positive self-esteem, and reduce opportunities for behavior concerns
- Direct social skill instruction that promotes social competence when interacting with peers and adults
- A comprehensive schoolwide plan of strategies to proactively support behavior management (Stormont et al., 2008).

There is concurrence in the educational literature and research that early student engagement is an integral factor in a student's school perseverance and success (Archambault et al., 2017). Families, educators, and schools of elementary-aged children have a window of opportunity to impact a child's social behavior (Stormont et al., 2008). Students' investment in their overall education, academic learning, and school activities decreases with age, particularly among students who present higher levels of challenging behaviors (Archambault et al., 2017). Historically, educators have relied more on traditional disciplinary practices that punish the problem behavior in hopes of lessening or eliminating it. However, these practices tend to have the opposite effect and lead to negative reinforcement, particularly among students with regular and consistent behavior challenges (Stormont et al., 2008). To increase students' academic success and engagement in the classroom and school, schools should look at nonpunitive, positive disciplinary approaches. This includes interventions, social-emotional learning, and supports that reward positive behavior, reframe misbehavior, and establish protocols to redirect

students to make better choices around behavior (Lustick, 2020). Social and emotional learning helps students learn to explicitly manage their behavior and be more effective communicators with their teachers and peers (Lustick, 2020).

Disparities in Disciplinary Practices

Jacobsen et al. (2019) stated that disparities in disciplinary practices are largely attributed to differences in children's school and home environments rather than to actual behavior problems. There is a steady trend of disproportionate actions and effects of discipline on Black children, multiracial Black children, and children living in homes with single parents (Fadus, 2021; Schiff, 2017). There is a history of disparity in Black students being at a higher risk of being expelled, dating as early as the 1970s (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Black preschoolers received one or more suspensions at a rate over 3.6 times as many of the total preschool population (Morgan, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). American Indian, Alaska Native, and multiracial preschoolers were suspended one and a half times more than the total preschool population (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Despite their age, in the 2017-18 school year, over 300 preschool children were expelled; most of these students were Black or served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Despite legislation such as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and district and school-wide efforts to develop student behavior management models, when students of color and students living in poverty formally begin schooling, they are continual victims of what is known as cultural discontinuity (Reno et al., 2017). Cultural discontinuity is a lack of connection between their home and school's culture, values, expectations, and behaviors that contribute to their academic and behavioral inadequacies (Reno et al.).

Young et al. (2018) also discovered a clear correlation between the school-to-prison pipeline and the discipline gap. The discipline gap shows the historical disparities between White and Black students that create disadvantages for Black students and advantages for White students. Evidence of this discipline gap was first documented in 1975 by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) report, which revealed the disparities in discipline practices within schools in the United States (Young et al., 2018). Even when involved in the same type of disciplinary infractions, Black students and students with disabilities continue to be on the receiving end of exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion at more than twice the rate of other students (Lace et al., 2019). Black students make up 18% of the student population in K-12 public schools in the U.S., but 35% of the total number of students suspended (Lustick, 2020). In a study by Lace et al. (2019), almost every district in the state being studied had at least one school with disproportionate discipline removal rates, despite the school's makeup (Lace et al., 2019). A 2021 study found that the root causes of discipline disparity include lack of teacher preparation needed to teach students in urban populations, the lack of teacher support from the school and families, and the routine use of school-wide zero-tolerance exclusionary disciplinary practices (Morgan, 2021).

History and Progression of Positive Behavior Support

Recognizing the imbalance and misuse of exclusionary discipline practices, schools are implementing school-wide positive behavior management systems (Schiff, 2018). These systems are set up to recognize students for meeting behavioral expectations and promote positive and fruitful relationships between students, peers, and teachers (Lloyd et al., 2022). Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) was established in the 1980s to further aid children with extreme behavioral challenges (Reno et al., 2017). In 1992, Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop

declared the increasing trend of behaviors tied to violence and aggressive acts as an epidemic (Stormont et al., 2008). In 1997, PBIS was adapted to include all students to improve behavioral support and interventions (Reno et al., 2017). The year 2002 marked the establishment of the PBIS Center. This collaboration with the federal government was orchestrated to support federal and state capacity to maintain multi-tiered behavioral frameworks such as School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (George, 2018). By 2009, more than 9,000 schools across 44 states began to implement three-tiered positive behavior support systems (Reno et al., 2017).

In 2014, the United States Department of Justice and Education's Office of Safe Schools assigned money to the School Climate Transformation grants that were handed down to state and local educational agencies (George, 2018; Lustick, 2020). These grants were awarded to 38 states and tasked leadership teams to provide training on systems for student behavioral support, requiring schools to reduce suspension rates and shift to positive behavior initiatives (George, 2018; Lustick, 2020). If there was not a reduction in racial disproportionality in disciplinary actions, schools could have faced litigation (Lustick, 2020). By 2017, the PBIS Center disclosed that as many as 25,000 schools throughout the United States committed to taking a more positive and proactive perspective to address the behavior of all students using SWPBIS (OSEP PBIS Center, 2017).

Additional federal drives support the restructuring of behavior support systems, like the 2016 Department of Education's Rethinking Discipline Initiative and the School-Justice Partnership Initiative. The Rethinking Initiative was formulated as an effort to get schools to rethink discipline to support school climates that are guarded, encouraging, and favorable to conditions of teaching and learning by focusing on the diverse social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. To do this, the U.S. Department of Education tasked school leaders with

researching alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The School Justice Partnership Initiative (SJP) is a gathering of community partners—schools, law enforcement, and court officials who advance and enforce constructive processes to tackle behavioral challenges in schools and the community to prevent further measures such as the juvenile court system (NC Courts Fact Sheet, 2021). Statistics show that a student’s early encounter with juvenile court systems triples the likelihood of landing back in the same system as an older student or adult (NC Courts Fact Sheet 2021). Therefore, School Justice Partnership partners with schools across the country and regularly assess ways to decrease court encounters with students in an effort to keep them in schools and away from suspensions, expulsions, and other exclusionary disciplinary structures (NC Courts Fact Sheet, 2021).

Today’s Behavior Support Practices

According to Lee and Gage (2020), many schools are implementing behavior support systems to disrupt the stigma of punishment associated with the discipline. These systems focus on increasing positive prosocial habits and behaviors while reducing negative ones. If teachers are to teach students to be nonviolent and aggressive, they must model the desired behaviors and responses in hopes of supporting and increasing appropriate social behavior that reinforces positive behavior (Lee & Gage, 2020). To look at what is included in a positive behavior management system, one must first look at what it takes to successfully work through a behavior challenge. Success is tied to having models of appropriate behavior, regular behavior monitoring, feedback and redirecting, and opportunities for social and academic success (Stormont et al., 2008).

Each day, children come to school to learn, make friends, and figure out their sense of belonging in a changing world. At the same time, the expectations and demands of schools are

increasing (James & Oplatka, 2015). Schools are expected to be safe and caring learning environments while meeting the needs of all students and encouraging students to take educational risks (James & Oplatka, 2015). In addition to schools being responsible for providing core academic instruction, they also have a critical role in managing and supporting student behavior (Dillon et al., 2019). To manage discipline positively and productively, schools are creating school-wide behavior support systems. The notion of behavior support paired with elementary-age children has a variety of theories, practices, impacts, and short and long-term effects. As young children transition to elementary school, they begin to get a stronger sense of right and wrong and have a basic understanding of the practical consequences of not following directions and rules. Behavior support systems are designed to reduce discipline concerns and create a positive school culture (Reno et al., 2017). The goal of behavior support is “often to maximize academic instruction time, as time engaged is a contributing factor of academic success” (Dillon et al., 2019, p. 18).

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

A vital acknowledgment when talking about meeting students' needs is that they require different levels of support to be successful in all areas, including behavior (Wienen et al., 2019). In the 1970s, School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) was developed to strengthen students' behavior and academic needs by addressing the organization of the culture of a school (Wienen et al., 2019). SWPBS is a practice with great potential to reduce exclusionary discipline, improve the school's culture and climate, and strengthen relationships within school communities (Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Stormont et al., 2008). School-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) is a comprehensive process focused on modeling and instructing positive social behavior through research and a data-based system (Stormont et al.,

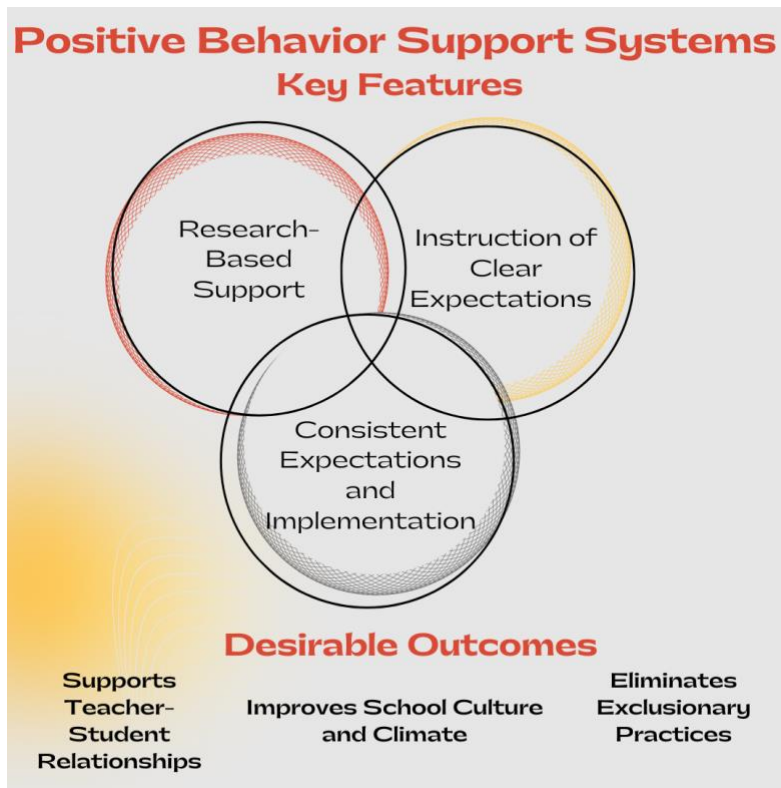
2008). The principles of positive reinforcement show that when a behavior is followed by an event that the individual finds reinforcing, they are more likely to continue that behavior in the future (Horner et al., 2010; Stormont et al., 2008). Twenty-plus years of research imply that schoolwide PBIS has a positive impact on students' behavioral and academic success and improves the culture and climate of schools (Lee & Gage, 2020).

The key attributes of building a school-wide positive behavior system are:

- The formation of a support team who uses data to inform research-based levels of support,
- Clear school-wide expectations with an instructional focus on correcting behavior taught by educators,
- Consistent expectations and implementation by all adults in the school community with systematic and consistent consequences (Colvin & Fernandez, 2020; OSEP PBIS Center, 2017; Stormont et al., 2008; Wienen et al., 2019).

Figure 1

Positive Behavior Support Systems Key Features and Desirable Outcomes



Note. Shows the relationship between the key features of positive behavior support and the intended outcomes of school-wide positive behavior support systems.

To dive deeply into positive behavior support systems and their perceived effects, one must first have a working knowledge of the foundational principles of how and why these systems were established. The framework for many positive behavior support systems is founded on the behaviorist principle of theorists like John B. Watson (Kervick et al., 2020). Those who follow the behaviorist theory and want to see a behavior change believe that rewards are essential to continue desired behaviors and lessen undesirable behaviors (Clark, 2018). Positive behavior support systems have emerged as a practice with great potential to reinforce three areas: lower exclusionary discipline rates, build and sustain a positive school culture and climate, and

support and strengthen teacher-student relationships (Kervick et al., 2020). Based on this information, the following questions are at the core of the research on positive discipline practices in elementary schools:

- How do positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?
- How do positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?
- How do positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?
(OSEP PBIS Center, 2017).

The multitiered behavioral support framework, known as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), is widely implemented in elementary schools to have three intended outcomes: create a positive environment, promote high levels of student learning, and improve student behavior (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010). While PBIS is not a formal curriculum, Lee and Gage (2020) defined positive behavior systems as a three-tiered intervention-based support framework used as a preventative and proactive approach to lessening and disrupting problem behaviors. PBIS also works to increase prosocial behaviors in students that help them to achieve social and academic success (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Lee & Gage, 2020). It is gaining popularity in schools, and researchers are assessing its effectiveness (Lee & Gage, 2020).

Hannigan and Hauser (2015) found PBIS to be the application of a systems-based approach to magnify the capacity of the school and family to create an environment where teachers can ensure that learning can occur. The framework of PBIS is set to manage student behavior while also increasing their academic motivation and autonomy. PBIS allows teachers to communicate classroom expectations with successful implementation while providing rewards

for students who meet those expectations (Reno et al., 2017). It also establishes a consistent strategy for handling discipline concerns (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Reno et al., 2017). PBIS program developers provide schools with the leadership training needed to establish the school's capacity for effective interventions and implementation, decision-making data, professional development, and coaching to promote a safe school environment for students (Horner et al., 2010).

PBIS Tiers of Support

PBIS tiers provide three levels of behavior support that are based on the student's needs: primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010). All students get the basic level of preventive behavior support, and moving up in tiers increases the intensity of the intervention to align with the student's needs (Horner et al., 2010). Tier one is the primary tier of intervention in which school-wide behavioral expectations are directly defined and taught, meeting the needs of 80% of students (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010; Stormont et al., 2008). This tier involves the entire school community, and there is a continuum of consequences of behavior challenges. Systems may include a reward system or acknowledgment of appropriate behaviors (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010).

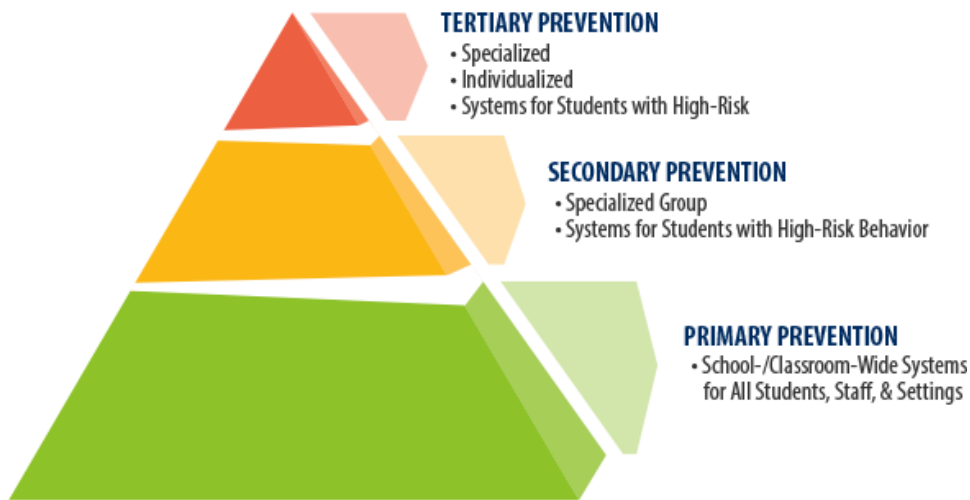
The secondary tier (tier two) focuses on 10-15% of students as it increases the structure, feedback, and monitoring of students who are at risk for repeated behavior concerns or are non-responsive to the primary level of support (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010; Stormont et al., 2008). This tier includes an intervention team and coordinator who increases data collection and home and school communication (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010). Examples of tier-two interventions include check-in/check-out, schedules, think time,

closer supervision, and social skills groups, in addition to the primary interventions (Horner et al., 2010).

Tier three supports (tertiary intervention) also include a team and coordinator who develop an individualized intervention plan for students with repeated behavior challenges with limited to no success in the lessening of these behaviors (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015; Horner et al., 2010). These supports require a significant investment of time and resources, including an elevated level of expertise in guiding the plan implementation to meet the needs of the 5-7% of students who require a significantly higher level of support (Horner et al., 2010; Stormont et al., 2008). Additionally, a functional behavior assessment (FBA) is completed to look at the environmental factors in the classroom and school that may influence a student's behavior to create a comprehensive support plan (Horner et al., 2010).

Figure 2

PBIS Tiers of Support



Note. This figure shows the three-tier positive behavior interventions of Support used in schools. (KOI Education, 2022)

Many studies have been conducted to assess PBIS implementation's level of success. However, the results of its effectiveness vary. Lee and Gage (2020) administered a study to evaluate the effects of PBIS on students, teachers, staff, and the greater school community. Close to 9,000 schools were included in this research, most of which were elementary schools. Overall, PBIS implementation showed that there is a substantial decrease in school discipline matters and an increase in academic achievement (Lee & Gage, 2020). This meta-analysis study showed that consistent implementation of this system positively affects schools and students, mainly when it is done with fidelity (Lee & Gage, 2020). Additionally, the study showed that PBIS is also tied to academic achievement. Therefore, the PBIS framework could be considered an effective intervention system for school-wide implementation when implementers follow quality criteria and regularly monitor their progress (Hannigan & Houser, 2015).

To ensure that PBIS is implemented with fidelity, PBIS developers state that schools should place emphasis on five elements that are interrelated: equity, systems, data, practices, and outcomes (OSEP PBIS Center, 2017). This requires a focus on school culture and equity. Teams must work with school community members, including students and families, to promote consistent and high expectations for all students. This system of equity includes supporting the educator's implementation, meeting the various needs of students, and using data to ensure student success (OSEP PBIS Center). The foundational system includes ensuring that the structure, training, and coaching are in place to support educators (OSEP PBIS Center). The data component involves schools ensuring that a wide range of data is used to inform best practices. Additionally, these data should be regularly monitored and evaluated (OSEP PBIS Center). Practices in the school and classroom are critical for student support and for promoting a school culture and climate conducive to positive learning (OSEP PBIS Center). Lastly, schools should

keep in mind the ultimate goal of PBIS implementation: student growth, a positive school climate, and fewer exclusionary practices (OSEP PBIS Center).

As schools think about the implementation of PBIS with fidelity, they can ask the following questions:

- How can we enhance the experiences and outcomes of each student and educator?
- What can be done to sustain PBIS implementation over time?
- What information is needed to ensure effective decisions about PBIS implementation and outcomes?
- What are the best practices to support the behavior, social, and emotional needs of students while promoting academic growth?
- What is important to the school community? (OSEP PBIS Center, 2017)

Culturally Restorative Discipline

Culturally restorative discipline is another practice that schools use to reinforce positive behavior and build positive school culture (Schiff, 2018). Restorative practices refer to whole school practices that are tied to proactive practices as opposed to punitive disciplinary models (Lustick, 2020). Supported by research and federal governmental initiatives, restorative practices have developed as an increasingly sought-after measure used to counter high levels of disparity in disciplinary practices (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018). There are three primary reasons for restorative justice practices: zero tolerance exclusionary practices have limited evidence of being successful, research shows high levels of discipline disparity among certain groups of students (mainly Black, Latinx, and Native students), and federal initiatives in support of new disciplinary practices brought to light a call for change (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018).

The practice of restorative discipline is closely aligned with other positive reinforcement systems, such as PBIS and social-emotional learning systems (Schiff, 2018). Whole-school approaches to restorative practices are based on respect, trust, inclusion, tolerance, and understanding (Schiff, 2018). Restorative practices presume that student misbehavior is more than an infraction or violation. In fact, restorative practices believe that student misbehavior is more of a violation of the relationship that is the foundation of the culture and climate of a school (Schiff, 2018). An essential component of restorative practices is that students comprehend the impact of their behavior and how it influences those directly affected and the entire school community and make amends to correct that behavior (Schiff, 2018).

Each school selects and labels its restorative practices in the best way that fits its school culture (Lustick, 2020). Through its three-tiered system, various strategies such as conferences, peer mediation, class community-building talking circles, practical questions, and restorative dialogue occur (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018). Community building circles are commonly referred to as “Tier 1” restorative practices; Restorative circles are “Tier 2” restorative practices; Reentry circles are “Tier 3” practices that are used to equip students for reentering the school and classroom community after suspension (Lustick, 2020). Tier 1 Proactive practices are constructed to lessen the likelihood of students needing interventions from Tier 2 or 3 (Lustick, 2020).

After a study of elementary school teachers, support staff, and parents, it was determined that this system could effectively reduce disciplinary practices, particularly those that would disconnect students from their normal educational setting, also known as exclusionary discipline (Kervick et al., 2020). At its core, the success of restorative discipline is widely attributed to the buy-in from all constituents, including students, parents, and teachers. Teachers who feel

prepared through professional development in restorative discipline practices and supported by school administration reported higher levels of success. Additionally, parents who feel informed of the school's disciplinary practices feel more comfortable speaking to their children about behavior and expectations (Kervick et al., 2020). Therefore, with the right level mix of diligent and deliberate implementation of all constituents, including collaboration and communication between teachers and parents, the effects of restorative discipline practices showed a decrease in exclusionary discipline practices of elementary school students, decreased disciplinary referrals, and improvement in students' academic achievement and relationships (Schiff, 2018).

Impact of Behavior Support

Reducing Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Exclusionary practices can damage the sense of belonging among students as well as the sense of community within the school (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015). More than 2.6 million children in our country are suspended from our schools each year. For more than 40% of these students, suspension happens multiple times throughout the school year. These suspensions are becoming more common for minor misbehavior (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Off-campus exclusionary practices are reserved for more severe offenses. More than 100,000 children are permanently expelled each year. If suspended and expelled from school multiple times in a school year, they are 300% more likely to spend time in a juvenile detention center the following year (Hannigan & Hauser, 2015). The disciplinary practices of students being put in detention centers resemble the strategies used to punish adults (Reno et al., 2017).

When students are suddenly removed from what is their regular educational environment for behavioral concerns, they are faced with an increased chance of academic failure (Stewart, 2022). Jacobsen et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine the effects of these exclusionary

discipline practices in elementary schools. This parental study examined the changes in elementary-aged children's behavior following a suspension or expulsion. According to their research, boys are at a greater risk than girls of being suspended or expelled for misbehavior (Jacobsen et al., 2019). The rate increased for Black boys in comparison to White peers. Forty percent of Black boys are suspended or expelled compared to 8% of White or boys of other races (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Historically, these levels of disparity are attributed to differences in the school and home environment rather than behavior issues (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Most students in this study were suspended or expelled by age nine (around third grade). A 2021 study from Fadus et al. found that Black and multiracial Black children had almost four times the odds of experiencing disciplinary practices such as detention or suspension than their White peers. Additionally, children from single-parent households have close to 1.5 times the odds of experiencing the same disciplinary practices than children in two-parent homes (Fadus et al., 2021).

Exclusionary practices assume that students know what to do instead of the inappropriate behavior and that the student would rather be at school (Stormont et al., 2008). Jacobsen et al. (2019) found that school discipline policies that mostly use exclusionary punishment foster systems of childhood inequality. These practices are disruptive to a child's need for consistency and routine, potentially causing children to fall behind. If children feel misunderstood or mistreated, this punishment may also incite negative emotions like anger and resentment. It also stands to note that more aggressive physical behavior could be more of a way for elementary school children to manage emotions, particularly among students who are in the process of learning the verbal skills needed to regulate emotions (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

Young et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of over 29 studies that showed that school discipline practices that include exclusionary methods play a vital role in the justice system's disproportionate outcomes. This study of more than 30 years of data aligns with the impending disproportionate rates of disciplinary practices and the adverse impact that it has on students who identify as Black. The K-12 research also found that the chances of Black male students being disciplined are more than two times higher than White students. This study has a direct correlation to what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline," where increases in zero tolerance and other harsh exclusionary practices have a direct correlation to increases in incarceration rates (Schiff, 2018). While this pipeline is not statistically verified, it serves as the foundation for much of the critique around the impact of punitive discipline, such as exclusionary practices, particularly among students of color (Lustick, 2020). This impact is particularly felt by students of color in the country (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018). The relationship between the school and the juvenile justice system is most conspicuous among Black students and their families (Young et al., 2018). Additionally, there is no profound scientific evidence showing that zero-tolerance discipline policies are effective in turning around student behavior (Schiff, 2018). Additionally, current literature on the school-to-prison pipeline fails to explicitly acknowledge the impact of extreme discipline policies (Lustick, 2020).

In another recent study of close to 12,000 children, Fadus et al. (2021) noted that discipline practices such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions have a disproportionate impact on children from minority backgrounds, in particular Black children and children who live in lower socioeconomic areas. Looking long term, these behaviors and the subsequent disciplinary actions are common contributors to adult violence (Jacobsen et al., 2019). To counter exclusionary discipline practices, schools are exploring research-based alternatives.

Some schools have turned to positive behavior management systems with mixed reviews. In the report from Kervick et al. (2020), despite implementing a positive behavior management system such as Restorative Discipline, Black students in the study continued receiving twice the amount of office discipline referrals as white students. When asked why this may be the case, one elementary school principal attributed it to the new system not being fully implemented by school staff. McIntosh et al. (2021) conducted a three-year study across 13 schools serving 9,600 students in grades K-8. It was concluded that schools should provide professional development focused on equity practices. In addition, they should openly assess their school's discipline disparities and build structures to counteract their bias. With successful implementation, behavior management frameworks can provide meaningful improvements in racial inequities in school discipline.

Reno et al. (2017) concluded their study with several suggestions for schools to consider when tackling the lasting effects of disparity in our children. Suggestions include:

- create a safe space for students that supports academic and social goals
- provide clear behavioral expectations
- communicate in culturally appropriate ways
- develop a caring classroom environment
- develop a strong partnership with families
- use appropriate intercessions to aid students with behavioral concerns (Reno et al., 2017).

Improving School Climate, Achievement, and Behavior

Each student is entitled to a safe and caring school environment (Reno et al., 2017). Administrators and teachers deal with that need along with pressure to tend to academic and

behavioral challenges in a changing world (Reno et al., 2017). Research on school climate indicates a distinct correlation between the climate of a school, academic achievement, and student behavior (Sulak, 2016; Wiene et al., 2019). This is done by targeting the social culture and organizational structure of a school (Wiene et al., 2019). A positive school climate promotes higher student achievement, but a negative climate with an abundance of disciplinary issues suppresses academic achievement (Sulak, 2016). When classroom teachers lack an understanding of how the school's culture and climate influence behavior, they can unknowingly build levels of inequality among students, particularly those from diverse cultures (Reno et al., 2017). Across the country, schools are implementing procedures in an effort to improve the climate of the school by fostering a relational school community (Kervick et al., 2020).

There are general theories around the best school-wide approaches to discipline practices. While there are many other frameworks, there are two widely used discipline structures in schools nationwide: Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Discipline. Positive (non-punitive) behavior systems such as PBIS and restorative practices will not transform the school's culture unless they are part of a larger transformative effort (Lustick, 2020). It is essential that schools adapt their positive behavior support system to fit the needs of the school. This system should display culturally responsive disciplinary practices that reduce exclusionary methods and simultaneously challenge the thinking about the critical purpose of education (Lustick, 2020). To target the school's organization and social culture, essential elements of school-wide positive behavior support should include:

- establishing, teaching, and practicing clear expectations
- reinforcing positively the desired behavior
- following consequences for problem behavior

- adhering to school-wide implementation
- collecting and using data for future decision-making (Wienen et al., 2019).

Restorative practices are used not only to reduce exclusionary practices in schools but to transform the culture of the school (Lustick, 2020).

Strengthening Relationships Between Teachers, Students, and Families

Our country is faced with rising numbers of teachers leaving the profession for various reasons. One of the top overarching reasons is job dissatisfaction and lack of administrative support (Dillon et al., 2019; Noël Smith et al., 2019). All teachers, including elementary school teachers, are challenged by the additional factors that play into their day-to-day expectations. Teaching students to read, write, and do arithmetic is only part of the role of the teacher. Teachers multi-task by being a nurse when a student is injured, a referee when students disagree, a recess manager on the playground, and a cafeteria monitor when a student needs a container to be opened. Elementary school teachers spend several hours each day with students and are, therefore, an essential part of students' learning environment (Harvey et al., 2022). The same teachers are responsible for students' core instruction while also maintaining a crucial role in managing student behavior. Teachers report being ill-equipped to manage behavior effectively and express the dire need for increased professional training and administrative support in managing behavior (Dillon et al., 2019). Bardach et al. (2022) found that teachers' motivation and personality correlate with their relationships with primary stakeholders at the school (students, administrators, parents, and peers). Challenging behaviors often overwhelm school personnel, including teachers, as they strive to effectively address discipline incidents (George et al., 2018). Reno et al.'s 2017 study found that overall job satisfaction was high when positive behavior management systems helped to create a school culture that improved student behavior.

There are three dimensions to the student-teacher relationship: closeness, conflict, and dependency (Harvey et al., 2022). Closeness is defined as the degree of openness, warmth, and security of the student-teacher relationship (Harvey et al., 2022). Conflict is the level of negative and unpleasant student-teacher interactions (Harvey et al., 2022). Dependence is the student's need for reassurance from the classroom teacher (Harvey et al., 2022). Teachers with positive established relationships with the students report more positive mindsets around student behavior, a better ability to manage problem behaviors, more effective application of problem-solving strategies, and lower levels of teacher stress and burnout (Reno et al., 2017; Wink et al., 2021). On the contrary, those teachers who rank as experiencing high levels of empathic distress (those who experience personal distress from others' distress) showed stronger negative misbehavior mindsets, increased significant relationship conflict, less competence, few problem-solving strategies, and higher teacher stress and burnout (Reno et al., 2017). These findings include "implications for supporting teachers to effectively intervene and build positive relationships with behaviorally challenging students" (Wink et al., 2021, p. 1575).

Supported by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, a person's environment, experiences, and mindset can influence their perceptions. This can subsequently result in bias, which can be explicit (conscious) or implicit (unconscious) (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). Implicit biases can be manifested in different ways and are experienced by all people. These same biases can lead to serious consequences (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). Teachers who work in cognitively demanding high-stress conditions and experience negative implicit relationships with students and peers may be made worse in the classroom setting. This can lead to an increase in disciplinary action (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). A teacher's unfavorable perception of student behavior increases stress and the potential for undesirable interactions between the

teacher and student (Wienen et al., 2019). In addition to biases, there can be a cultural mismatch between the school and students. This can result in misunderstanding students' actions, especially students with behavior challenges (Reno et al., 2017).

When teachers face challenges around discipline and behavior, their management of that behavior correlates with the teacher's relationship with their school, students, and their families. Kervick et al. (2020) reported that restorative discipline implementation proactively establishes and increases positive teacher-adult relationships within a school community. Reno et al. (2017) found that students are more prone to listen to the established rules and procedures of the classroom if they have a positive relationship with their teacher. Wink et al. (2021) conducted a study of grades close to 200 kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary school teachers across the Northeastern portion of the country. Teachers were asked about their varied approaches to handling some of the most challenging student behaviors. Both preparation and empathy play a significant role in a teacher's approach to student discipline. The higher the level of empathy, the more prepared teachers felt to manage more challenging student behaviors.

Teachers who reported having a positive relationship with students said that they are happier on the job and have fewer feelings of frustration or angst (Wink et al., 2021). According to Harvey et al. (2022), positive relationship-building is not always a natural occurrence. Instead, it takes a diligent endeavor on the part of the teacher, particularly concerning the development of positive relationships with students who regularly display behavioral challenges (Harvey et al., 2022). School psychologists act as integral resources for assisting and supporting teachers in the development of positive relationships between teachers and students (Harvey et al., 2022). This can also be done through evidence-based teaching practices and intervention programs that help teachers develop the best relationship-building practices. The more teachers know about their

students' successes, struggles, and challenges, the better their relationship and the teacher's empathy (Reno et al., 2017). Teachers who can acknowledge and appreciate a student's divergent behavior and thinking are better prepared to manage the behavior and promote high-quality relationships with their students in a thoughtful and effective way (Harvey et al., 2022). With increased empathy comes a more inclusive and welcoming classroom community (Reno et al., 2017; Wink et al., 2021). At the core of that community is a teacher who exercises patience and understanding for children who have behavioral struggles and challenges. Therefore, consistent discipline practices in elementary schools can cause a teacher to be more empathetic and understanding, impacting their approach to behavioral concerns (Wink et al., 2021).

More schools are turning to school-wide positive behavior support as a prevention framework to support student behavior (George, 2018). This school-wide positive behavior support includes a level of buy-in, support, and communication on the part of the educator (George et al., 2018). To support teachers' relationships with students, schools should provide teachers with professional development on students' temperamental differences (Reno et al., 2017). This professional development is for all teachers who want to enter the classroom feeling adequately equipped -- from preservice educators during their initial training to those with many years of classroom experience (Harvey et al., 2022).

The focus should be on the learning and implementation of culturally responsive teaching to enrich the school's culture and positive behavior support system framework (Reno et al., 2017). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a research-backed teaching method that connects students' culture, language, and exposure along with their education (Reno et al., 2017). Through CRT, the weaving of these connections enriches a student's academic experience by giving them access to a curriculum that develops higher-level academic skills.

Family Relationship Support

There are numerous ways that parents shape children's educational processes (Young, 2022). Parents are usually the first people responsible for using appropriate, effective, and healthy foundational discipline strategies on their children. It is one of the most critical yet challenging responsibilities of parents. This great responsibility takes time, dedication, and an unlimited amount of patience. While there are a variety of expert opinions on the specific age at which children should start to be disciplined, some researchers say that foundational acts of discipline begin as young as six months of age (Lawrence et al., 2019; Neiman et al., 2014). These disciplinary strategies are used to help children learn acceptable behavior. From saying "no" to help babies learn safety limits, setting a timer for clean-up, and using time-outs strategies to resolve conflict, children at a very young age are exposed to disciplinary practices used to model appropriate behavior and set limits and promote self-control (Neiman et al., 2014). This thinking is supported by sociocultural learning theory, which states that people's interactions with others shape their development. It is critical that school personnel support parents as students transition to a formal school setting and schools utilize forms of positive behavior support.

There is a connection between parental involvement and teachers' perceptions of students, thus impacting student learning (Young, 2020). Regular parent-teacher contact is linked to an increase in student performance, motivational teacher praise, higher levels of student participation, and other forms of positive student attention and support (Young, 2020). This support correlates with a student's level of motivation, engagement, passion, academic performance, and whole-child development (Sulak, 2016; Young, 2020). The relationship between teacher and parent is also vital in looking at the effects of discipline practices (Reno et

al., 2017; Wink et al., 2021; Young, 2020). Parents play a vital role in the foundational principles of disciplinary procedures in our young children. One cannot look at parents and schools as separate silos. Collectively, they strengthen the experience that our children have in school. The home-to-school partnership is crucial to the success of effective disciplinary practices. Parents who form positive relationships with their child's teachers through frequent contact are more likely to receive regular communication with teachers, including information on behavior concerns (Young, 2020).

Kowalski and Froiland (2020) found that parent-school relationships that are characterized by high levels of parent trust in the school predict students' positive behavior and achievement. Additionally, regular parental involvement correlates with higher student achievement and fewer disciplinary issues (Sulak, 2016; Young, 2020). Behavior management has a direct correlation with student achievement (Reno et al., 2017; Young, 2020). Essentially, if parents have a great working relationship with the teacher and the discipline policies in place do not put too much pressure on their students, then parents favor the systems put in place by the school. Parents believe that these practices positively impact their students' development and influence the level of attention their child receives relative to other children in the classroom (Reno et al., 2017; Young, 2020).

Student Relationship Support

Parental involvement and support from teachers contribute to a student's overall success (Reno et al., 2017; Young, 2020). Students displaying consistent behavior challenges are at risk of developing relationships with their peers and teacher that are marked with reported lower behavioral and emotional engagement, discordance, frustration, and an overall lack of warmth and affection (Archambault et al., 2017; George et al., 2018; Zee et al., 2020). Additionally, they

experience higher levels of peer rejection and isolation from their community (George et al., 2018). Overall, children are characterized as deeply affected, as observed by their relationships with teachers. Many teachers use reprimands as a form of punishment to lessen disruptive behaviors in students. Reprimands are statements meant to correct misbehavior and are often referred to as negative forms of communication (Caldarella et al., 2021). Caldarella et al. (2021) conducted a four-year longitudinal study of elementary school teachers and students across three states. They noted that the characteristics of students who often receive reprimands displayed high levels of “aggression, attention and academic problems, antisocial behavior, low classroom engagement, high rates of disruptive behaviors, and mental health challenges” (p. 163). Reprimands were less effective than positive behavior management strategies and did not decrease disruptions or increase engagement (Calderella et al., 2021). The more reprimands a student received, the less engaged they became in class (Calderella et al., 2021).

When looking at the effects of any practice, we must examine what is at the core: the relationship between the teacher and the students. Sociocultural theories such as Vygotsky and some authors suggest that student-teacher relationships are at the core of students’ level of engagement (Archambault et al., 2017). Some research on the teacher-student relationship indicates that some teachers function as ad hoc parental figures for their students (Zee et al., 2020). A close student-teacher relationship is an essential component of a student’s overall social-emotional and psychological development (Archambault et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2022). Children who exhibit aggressive behaviors report conflicting relationships with their teachers (Lin et al., 2022). However, when the teacher instills more emotional support, these aggressive behaviors lessen (Lin et al., 2022). A negative student-teacher relationship may lead to classroom discord paired with significant oppositional behaviors, while conversely, positive relationships

may lead to a positive classroom culture and student behavior (Archambault et al., 2017). It is important to note that a teacher's perception of a student-teacher relationship is influenced by the teacher's characteristics, biases, and experiences (Zee et al., 2020).

Teachers play a vital role in being a sense of security and safety for students by being responsive to their needs and helping students feel confident in the classroom (Zee et al., 2020). Relationships can be strengthened by providing positive classroom management strategies each day. This impacts students' behavior by increasing on-task behavior and level of engagement. The higher the level of teacher praise, the better the response from students. The more engaged students are, the less disruptive behavior is displayed (Caldarella et al., 2021). Therefore, educator professional development should include an emphasis on the importance of teacher support and student-teacher relationships and the impact of teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and actions toward their students (Zee et al., 2020). This may create positive changes for students who exhibit regular or extreme behavioral challenges (Archambault et al., 2017; Zee et al., 2020).

Summary

Dewey (1916) believed that schools were developed to model the community's basic needs in life while improving that life so the future can be better than the past. All children begin school with different experiences that shape their cognitive, social, and behavioral skills (Harvey et al., 2022). Our brains naturally make connections to background knowledge. Each day, students bring these contextual connections to the classroom. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory sees cognitive functions as being affected by a person's beliefs and values that shape their development. While most students associate the first school experience as a positive one, others have more difficulty adjusting. These adjustments can take the form of behavior challenges such

as teacher opposition, peer aggression, rule-breaking, feelings of anxiety and depression, and social withdrawal (Harvey et al., 2022). To deal with these challenges, schools establish handbooks and conduct codes in an effort to teach and inform students that a rule violation will have consequences that will not be tolerated (Reno et al., 2017). Some of these disciplinary practices resemble those used to punish adults (Reno et al., 2017). Students with more consistent behavior challenges are at higher risk of long-term academic and social difficulties that can lead to absenteeism and other mental health problems (Harvey et al., 2022). Students who are severely punished historically tend to be students with learning disabilities, those who do not live with both parents, males, students of color, and students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch (Reno et al., 2017).

To understand the association between a student's behavior challenges and nature, one must assess their relationships at home and school and the school climate and culture (Harvey et al., 2022). School culture and climate are critical as they influence student behavior and academic success (Reno et al., 2017). Eliminating school-wide exclusionary practices, promoting positive student-teacher relationships, and promoting a safe culture and climate are primary reasons for schools establishing positive behavior management systems (Kervick et al., 2020). To promote a more positive school culture, schools are implementing previous behavior plans to reduce discipline challenges (Reno et al., 2017). Positive behavior management systems are founded on the principles of behaviorist theories. Students have better experiences when they feel safe, seen, and valued. One cannot discount the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student. Together, these principles help to create a positive behavior management system that meets the needs of all constituents -- mainly students, families, and teachers.

School-wide positive behavior support is a widely implemented model for supporting the social and behavioral of all children, including those at risk for behavioral disorders (George et al., 2018). Previous studies showed that the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support can reduce exclusionary practices, improve student behavior, increase student learning and involvement, and enhance collective efficacy (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Sulak, 2016; Wienen et al., 2019; Yeung et al., 2016). Therefore, it is considered to be an evidence-based intervention to improve student behavior. With successful implementation, school-wide positive behavior systems have shown results in lower office referrals, suspensions, improved school climate, academic outcomes, and increased student engagement (George, 2018). However, there is also research that does not show the long-term sustainability of these positive behavior support systems (Yeung et al., 2016). It is critical that implementation is supported by the school to allow for the necessary allocation of resources and teams to access and evaluate implementation (George et al., 2018). The research community should work to examine alternatives to exclusionary practices and examine their impact on school culture (Lustick, 2020).

There remains limited knowledge on teacher perceptions and environmental factors of student behavior after school-wide positive behavior support system implementation (Harvey et al., 2022; Wienen et al., 2019). However, this is a growing number of researchers have found that having a solid teacher-student relationship marked by a high level of closeness is associated with a student's educational and behavioral adjustments (Harvey et al., 2022). Conversely, students who exhibit a high level of conflict or dependency reported negative student-teacher relationships (Harvey et al., 2022). Teachers must have strong, positive relationships with their students (Reno et al., 2017; Wink et al., 2021). Educational researcher Robert J. Marzano (2003)

shared that students will resist rules and procedures along with the resulting disciplinary actions. If the foundation of a good relationship is not present, students will resist the classroom rules and be subject to more punitive disciplinary action. Therefore, it is essential for educators to work to meet the diverse needs of students by paying close attention to behavior data distributed by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability (Reno et al., 2017). School leaders and teachers have a responsibility to put forth a diligent effort to support the development of an inclusive, safe, efficient, and effective school culture that reinforces students' academic and personal success. To create a more synchronized school culture, schools must access the cultural norms and behaviors of all students (Reno et al., 2017). Teacher burnout is lessened when teachers have the opportunity to become active participants in the establishment of effective behavior support systems (Colvin & Fernandez, 2020).

Effective behavior support systems increase a school's capacity to provide quality student instruction and behavior management to all students (Colvin & Fernandez, 2020). To establish a proactive school-wide positive behavior support system, schools are strongly encouraged to do the following:

- establish and reflect on the need to address student behavior,
- form and maintain a leadership team who represents the school community,
- maintain a focus and implementing support plans sequentially,
- clarify faculty roles and expectations with visible and active support from leadership,
- develop a data system for decision-making to assess progress, pinpoint problems, and provide a plan,
- have access to a consultant to provide direction, resources, and research-based information for effective implementation, and

- increase emphasis on academic support (Colvin & Fernandez, 2020).

From the list above, the essential features of successful, positive behavior support implementation are research-based support, clear instructions of expectations, and consistent follow-through that applies to all students. If this is followed with fidelity, the outcomes should strengthen teachers' relationships, lessen disciplinary actions, including suspension and expulsion, and improve the school climate and culture. Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory says that when one believes that he or she can reach a goal, they go about it in a way that often results in success (Bandura, 1997). Likewise, collective teacher efficacy was presented as a way of showing that with collaborative, cooperative, responsive, and accountable minds, educators will have success when they have buy-in and believe that they can meet the needs of those who matter most- the students (Peng Liu, 2019).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Historically, teachers have faced the challenge of educating children while simultaneously managing challenging behaviors. Schools attempt to rectify the behaviors through disciplinary practices that include exclusionary practices. Research and data have shown that these exclusionary discipline practices do not best serve students (Fadus et al., 2021; Schiff, 2018). Data show a disparity in practices among some groups -- particularly male students of color. Even when involved in the same disciplinary infractions, Black students and students with disabilities are significantly more likely to receive exclusionary discipline consequences (Lace et al., 2019). Schools are implementing school-wide positive behavior management systems to counter this narrative of disparity of exclusionary practices (Schiff, 2018). In the United States, most schools have adopted the multilevel approach known as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Bastable et al., 2021; Yeung et al., 2016).

After seeing limited long-term success in the use of these positive behavior support practices, schools are implementing a more positive and proactive school-wide approach to address students' behavioral needs. These tiered systems have decreased some of the challenging behaviors that face our school communities, encouraged a more positive and safe school climate, and improved relationships with teachers, students, and families (Stormont et al., 2008). However, teachers continue to report high levels of stress and frustration, citing frustration as one of the top reasons for leaving the profession (Walker, 2022). While most research has been data-driven in looking at the success of positive systems in lessening exclusionary discipline practice, there is limited research in understanding these systems' impact on teachers.

In this study of teachers' perceived impact of the school-wide implementation of positive behavior support systems, the researcher conducted a qualitative study using expert sampling research methods. This study determined how elementary school teachers feel these positive systems affect exclusionary practices, classroom culture and climate, and student-teacher relationships. Understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions will help schools improve practices related to the effect of behavior support systems, particularly around continued professional development practices and ways to ensure educators feel supported.

Initially, interview questions steered the study and were designed to elicit stories of the experiences of elementary school teachers. The questions derived from the literature review's findings of how school-wide positive behavior support systems were designed to lessen exclusionary practices, strengthen classroom culture and climate, and support the development of positive student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Lace et al., 2019; Schiff, 2018; Stormont et al., 2008; Walker, 2022; Yeung et al., 2016). The central research question for the study is as follows:

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be the impact of positive behavior management systems' impact in supporting teachers, students, and families?

The following sub-questions were used to support the central question: As part of the interview, the following questions were asked of elementary school educators:

Sub Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

Sub Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

Sub Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

To strengthen validity through the triangulation of this study, observations and artifacts were used along with interviews to look at how teachers work to support students by proactively and reactively managing student behavior. This study is important because understanding the teacher's voice is critical during a time when many educators are open and honest about their frustrations related to behavior support systems. Teachers are ultimately responsible for enforcing and managing positive behavior systems. Therefore, they are the ones whom we need to listen to and observe to know what steps we need to take to support teachers with student behavior support. This study contributes to the current body of knowledge so schools can continue to find ways to keep teachers educated and feeling motivated enough to continue to perform the essential duty of their job: educating our students.

Research Method

Case studies are among the most common qualitative designs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Trochim et al., 2016). Merriam and Tisdell defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (2016, p. 37). An intensive case study contextualized teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior management systems in elementary schools. The researcher went through a thorough sample selection process to strengthen the study's external validity. Findings were gathered from demographic survey questions, one-on-one interviews conducted in person or online using Zoom, observations, and document/artifact collection. Observation length ranged from 15 to 30 minutes at a time. The researcher observed the participants' interactions with students as teachers managed student behaviors. The interview length ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. Participants were asked to share examples of experiences

and feelings that showed their perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior management systems. All participants were asked permission for the researcher to record the interview. As a form of member checking, or respondent validation, upon the completion of each interview, the transcript of the conversation was used to gain an understanding of the themes related to teachers' perceptions. Additionally, interviewees were emailed a discussion summary to ensure their thoughts had been fully captured. They were also instructed to respond if their perceptions, experiences, and feelings were not correctly captured. They were asked to submit documents, data, or other artifacts that showed how they created structures to support the school-wide positive behavior systems to support student behaviors.

Participants / Sample

Through nonprobability and purposeful sampling, participants were recruited from a list of teachers in an elementary school in North Carolina. The researcher used the purposive sampling method to ensure that the study aided the researcher to “discover, understand, and gain insight” related to the perceived impact of positive behavior support systems (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). The researcher conducted a thorough purposive convenience selection process to strengthen the study's external validity. For instance, the educators at the selected school have implemented a school-wide positive behavior management system, thus allowing the researcher to conduct research using a small convenience sample. Additionally, the researcher obtained permission from the school administration to conduct the interviews with a group of teachers whose identities were not shared with the school. After permission to conduct the research was received from the school administration, an email was sent to teachers that described the study and asked for permission to recruit participants. Teachers were informed that their identity would not be shared with the school at any point before, during, or after the

complete research process. The sample size consisted of 12 elementary school teachers. Participants with over 16 years of experience represented 58% of the sample size, with the group with less than eight years of experience representing 33%. The researcher conducted demographic surveys, interviews, observations, and artifact collection to the point of redundancy in which the same responses to research questions were observed, and no new insight was gained (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

All participants were provided a consent form via email. Participants were also notified that their names would not be included in any shared information and would be removed from transcriptions and direct quotes used in the research. This form was signed electronically before demographic survey questions were sent to the participants. Upon completion of the survey, the researcher contacted the participants again. All interview dates were only scheduled following the return of the signed consent form and subsequent demographic survey questions. At the beginning of each one-on-one interview, the researcher reminded participants of the signed consent form and asked whether they agreed to the consent terms, including the interview recording. These participants' acknowledgment of the informed consent was recorded. All participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions about their participation, the measures taken to protect their privacy, and any potential risks associated with their participation.

Following the interview, the researcher asked participants to share artifacts that showcase how schoolwide positive behavior support systems support, or do not students' behavior. The researcher also observed how participants actively support students' behavior.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Through nonprobability and purposeful sampling, participants were recruited from a list of Junior Kindergarten through fourth-grade teachers at an elementary school in southcentral

North Carolina. The researcher used the purposive sampling method to ensure that the study aided the researcher in discovering, understanding, and gaining insight into the perceived impact of positive behavior support systems. To strengthen the study's external validity, the researcher went through a thorough purposive convenience selection process. For instance, the educators at the elementary school have implemented a school-wide positive behavior management system, thus allowing the researcher to conduct research using a small convenience sample. All elementary teachers were ranked according to their years of teaching experience, with subgroups consisting of 0-2 years, 3-5, and 6 or more years of teaching experience. From this list, the researcher selected the top two and bottom two teachers for each subgroup, initially asking 12 participants. If a teacher declined participation, the researcher selected the next teacher on the list and invited them to participate until the point of data saturation.

The researcher obtained permission from the elementary school's administration to conduct the interviews with a group of teachers whose identities were not shared with the school at any time. Teachers' complete voluntary participation allowed the researcher to conduct research through a demographic survey, one-on-one interviews, observations, and document/artifact collection. Once official permission to recruit volunteer participants for this study was received from the school administration, an email was sent to teachers describing the study and asking for volunteers to participate through surveys, interviews, observations, and artifact collection. The email asked teachers to consider volunteering their time to participate by sharing their experiences with the school-wide positive behavior support system. The researcher communicated the importance of this research and the implications of how the information gleaned from this research could inform best practices for schools and educators.

Teachers were repeatedly reminded that their identity would not be shared with the school at any point before, during, or after the study's conclusion. Through experience working with the researcher, teachers were already aware that the researcher was in no way in a position of authority over the teachers at the elementary school. However, the researcher communicated this repeatedly in the initial email, letter of consent, interview and observation protocol, and follow-up email.

Participant Exposure

Once participants agreed to volunteer by participating in this study, all interviewees were provided a consent form via email. The consent form included the following:

- Purpose of the study was to look at teachers' experiences with school-wide positive behavior support systems
- Outline of why teachers were being asked to participate in the study
- Parts of research -- demographic survey, interview, observations, artifact collection
- Permission to record, transcribe, ask clarifying questions, and include findings in a research project
- Acknowledgment that participation was entirely voluntary and withdrawal or refusal to participate could happen at any time.
- Steps to protect participants (privacy and data security). Names and other identifying qualities would not be included in any shared information and would be removed from transcriptions, field notes, artifacts, and documents acquired during research.
- Contact procedure for questions or additional information

Throughout each phase of research, the researcher worked to be respectful, non-judgmental, and non-threatening to those being interviewed. During a time when stressed

teachers are leaving the teaching profession at an alarming rate and citing discipline as one of the top reasons, the questions asked were centered around the researcher's findings of the purpose of school-wide implementation of positive behavior support systems in elementary schools: support classroom culture and climate, eliminate exclusionary discipline, and improve student-teacher relationships.

Role of the Researcher

In this study of teachers' perceived impact of the school-wide implementation of positive behavior support systems, the researcher conducted a qualitative study using convenience sampling methods. As a qualitative researcher, the researcher intentionally constructed an instrument of questions that formulated data which could be used to make sound and informed decisions around positive behavior support systems. The researcher located and enlisted the complete cooperation of participants. Given the relationships with several educators, the researcher was mindful to select a sample of elementary educators who represented a diverse group in terms of experience, grade levels taught, and education. The researcher communicated the importance of this research and the implications of how the information gleaned from this research would inform best practices for schools and educators.

A human researcher has many "shortcomings and biases that can impact the study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). As an inclusive researcher, a limitation of the study includes researcher bias. This is when the researcher consciously or unconsciously focuses on data that supports the researcher's existing beliefs and expectations (Trochim et al., 2016). As an open-minded researcher, the researcher was honest about confronting the existing biases and assumptions and how they can skew data from a qualitative study. Additionally, the researcher followed the order of questions, asked every question, and asked for elaboration and clarification

as needed. This avoided leading the participant to a desired answer or response. The researcher was mindful of inductive reasoning by looking for meaning in the participant's responses. This meant the researcher must judge the quality of the information received and avoid asking leading questions to elicit specific responses. The researcher brought to the forefront new information on teachers' perspectives.

As a former elementary classroom educator and current Dean who manages student behavior support, the researcher is mindful of reactivity, positionality, and interpretation of data based on opinions, values, and experiences. The researcher encouraged participants to speak candidly and informatively in this study. To address selection bias, the researcher ensured that a diverse population (gender, years of classroom experience, race, and ability) was represented in the interviews. The researcher worked cyclically with the data collected to identify trends and construct deeper meaning. While doing this, the researcher worked to take a stance without judgment and showed sensitivity and respect for those teachers impacted by school-wide behavior support systems.

Data Collection and Instruments

Various methods were used to analyze, interpret, describe, and apply meaning to the collected information. Findings were gathered from demographic surveys using Qualtrics, one-on-one interviews conducted in person or online using Zoom, observations using a researcher-created behavior observation form, and artifact collection. Following the study's conclusion, the researcher securely stored data for three years after the study's closure. The interview structure was semi-structured, allowing the researcher flexibility of probing to ask follow-up questions and responses while still allowing for the same specific data to be gathered from all participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were analyzed using demographic survey results, interview field notes, observation field notes, interview transcriptions, interview or email follow-up correspondence between the researcher and interviewer, and artifact collection. Coding was used to look for themes throughout the collected information. Interviews and observations were conducted until data saturation when clear themes appeared throughout the data. These multiple sources of data collection were used to strengthen the validity of the research. Triangulation was used to test the consistency of the findings and reduce the bias by approaching the topic of school-wide positive behavior support systems with different modes -- interviews, observations, and artifact collection. Each mode was reviewed and coded by the researcher to look for themes highlighting teachers' perceptions of these school-wide systems. This helped the researcher get a more comprehensive picture of the central question.

Demographic Survey

Once teachers agreed to participate in the study, they received a demographic survey designed through Qualtrics. This demographic survey asked the following questions: participants' age, race, gender, years of classroom teaching experience, and grade(s) of elementary teaching experience. These data were used to help the researcher better understand the background characteristics of the study participants. The survey data offered more comprehensive sample descriptions while also disseminating the study's results. Participation in the demographic survey was voluntary, and there were no consequences for not participating in this or any subsequent part of the research.

Non-Participant Observations

With the participant's consent from the signed letter of consent, the researcher conducted observations in multiple 15–30-minute increments around the elementary campus. These

observations looked at student behaviors and how teachers managed these behaviors. The researcher looked at students and teachers in multiple settings, including the classroom, hallway, cafeteria during lunch, and playground during recess. Teachers were not coerced or forced into allowing the researcher to conduct the observations. Participation in observations was voluntary, and there were no consequences for not participating in this or any subsequent part of the research. The outline for the observation protocol is found in Appendix B

One-on-One Interview

Participants can conduct the interview in person or virtually via a live synchronous video component. An offering of asynchronous follow-up questions or feedback was sent through email. Elementary school teachers were invited to participate in a one-on-one interview using the purposeful sampling technique of convenience sampling. Interview questions were structured to determine teachers' experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge, and background (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Leading questions and those that force the respondent to give yes or no answers were avoided in forming questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the start of official interviews, a pilot interview was conducted to ensure clarity and wording of questions.

Throughout the interviewing phase, the researcher worked to be respectful, non-judgmental, and nonthreatening to those being interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During a time when stressed teachers are leaving the teaching profession at an alarming rate and citing discipline as one of the top reasons, the questions asked were centered around the researcher's findings of the purpose of school-wide implementation of positive behavior support systems in elementary schools: support classroom culture and climate, eliminate exclusionary discipline, and improve student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Lace et al., 2019; Schiff, 2018; Stormont et al., 2008; Walker, 2022;

Yeung et al., 2016). To ensure adequate engagement in the data collection process, the researcher conducted, transcribed, and simultaneously analyzed interviews until saturation or redundancy was reached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interview protocol was established to guide the researcher while conducting semi-structured interviews with elementary teachers. The protocol included a script to guide the researcher during the interview process. The script comprised an introduction, informed consent description, interview questions for teachers, and a closing and summary. Creating the interview protocol allowed for continuity with each participant and consistency across all participants in the interview process. With prior permission, the synchronous video conferencing platform Zoom was utilized to record the interview for transcripts and analysis. The interview length ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. Participants were asked to share examples of experiences and feelings that showed their perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior management systems. All participants permitted the researcher to record the interview. The interview workflow process form was completed for each scheduled interview (see Appendix C).

The recording was reviewed within a few days of each interview to efficiently summarize critical data while still fresh in the interviewer's mind. Complete interview transcriptions were conducted within 24 hours of the conclusion of the recorded interview. This included the verbal and nonverbal happenings that added meaning to the transcript, including laughs, sighs, lengthy pauses, and any significant changes in tone or volume. Transcriptions of the recordings were completed and emailed to any participants who requested a copy. Participation in the one-on-one interviews was entirely voluntary, and there were no consequences for not participating in this or any subsequent part of the research.

Artifact Collection

Following the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher asked participants to share any documents or artifacts that showed their perceptions of the school-wide positive behavior support systems and how they impacted relationships, exclusionary practices, and classroom culture and climate. The artifacts included but were not limited to pictures, classroom contracts, reward systems, written correspondence, and teacher or student reflections. When analyzing the artifacts shared with the researcher, the researcher focused on the artifact and how it was used to manage student behaviors. Identifying information was removed from all collected artifacts. Participation in the one-on-one interviews was entirely voluntary, and there were no consequences for not participating in this or any subsequent part of the research.

Table 1

Theory, Research Questions, and Data Table

Research Question	Sociocultural Theory Alignment	Behaviorism Theory Alignment	Data Source
RQ 1. What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?	This theory helps preceding researchers tie behavior challenges in the classroom to negative repercussions on classroom culture, leading to an increased frequency of exclusionary discipline practices (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Sulak, 2016)	Behaviorism theory emphasizes reinforcement and conditioning in shaping behavior. Positive behavior support systems contribute to a positive and supportive classroom environment, ultimately reducing the need for exclusionary discipline practices.	Interviews- example of a question used to support initial research question: Describe what changes, if any, have you observed in exclusionary practices since implementing a school-wide system? Observations- researcher will conduct observations of a teacher using positive redirection with students.

RQ 2. What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

A person's environment influences their cognitive development, including their behavior and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory helps preceding researchers tie behavior challenges in the classroom to negative repercussions on classroom culture (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Sulak, 2016)

In a classroom setting, students may observe and learn from their peers, reinforcing the importance of positive behavior and contributing to a positive classroom culture (Evertson et al., 2021).

Positive systems, inspired by behaviorism, are crucial in creating a positive classroom culture. This involves setting clear behavioral expectations for all students. When everyone knows what's expected, it lays the foundation for a positive atmosphere. By recognizing and rewarding desired behaviors, we encourage students to repeat those actions.

Interviews- example of a question used to support initial research question: Describe what changes have you noticed about your classroom culture and climate since implementing a school-wide system? Provide an example.

Observations- researcher will look for examples of ways that teachers work to build a positive classroom climate and culture.

RQ 3. What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

According to Vygotsky, social interaction plays a pivotal role in the learning process, with children significantly influenced by their relationships with teachers (Archambault et al., 2017).

The belief in the effectiveness of PBSS strategies reflects behaviorism's principle that positive reinforcement contributes to a positive and supportive classroom environment, fostering stronger

Interviews- example of a question used to support initial research question: In your opinion, why are teacher-student relationships important?

Artifacts- Researcher will look for concrete examples showing

connections between teachers and students. the interconnection between student teacher relations and positive behavior support

Data Analysis, Validity, and Limitations

To make sense of the researcher's gathered data, the management and organization of the collected interview data began early after the data had been gathered in a case study database (Merriam & Trochim, 2016). The researcher's analysis of the interviews, notations, and memos included creating a data inventory set. All interview notes were transcribed into one file for easy access, while paper copies were routinely printed to preserve the data set. Using Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method of grounded theory, data were analyzed to ensure that it was "primarily inductive and comparative" (Merriam & Trochim, 2016, p. 201). The researcher began the data analysis process while conducting teacher interviews to avoid vague, repetitive, vast, and overwhelming mounds of collected data. This included merging, reducing, and inferring what was shared in interviews to make the data set concerning the research questions more meaningful.

As data were analyzed, the researcher looked for themes related to the central question: What can schools do to improve positive behavior management systems to best support teachers, students, and families? As data were collected, themes and categories were flexible enough to allow for changes. Open coding was used initially until central themes began to rise to the surface. Codes were then assigned to particular data as categories and themes were constructed. The researcher selected five main categories, which were noted in the margins of the data set. When saturation occurred and no new themes or categories came forward, the researcher began a deductive process (Merriam & Trochim, 2016). These five themes responded to the research

questions and were exhaustive, clear, conceptually corresponding, and mutually exclusive (Merriam & Trochim, 2016):

- centering support for teachers,
- supporting through communication and collaboration,
- supporting through consistency, accountability, and expectations,
- supporting for students and
- addressing the challenges.

The researcher adhered to proper collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation guidelines to ensure the study's validity. This case study sample of educators included 12 educators at an independent elementary school in North Carolina. The smaller sample size may spark concern with applicability to different school environments. Despite this, the researcher ensured that the data were credible, applicable, reliable, and unbiased. One way to do this was through maximum variation, where the researcher sought a diverse sampling group of elementary educators (Merriam & Trochim, 2016). Data triangulation also strengthened the study's internal validity by cross-checking the data collected in interviews with varied perspectives and pairing it with follow-up communication with the same selected participants (Merriam & Trochim, 2016).

A limitation of the study includes researcher bias. This is when the researcher consciously or unconsciously focuses on data that supports the researcher's existing beliefs and expectations (Trochim et al., 2016). To curtail this, the researcher utilized discrepant case analysis to look for alternate findings and was mindful of inductive reasoning by looking for meaning in the participant's responses (Merriam & Trochim, 2016). The researcher assumed that the selected participants provided open and honest feedback. This feedback was not

misinterpreted as frustration related to different factors and responsibilities of their teaching positions- such as teacher pay or additional job responsibilities. The researcher assumed that the selected participants were participating in hopes of helping schools best meet the needs of students.

Another limitation is generalizability, given that the sample population is limited to one state in the country. The sampling was limited to elementary school educators in one state in the United States, North Carolina, during the 2022-2023 school year. Schools across the country are experiencing, defining, and collecting data regarding behavior challenges differently (Schiff, 2018). Additionally, the schools may provide different levels of support regarding behavior management and behavior support systems. This support could include professional development, administrative support, and resources for teachers and students.

This topic was selected because of the researcher's experience with positive behavior support systems as an elementary educator. As a former classroom teacher who is now an administrative one who handles student behavior support, the researcher understands the importance of listening to teachers' voices. Their perceived impact of behavior management systems helps schools evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the behavioral needs of students in elementary classrooms. Additionally, the data gathered will help schools prepare teachers for behavioral challenges through needed professional development and clear protocols and procedures. Elementary teachers were selected because elementary schools set the foundation for the youngest learners.

Ethical Considerations

The study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of positive behavior support involves human subjects. Therefore, it was the researcher's responsibility and obligation to protect the

identity of the human subjects. This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. This committee was responsible for ensuring that the rights of human subjects were protected during the research process. The researcher did not include names or otherwise identifying qualities in the research. A participant's identity being known could have ramifications with their school, particularly if the subject expressed negative feelings about the impact of the school's behavior support system. The following safeguards were put in place to protect during this study:

- Subjects were asked for informed consent to participate in the research through interviews.
- Subjects were informed of the nature of the research. If a subject chose to withdraw information from the process at any time, the researcher did not use any information obtained from them.
- Instead of using names or other identifying qualities, subjects were referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3, etc.
- Data security protocols were implemented and communicated to the subjects by the researcher at the start of the interview. These protocols included the following:
 - The researcher asked the subject for permission to record the interview at the beginning of the interview. If the subject declined the recording, the researcher took notes during the interview. These notes were shared with the subject within five days.
 - The researcher provided a transcript of the interview within five days of the interview. Providing a transcript after the interview's conclusion ensured that all information shared was accurate. The interviewee was able to clarify information

transmitted, provide additional information, ask subsequent questions, or withdraw from the study.

- The researcher deleted each recording as soon as the purpose was served, which was when the research was concluded.

At the start of each phase of research, whether survey, one-on-one interview, observation, or artifact collection, the researcher reminded participants of the signed consent form and asked whether they agreed to the consent terms, including the interview recording and the acknowledgment that they were not forced to participate in this study and could excuse themselves from participation at any point. These participants' acknowledgment of the informed consent was recorded. All participants were provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about their participation, the measures taken to protect their privacy, and any potential risks associated with their participation. The data collected through research were locked in a secure location at Youngstown State University for three years following the study's conclusion.

Summary

In this study, the researcher looked at teachers' perceptions of the impact of positive behavior management systems to best support teachers, students, and families. The researcher developed the central question, sub-questions, interview questions, observation structure, and demographic survey questions that were derived from the literature review's findings of how school-wide positive behavior support systems were designed to lessen exclusionary practices, strengthen classroom culture and climate, and support the development of positive student-teacher relationships (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Lace et al., 2019; Schiff, 2018; Stormont et al., 2008; Walker, 2022; Yeung et al., 2016). Through a series of observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts, the researcher

explored ways that schools can work to improve positive behavior support systems in elementary schools. A limitation could include researcher bias based on the researcher's work on positive behavior support systems. Generalizability was another limitation concerning the sample population being limited to one state in the country. The researcher's analysis of the interviews, notations, and memos included creating a data inventory set. Through Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method of grounded theory, interview data were analyzed to ensure that it is "primarily inductive and comparative" (Merriam & Trochim, 2016, p. 201).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support. In an ideal elementary school setting, there would be zero disruption to the learning environment constructed to help the youngest learners thrive. Standing in the way of the ideal climate is a variety of factors. Student behavior is one of those factors. For years, schools have been challenged with finding the best ways to manage student behavior. One of the ways that schools have attempted to do this is by establishing school-wide positive behavior support systems. These systems are set up to recognize students for meeting behavioral expectations as they promote positive and fruitful relationships between students, peers, and teachers (Lloyd et al., 2022).

Despite establishing these school-wide support systems, teachers cite behavior as one of the main reasons they are considering leaving the teaching profession altogether (PDK Poll, 2019). Stress is among the top four reasons. School discipline remains a widespread issue affecting many students, educators, and schools across the United States (Bastable et al., 2021). Behavior challenges in the classroom affect student-teacher relationships, negatively impact the classroom culture, and increase the frequency of exclusionary discipline practices (Bastable et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Sulak, 2016). It is timely and imperative that research is focused on teachers' perception of school-wide positive behavior support systems in elementary schools.

Study's Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of school-wide positive behavior support systems. The desirable outcomes of school-wide positive

behavior support systems are to lessen or reduce exclusionary discipline practices, support student-teacher relationships, and improve our schools' and classrooms' culture and climate. A recent study has identified the sustainability of current positive behavior support systems as a significant concern (Yeung et al., 2016). Fifty-one percent of educators shared that they need more behavior management training and strategies as they still do not feel equipped to handle the behaviors they see in their classrooms (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2022). Next to students, teachers are most directly impacted by student behavior and the systems designed to manage these behaviors. There is a gap in the research that uses the teachers' perception of ways to manage student behavior. This phenomenological case study examined elementary school teachers' experiences and perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. More specifically, this study researched how elementary school teachers feel these positive systems affect student-teacher relationships, classroom culture and climate, and exclusionary practices.

Research Questions

This chapter presents the analyzed data from teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. Namely, the findings of this qualitative study evaluated whether these support systems affect exclusionary discipline practices, school culture and climate, and student-teacher relationships. The following research questions were asked:

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be the best ways for schools to improve positive behavior management systems to best support teachers, students, and families?

How do you define positive behavior support systems?

Sub Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

Sub Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

Sub Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

Sample

Through nonprobability and purposeful convenience sampling, participants were recruited from a list of teachers in an elementary school in North Carolina. The school is an independent school outside of Charlotte, the second-largest city in the state. The selected school serves approximately 300 students in the Lower School division and 1,030 students across all three divisions. The Lower School division contains grades from Junior Kindergarten through fourth grade. To ensure a high probability of student success and create a diverse student population, the school accepts students based on various criteria. Students of color represent 23% of the total school population. Students receiving financial aid make up 21%.

Staff in the Lower School includes close to 50 educators, including teachers, teacher assistants, a student support team (counselor, learning specialist, reading interventionist), and a Lower School leadership team (Head of Lower School, Assistant Head of Academics, Assistant Head of Student Life). Maximum variation was used, where the researcher sought a diverse sampling group of elementary educators (Merriam & Trochim, 2016). This approach was selected to ensure richness in the data collected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. For a range of perspectives and to strengthen the diversity of the sample, the recruited teachers have a variety of elementary teaching experience as well as years of teacher experience managing student behaviors with positive systems. Because the elementary educators at the selected school

have all implemented positive support systems in their classrooms, expert sampling was used to maximize efficiency. This study defined expertise as elementary teachers having background knowledge and experience with school-wide positive behavior support systems and their use in their classrooms. This allowed the study to be conducted using a small sample of teachers.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Race	Gender	Year(s) of Experience	Grade Level(s)
Interviewee 1	40-49	White	Woman	16 or more	Fourth, Fifth
Interviewee 2	40-49	Other	Woman	16 or more	Kindergarten, first, third, fifth
Interviewee 3	50-59	White	Woman	16 or more	Junior kindergarten
Interviewee 4	20-29	White	Woman	0-3	Second
Interviewee 5	40-49	Black/AA	Woman	16 or more	Second, Third
Interviewee 6	40-49	White	Woman	12-15	Kindergarten, First
Interviewee 7	50-59	-	Man	8-11	Fourth
Interviewee 8	60 or older	White	Woman	16 or more	First, Third
Interviewee 9	30-39	White	Woman	12-15	Second, Support
Interviewee 10	30-39	White	Woman	8-11	Second, Third
Interviewee 11	30-39	Asian	Woman	12-15	First, Third, Fifth
Interviewee 12	20-29	White	Woman	4-7	Preschool, Kindergarten

Of the 12 participants, 11 chose to share their race information, with 67% identifying as White or non-Hispanic. The ages of the participants varied. Participants who were 50 years or older represented 25% of the sample; 58% were between 30 and 50; 17% were younger than 30; and 0% of the participants declined to answer. Participants with over 16 years of experience

represented 58% of the sample size, with the group having less than eight years of experience representing 33%. Table 3 presents the breakdown by grade level experience representation in the data, showing a representation of each elementary grade level.

Table 3

Grade Level Representation

Grade Level	Percentage of Representation in Data
Preschool/Junior Kindergarten	25%
Support Positions	13%
Kindergarten	38%
First Grade	63%
Second Grade	50%
Third Grade	63%
Fourth Grade	25%
Fifth Grade	25%

Once the interviews concluded, interviewees received a summary of the conversation and were asked to respond and provide feedback as a form of member checking. The researcher fully transcribed all interviews. The transcriptions were analyzed through multiple rounds of coding. The participant demographics in Table 2 revealed a diverse group of educators. Among the 12 participants, the majority (67%) identified as White, non-Hispanic. Age distribution also varied, with 25% of participants aged 50 or older, 58% falling between the ages of 30 and 50, and 17% under 30. Notably, most participants shared their race. In terms of educational

experience, a significant portion (58%) had over 16 years of teaching experience, while 33% had less than eight years. The participants covered a wide range of grade levels, with representation across all elementary grades, as shown in Table 3. This diversity in terms of age, race, experience, and grade level experience provided a rich and comprehensive perspective in this study.

Methodology

Phenomenological case studies allow for the exploration of teacher experiences to explore the question of teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide support systems. This phenomenological case study method was chosen because it would best allow teachers an opportunity to share stories of their experiences and allow the researcher to gain insight and a better understanding of the perceived impact of these support systems.

Survey

Demographic data were collected through the utilization of an online survey tool, which served as a means of gathering valuable insights into the participants' profiles. These questions encompassed a range of self-descriptive aspects, including race, grade level, and the number of years dedicated to the teaching profession. The survey instrument was adept at extracting demographic information, offering a comprehensive view of the participants' backgrounds while ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The data displayed the diverse nature of the sample group, particularly in the total years of elementary education experience exhibited among the 12 participants. This wide range of years of teaching experience is noteworthy, as it adds depth and complexity to the study. See Appendix D for survey questions.

Interview

Research participants engaged in one-on-one interview sessions with the researcher. These interviews were designed to provoke thoughtful and reflective responses from elementary educators regarding their experiences with student behavior and the systems established to better support student behavior. These interviews were guided by open-ended questions, allowing participants to freely express their perspectives, insights, and personal anecdotes. See Appendix C for interview protocol.

Artifacts

In addition to their active participation in interviews and surveys, participants were asked to contribute any relevant documents or artifacts that could enhance the depth and context of the dialogue pertaining to student behavior support. These documents and artifacts could encompass a wide array of materials, classroom rules, photos of behavior track systems, classroom behavior management strategies, instructional resources, or any other materials they deemed pertinent to the research. By encouraging educators to share these documents, the study aimed to gain access to tangible evidence of behavior support systems in educational settings. This not only enriched the qualitative data but also provided a more comprehensive understanding of the practical aspects of school-wide positive behavior support. The willingness of participants to contribute such materials underscored educators' commitment to the research process and their dedication to improving the field of student behavior support.

By following this artifact collection protocol (see Appendix E), the research aimed to gather a comprehensive set of documents and materials that enriched the understanding of school-wide positive behavior support systems and its impact on elementary education settings.

Observations

In addition to interviews, surveys, and the collection of supporting documents, the research methodology included another critical component: observations. These observations allowed for an in-depth exploration of trends in student behaviors within educational settings and an examination of how teachers responded to these behaviors. Through systematic and unobtrusive observations, researchers gained valuable insights into the dynamics of classrooms and the day-to-day interactions between students and educators. This method facilitated the identification of recurring patterns in student behavior, the effectiveness of behavior support systems in place, and the strategies and approaches employed by teachers to address and manage various behaviors. Examples of observations included teacher interactions with students during a disagreement on the playground, a morning meeting where the teacher reviewed classroom expectations, and an observation of a teacher using positive redirection to help a student work through a social challenge with a peer. By capturing these observations, the study aimed to provide a perspective on the connection between student behavior and the strategies educators implement to foster a positive and productive learning environment (see Appendix B).

Results

The initial categories in this research remained constant from their original form. Through analysis of the data, as described in Chapter 3, this research produced the following categorical findings: teachers' perceptions are that overall, these school-wide positive behavior systems lessen exclusionary practices, strengthen the culture and climate of the classroom, and improve the relationship between the teachers and students.

Data and Analysis

An established qualitative methodology was used to interview these elementary school educators to garner an understanding of their experiences with positive behavior support systems. Most interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes. Participants could meet in an office, via Zoom, or at an off-campus location of choice. Time was spent conversing before each interview building rapport with the participants.

Coding

Open coding was used initially until central themes began to surface. The initial manual coding cycle method used was descriptive in vivo coding. An advantage of descriptive coding of qualitative data is that succinct codes can be used for the subsequent rounds of coding analysis and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcripts were uploaded into computer software, Atlas.ti, for further analysis. Actual words or short phrases highlighted the interviewees' voices and best captured their experiences.

Additional rounds of manual coding were used to further consolidate and filter data. The second cycle of coding involved a pattern coding process. This involved a search of themes from the first cycles of coded data, allowing some codes to be grouped to strengthen the themes. Multiple rounds of coding all 12 interviews, observations, and artifacts aided the constant comparative analysis technique. Coding was selected because it is the foundation of high-quality analysis of data.

Teachers' responses to school-wide positive behavior support systems were synthesized into five themes: (a) centering support for teachers, (b) support through communication and collaboration, (c) support through consistency, accountability, and expectations, (d) support for

students I addressing the challenges. These themes were selected after analyzing each interview to find commonalities among interview data.

Table 4

Triangulation Table

<i>Findings</i>	<i>Present in Interviews</i>	<i>Present in Observations</i>	<i>Present in Artifacts</i>
Finding 1: Centering support for teachers	X	X	X
Finding 2: Support through communication and collaboration	X	X	X
Finding 3: Support through consistency, accountability, and expectations	X	X	X
Finding 4: Support for students	X	X	X
Finding 5: Addressing the challenges	X	X	X

Table 5

Coding

Initial Code	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (<i>N</i> =12)	<i>n</i> of transcript excerpts assigned	Sample quote
Finding 1: Centering support for teachers	12	37	“We have great support so far for any students to where if it becomes a disruption, there’s somebody there that’s going to help, that I can get the class back and we can move forward with the learning. I don’t know if that support exists efficiently in other schools.”

Finding 2: Support through communication and collaboration	11	46	“Peer support is if we are all using the same language, tactics, and methodology for positive behavior, then if I’m having a bad day, a behavioral incident means that I will have the support of my peers and school leadership. That takes away so much stress!”
Finding 3: Support through consistency, accountability, and expectations	12	40	“If a student starts and the same structures are in place across the board in every classroom and down the hallway, it will help students understand and feel safe and secure. Parents want to know how their child is being communicated with what their day looks like. They also want to know the expectations to foster meaningful conversations at home.”
Finding 4: Support for students	12	46	“One of the most important things we spend the first couple of weeks is getting to know who [students] are to build those relationships. It also helps them to build connections with each other in that way. This is how to get buy-in from the kids. They’ll say, ‘She might be telling me I’m not supposed to be doing X, but I know she loves me, and it’s going to be fine.’ So it helps kind of just reaffirm. ‘I’m here for you, I’m here in your court no matter what, but I have expectations for you.’”
Finding 5: Addressing the challenges	12	33	“It’s heartbreaking. And I think that we as a educational system are failing our teachers. We need to help teachers build their toolkits because I didn’t take a class on classroom management. With 30 Kindergartners, you’re just thrown in the trenches, and you have to figure it out. And some people handle it well and some people don’t. It is stressful when you don’t have a toolkit to know how to handle certain situations.”

Finding 1: Centering Through The School-Wise use of Positive Behavior Support Systems

Every interviewee spoke about the high impact of school-wide systems. Observations and artifacts further supported this. The most glaring theme that surfaced from interview

conversations with teachers is their perception of the strong need for schools to adopt school-wide positive behavior support systems. Every interviewee commented on how essential it is for schools to have school-wide behavior support systems and that the benefits far outweigh the challenges. These findings showed numerous benefits to students, teachers, families, and the school community when consistent systems are implemented. After being asked how schools would look and feel with a school-wide positive behavior support system, 10 interviewees used the term “chaos” in their initial response. When Interviewee 1, an educator with over 16 years of experience in elementary education, was asked to describe schools without this system, within seconds of being asked, the teacher interviewee responded, “Oh, it would be chaos. It would be utter chaos.” After a lengthy reflective pause, the second interviewee verbalized having difficulty expressing how this could look:

Chaos? Dysfunctional? There’d be no cohesion, no unity. Just everyone is kind of all for themselves. To me, that’s a lot like schools where the teachers don’t work together. We talk a lot about teamwork and that we work together. You can always tell, not necessarily at our school, but at other schools that I’ve been at. You can tell the teams that do not work together, and it’s uncomfortable. So I would think that’s what it would look like for a school. It looks un’omfortable because there's no teamwork’going on.

Visualizing the absence of a school-wide system of support, Interviewee 3 paints the picture of discord by sharing, “Rather than having consistency and having clear expectations, everybody’s kind of doing their own thing.” This speaks to teachers not having direction from school leadership and being faced with building their own systems to manage and support student behavior. This lack of consistency would impact teacher communication and

collaboration, which are fleshed out in later findings. The impact of a lack of consistent behavior support practices touches students, as well.

Interviewee 5 echoed the pattern of discord by sharing that “it could be chaotic for a student who needs consistency. And I think if a child doesn’t have that consistency, it can cause a lot of behavior to happen if they’re a child who needs more support.”

“Unbalanced” was the initial response given by another interviewee. This teacher went on to talk about how she believes in having much structure in her classroom. As a result, she can be perceived as mean compared to other educators, whom she called “more permissive” regarding rules and how the class is managed.

Interviewee 10 commented on the impact that this inconsistency can have on school leadership. “A word that pops in my head is ‘siloed.’ All teachers will be doing whatever they feel is best for them, and they will probably still feel unsupported. How can an {Administrator} support 50-plus teachers who all have their own way of doing things?”

Interviewees continued to discuss the indirect impact that a lack of schoolwide behavior support systems would have on the community. Interviewee 6 stated, “{Administration} would feel the frustration and would probably be on the receiving end of lots of headaches.”

With two years of experience in a second-grade classroom, Interviewee 4 stated:

So I think it could be chaotic for children and frustrating for teachers because they’re going to notice more behavior because the children don’t have a clear understanding of the expectations because the expectations differ across the school. And that’s confusing for anyone. Even more confusing for children.

After speaking about the high level of stress that teachers face working at a school without a school-wide positive behavior support system, educator interviewee 4 continued by sharing their perception of how the absence of a school-wide system would impact teachers:

You would have frustrated teachers who feel like they are constantly putting out fires, and it takes the joy out of the job. If you're constantly focused on behavior management instead of making those connections and teaching and having those light bulb moments with kids, the job is pointless.

Teacher resources from a school-wide positive behavior support system, Responsive Classroom, were submitted by interviewee 12. These artifacts included checklists for helping students through the first six weeks of school, books for leading a morning meeting with students, and printed slides that outline the school guidelines. When asked why those particular artifacts were submitted, the teacher commented:

These are some of my most commonly used tools each day. I use this book so much that the pages are falling out. I know that I don't know it all yet, so it's like my Bible when I'm dealing with something in the classroom. The slides help us make sure we're all on the same page. I can refer to the guidelines in my class, and then students can go to art and know that we have the same guidelines. It looks a little different, but [children] know that we're using the same language. Student behavior shifted once we started using [Responsive Classroom].

This provides supporting evidence that elementary educators feel that school-wide positive behavior support systems are beneficial and help to eliminate chaos and confusion in our schools.

Finding 2: Support Through Communication and Collaboration

Findings through interviews, observations, and artifacts showed that teachers consider communication and collaboration to be integral components of their feelings of support in managing student behavior. Communication was coded 27 times, while 19 codes emerged from vignettes mentioning collaboration. When analyzing the keywords in conversations, they are the numbers first and third most commonly used words in conversations with teachers.

Interviewee 11 discussed the importance of collaboration and partnership when building effective teacher language that is used to confront student behaviors: “Collaboration is everyone coming to the table together and thinking about what language we can use.”

In this example, teachers are partnering and collaborating school-wide to find more developmentally appropriate ways to manage challenging student behavior. In this same conversation, the interviewee discussed how having language that is consistent school-wide helps to support the relationship that teachers have with their students.

Interviewee 11 went on to say:

If there is a conflict in my class, then I seek to find out where it came from. Where did it start? And that can only be discovered through conversation and through positivity. And thinking about the student-teacher relationship, the culture and climate of the classroom speaks to all of that.

Classroom culture and climate were further highlighted as areas where teachers feel supported through positive behavior support systems. Interviewee 9 shared:

It helps with my teacher stress because I’m not constantly putting out fires. And it also helps the classroom culture. My students know that we are in this together. We were a family. We’re going to treat each other respectfully.

With teacher stress being one of the top reasons that teachers are leaving the teaching profession as a whole, it is important to note that this teacher felt that stress was reduced because of positive school-wide systems.

When teachers are navigating behavior concerns, partnership with families plays a significant role. Interviewed teachers communicated that both collaboration and communication with families are seen in a more positive light through positive behavior systems. Interviewee 7 comes with 10 years of elementary teaching experience after spending five years teaching middle school social studies. When asked how school-wide positive behavior support systems support families, the teacher commented:

We're putting our children in a positive light. Seriously, that's usually the pushback I get from parents when they say, "My child doesn't do that at home. It must be you." So if I'm trying to put everything in a positive light when I approach that parent and I'm using those same tactics that everything is in a positive light, they're much more receptive to my words when there is a behavior concern. I have more tools that I can use.

Finding 3: Support Through Consistency, Accountability, and Expectations

The need for consistency was a throughline throughout interview conversations with teachers. Consistent language and accountability used by teachers provide a level of clarity for students in terms of behavioral expectations. The data showed a trend in how teachers' language used with students should be clear and direct.

Think about when kids go to [special area classes]. If every classroom does not have the same expectation, then what might be okay in my class is absolutely not okay in this class. And it leads to confusion among the students as well. So, I think it kind of levels

the playing field for everyone, and it helps the kids have a solid understanding Of what's expected of them. (Interviewee 11)

Consistency was coded 13 times, accountability was coded 9 times, and expectations was coded 18 times. This supports teachers when navigating challenges with students as transition throughout the day. As shared by Interviewee 6, a fourth-grade teacher with six years of experience:

Clarity is a crucial piece because [students] know it as a lower school-wide expectation. It's not like, "Oh, Mrs. A does this, but Mr. B does this." So, I think when those times of challenge come up, we have a set of expectations that we go back to and say, "We've modeled this expectation. I am holding you accountable to make good choices." I do not focus on the undesired behavior because that reinforces it because that is what they are focusing on. I focus on what can be done to correct the behavior.

In a subsequent interview, when asked to share thoughts on how students would cope with not having a school-wide support system, interviewee 11 added:

[Students] might say, "Well, it was okay for me to do this last year, why can't I do it this year?" And they don't have that understanding of what's expected. And then, when you meet with families, I think that it can be confusing because maybe what was acceptable last year isn't acceptable this year or vice versa. It leaves that area for turmoil and chaos to happen.

Further supporting the comment from interviewee 11, not only would this consistency be helpful for teachers, but interviewed teachers feel that the consistency of positive behavior support systems would also benefit families. Interviewee 10, a teacher with eight years of

elementary experience in second and third grades and a parent of elementary school-age children, commented:

Consistency helps. Again, so you're not having to guess: Oh, my third grader is doing this; what's my first grader doing? They're doing two completely different systems. I can't keep up with which one. And it helps as far as communication with families. These are expectations. And parents can support us more if they know, oh, this is what everyone is doing. And it really just solidifies that family school life balance when it's the same and having that common language.

When asked about the benefits of having a consistent school-wide system, a resounding response was centered around the consistency of expectations and the opportunity to use a common language.

Everyone using the same language and having the same expectations and consequences is a game-changer. So, you could talk to anyone no matter what they taught or what grade it was, and everyone is on the same page. It is really nice to have.

Another interviewee, a 17-year veteran educator with elementary teaching experience in kindergarten, first grade, third grade, and fifth grade, spoke to integral it is that consistent messages are communicated:

I think consistency is the biggest key here because we're working with children, it has to be consistent. And that is why I have loved my [last] school and our PBIS system because it has been consistent the entire time I'm there. Whether no matter what principal I've had, no matter who's running the show, no matter what grade level I've been in, it is consistent. So, consistency is what works. I don't think it even really matters what the program is, as long as it's consistent across the board. And that way, because then the

kids know what's expected of them, and you can make friendly reminders. (Interviewee 2)

Finding 4: Support for Students

It is essential that schools and educators think about the identities and stories that students carry when they enter our schools. Research participants shared their perceptions on how important it is to recognize the differences that we all carry. "Well, kids don't fit the same mold. They're not all the same. They all come from different backgrounds, they all have different experiences, and they come from a different home life as well." This comment by Interviewee 10, who taught second and third grades for eight years, went on to share about the impact of diversity and student support. "You can never assume kids come knowing because everybody's home life is different, and what [student] might be able to do, another student might not be able to do." Another educator shared her experience with diverse groups of students and her approach to using logical consequences to better manage student behavior:

Clear is kind. Good educators use modeling of expectations and accountability through consequences as a form of student support. Some kids, I do think, need clear logical consequences. They need to know that for their actions, that there is a consequence for it. Students can accept the consequences of their actions because I have relationships with all of my students. I also take time to walk students through examples of consequences. I hold them accountable for their actions and, in turn, they hold me accountable for consequences.

To strengthen clarity, it is important to model and teach behaviors and provide opportunities for students to practice the behaviors that you want to see. This is a positive and

proactive way to support students. Students will benefit from direct instruction in prosocial behaviors.

The teacher's relationship with their students supports the classroom culture and environment (Lloyd et al., 2022). Support was coded 25 times. Teachers shared stories of how modeling and other positive behavior support practices support students.

Relationships serve as a level of support I think every child needs to feel a connection with the teacher and with each other. They need to feel comfortable with themselves, each other, and the teacher. Personally, I like starting every morning with a morning meeting, and then before any time any work is done in small groups, I always like to model and show the right way to do it and ask the kids, what do you see me doing? What do you notice right now? What does it sound like? Look like, feel like in here? And then after every rotation, we would come back, and we would reflect on that.

This was the comment made by a kindergarten teacher with five years of teaching experience and three years as a preschool teacher's assistant (Interviewee 12).

During an observation in kindergarten during a morning meeting in May, the teacher (Interviewee 12) started with a message on the board that read, "Good Morning, Kindergarten Cougars. Today will be a good day. What is your favorite Core Value?" As students sat in a circle on the carpet, the teacher had each student go around and share their favorite Core Value (teamwork, integrity, respect, kindness, passion, or courage). Additionally, she challenged them to think about how a classmate has used that Core Value. The teacher encouraged them to use the school "Catch a Cougar" board to compliment their classmate when that Core Value is used. The "Catch a Cougar" board is a school-wide initiative where students nominate their peers when

they are witnessed using one of the Core Values. The board is often filled with student compliments since it began with the start of the school's positive behavior support system.

To me, I think it goes down to those relationships because everything depends on that.

The positive, you know, means that every way you respond to the child is building them up rather than putting those quiet voices in their head that they're going to play for the rest of their life. I think that's what it comes down to, that you want to really be conscious of your words.

This statement is from a junior kindergarten teacher with over 20 years of experience teaching elementary-aged students (Interviewee 3). This teacher speaks to how students having a positive relationship with their teacher helps them eliminate exclusionary practices through connection, compassion, and proactive conversation.

Interviewee 11 made the following comment about the importance of relationships with students and families as a form of student support:

I think it is important that we are building those relationships in those first few months of school so that students do feel comfortable trusting you and coming to you and working through those challenges. There are going to be challenges with every student that comes up during the year. So, and I think in my classroom, the biggest thing is to get the ball rolling. They get to know me; I get to know them. Then I also spend a lot of time getting to know their families and trying to get family input, and trying to talk to them as well so that I can establish those relationships.

Fostering relationships are key, so having a dialogue with students helps you to understand how they are feeling. From educators' responses, this is a way to lessen or eliminate exclusionary practices. The response from Interviewee 11 shares steps that are taken to build

those relationships, such as starting early in the year, getting to know students outside of the classroom, and making connections with families. When students make mistakes (because they will), they are not punished but are helped to work through repair or restoration (support them on their journey). “Teach students how to learn and grow from their behavior Proactive discipline should be 80% vs. 20%.” According to the interviewee, these steps make it easier for the teacher to address the more challenging behavior situations.

Vignettes centered around the importance of relationships between teachers and students were coded 21 times. Interviewee one related those relationships to student behavior by sharing an experience with a student who has some extreme behavior challenges. Having 16 years of experience with children, the interviewee shared:

Students will respond to someone they care about and knows care for them. Right. So I think that is one of the main things, to have a relationship and recognize that you care about them and want to understand what they’re having a hard time with because it’s typically a deeper thing than just their behavior. Eventually, you want students to take ownership of themselves and the community.

This educator later submitted a document that outlines the three classroom expectations, which they call “Our Classroom Agreements”: Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect the Environment.

Interviews showed a trend of teachers believing in the importance of intrinsic motivation being a factor that decreases exclusionary practices in schools. Interviewee 3 tied this to relationships when sharing “Relationship building and positive tone from the teacher encourages my students want to respond to me because they feel heard and respected. This also relates to

teacher empathy and understanding the messages that students are receiving through those messages.”

An educator with five years of experience in elementary, middle school, and student support experience also commented on the messages that students receive when they are removed from the classroom (exclusionary discipline practices): “I think it can be detrimental to the child’s mental space. Like it makes them feel unwanted almost. You’re telling them like what you’re doing so you can’t be here kind of thing.” (Interviewee 7)

To counter this, one educator spoke about a beginning of year practice that she uses where students create hopes and dreams for the year. That is then tied to the classroom goals that are built as a class community.

Goal setting is how my students work to become intrinsically motivated. They have personal ambitions that are tied to personal goals. Students want to feel like they belong, they want to feel heard, and they want to have fun. Eventually, everything just falls in place once you establish the groundwork.

Other participants spoke about the importance of taking the time to build class community so that when it is time to have difficult conversations, teachers have relationships in place that they can use instead of removing students from the classroom. A challenge with removing some students from the classroom is that it can be seen as a source of reward for some students. Interviewee 9 shared the story of a student who seemed to want to be out of the room, thus triggering negative reinforcement:

I think there are some children who are super smart, and they realize if they create a problem and are removed from the classroom, it actually is the reward that they need.

They are trying to get out of math. They are trying to because math is too hard. They can

see the connection. Like, if I have a temperature or if I blow up my classroom, I get out, then I don't have math. They don't have the ability to see. They can't make that last connection of, if I keep missing math class, it's going to be harder for me.

It is important to note that students leaving the classroom to take a break is not an exclusionary practice. Instead, it gives students an opportunity to restore. As shared by interviewee 12, who is currently studying for a Master's Degree in counseling:

Taking a break is not a punishment, it is an opportunity for students to reset. Taking a break is not necessarily associated with bad behavior. It's a way to deal with a behavior that you think is spiraling, and it gives you an opportunity to give them time. Eventually, students will be able to identify when they need to take a break. The time is not long.

Think about the established area in each classroom where and when they can take a break. "Calming Corner" can also be a movement break- it gives students an opportunity to move and take a break.

Finding 5: Addressing the Challenges

Stress related to teaching continues to be challenging when it comes to keeping teachers in classrooms. Over 25 vignettes were assigned the code "stress" and "frustration." Frustration and stress related to student behavior remain one of the top four reasons that educators leave the profession (PDK Poll, 2019). Teachers need to be supported by school leadership listening to their voices. Interviewee 5 shared:

I am thankful that [School leadership] thinks about how we support the kids. And absolutely, that's essential. That's number one, right? We're an educational institution, but we also need to make sure we listen to our teachers as well, because they're the ones

doing the work on the ground every day. And so, we can't ignore what they're saying. It's like this cry for help, and we need to figure out how to address it well.

Interviewee 8 echoed the impact of stress and not feeling equipped to manage all behavior challenges. This includes questioning decision-making when it comes to managing student behavior. "So, it's stressful. It's 100% stressful, and your hands are tied. You can only do so much in the classroom as far as behavior goes." Interviewee 8 continued,

You are up at night because you think, how could I have prevented that? How could I have done something different? And a lot of times, there was nothing that I could do differently. It's just an unfortunate situation that happened. But definitely, you stress because they become your kids, and you want the best for them. You love them, and you want them to succeed in all aspects, educationally, socially, behaviorally, everything.

Interviewee 8 shared an email exchange with parents, a temporary positive reward system for that student, and resources shared by the school's Student Support Team after a meeting took place to discuss the student's behavior. The teacher shared that the student's behavior did improve after the meeting and implementation of the temporary reward system for the student. The teacher also began to use the resources shared by the support team, which included examples of language that can be used when managing student behavior. The educator shared that she is registered for a series of professional development opportunities that provide additional support. These opportunities come from the developer of the positive behavior support system used by the school, Responsive Classroom.

The lack of preparation for managing behavior starts with college education programs, according to 2 interviewees. Interviewee 9 commented and shared their experience: "But it is

teaching is so challenging, and I think our college programs fail us because I remember graduating thinking, ‘How do you trust me to do this?’”

Another challenge for educators is not feeling equipped to manage the extreme behavior challenges that continue to rise in elementary classrooms. From conversations with teachers, it seems that elevated behaviors from students remain a contender of stress for teachers.

Interviewee 2 commented:

I think right now with society and what these kiddos have gone through because, for example, the ones I’m dealing with are our COVID babies. These are the ones that were at home as three and four-year-olds during COVID. So, they have not experienced a lot of stuff. So, we’re dealing with a lot of other issues. And I think that’s the problem with the school is mentally there’s more issues coming, and we’re not ready for them.

The effects of the pandemic may have greater implications for the behavior challenges that schools are facing. The interviewee mentions a need for tools and resources to help navigate the social-emotional needs of students that may manifest themselves as extreme behavior challenges.

Interviewee 2 went on to talk about a student in her class who presents a larger challenge in comparison to the other students in her class. In fact, she discussed how she feels that the attention that one student gets is more than the other students combined, “I feel like I’m stretched thin this year because I’m trying so hard to give them all that extra TLC that most teachers would want to do. But 75% of it, I feel, is sucked to one child.”

Educators want a voice in the decisions made when it comes to school-wide behavior support systems. As shared by the educator with the most years of classroom experience: [Positive behavior support systems] can take away a teacher’s individuality. Sometimes, teachers don’t feel empowered to make their classroom community as they want it to be,

so to speak. If teachers don't buy into what is in place, then you won't have a system that works to fidelity.”

Interviewee 7 went on to say, “So I think those are two of the big overarching things that I see is the buy-in and helping classroom teachers understand that this can still be individualized to them, and they still get to build their classroom community.” Connected to that comment is the following shared by Interviewee 8 as additional challenges with teachers feeling as if school-wide systems stifle individuality were highlighted:

Some of the challenges from some of the things that I've heard or experienced in my career are that it takes away a teacher's individuality and that sometimes teachers don't feel empowered to make their classroom community as they wanted to be, so to speak.

Reliability and Validity

Ensuring the reliability and validity of data analysis is crucial in maintaining the rigor and trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation involves using multiple data sources and methods to corroborate findings. In this study, data triangulation was employed by collecting data through interviews, observations, surveys, and document analysis. Triangulation helped ensure that the findings were not solely reliant on one data source, increasing the robustness of the analysis. Member checking is a technique used to enhance the validity of qualitative findings. After data analysis, participants were invited to review and validate the researcher's interpretations and findings. Their feedback and input were incorporated into the final analysis to ensure that the participants' perspectives were accurately represented. By adopting these strategies, the study aimed to strengthen the reliability and validity of data analysis, ensuring that the findings accurately represented the participants' experiences and perspectives. These measures enhanced the overall quality and rigor of the research.

Security

To uphold the utmost confidentiality and safeguard the privacy of our participants, stringent data protection measures have been put in place. This includes the secure handling of all research materials, including audio recordings of interviews, which remain accessible solely to the researcher. The researcher has taken the responsibility of ensuring that any potentially identifying information related to the participants is meticulously excluded from the study, guaranteeing their anonymity throughout the research process. Participants have been thoroughly informed and reassured that their involvement in the study will remain confidential and that no identifying details will be disclosed to any external party, thus preserving their privacy and encouraging candid and honest contributions to the research. Data security protocols were implemented and communicated to the subjects throughout the research. In compliance with IRB protocol, the data collected through research are locked in a secure location at Youngstown State University for three years following the study's conclusion.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the results of interviews, observations, and artifact analysis while connecting the analysis back to the research questions. Purposive sampling resulted in 12 participants being interviewed for this phenomenological case study. Interview questions were structured to understand teachers' perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. Observations and artifacts were used to support the findings of the interviews.

Through nonprobability and purposeful convenience sampling, participants were recruited from a list of teachers in an elementary school in North Carolina. Maximum variation was used, where the researcher sought a diverse sampling group of elementary educators. All participants were elementary educators with a diverse array of years of experience and grade-

level experience. Five of the participants had more than 15 years of experience in the classroom. Two teachers had fewer than three years of classroom experience. One teacher was a former elementary school administrator. There were also two teachers who identified as male.

Member checking, multiple rounds of coding (open coding using in vivo, an online program, and focused coding), and constant comparative analysis were used to discover five themes. The five themes resulting from this study summarize the teachers' perceptions of school-wide positive behavior support systems in elementary schools (a) centering support for teachers, (b) support through communication and collaboration, (c) support through consistency, accountability, and expectations, (d) support for students, and I addressing the challenges.

Categorical Findings

Each category outlined below was selected due to the emerging themes within each interview, artifact, and observation.

Centering Support for Teachers

Every interviewee highlighted the significance of school-wide behavior support systems, a sentiment reinforced by observations and supporting artifacts. The overarching theme emerging from these discussions was the belief among teachers that adopting school-wide positive behavior support systems is imperative. Each interviewee emphasized the essential nature of these systems in educational settings, underscoring that the advantages they bring far surpass any associated challenges. This collective perspective highlights the consensus among educators regarding the vital role of comprehensive behavior support frameworks in promoting positive learning environments.

Support Through Communication and Collaboration

Research showed a cohesive response among teachers regarding the crucial role of communication and collaboration in their perception of support when dealing with student behavior. Teachers emphasized that their partnership with families significantly influences their sense of support when addressing behavior concerns. Furthermore, the interviewed teachers expressed that positive behavior systems enhance collaboration and communication with families. These findings underscore the importance of fostering strong communication and collaboration between educators and families, particularly within the framework of positive behavior support systems, in creating a conducive learning environment.

Support Through Consistency, Accountability, and Expectations

Consistency emerged as a prominent theme in teacher interviews, highlighting its paramount importance. Teachers stressed the significance of maintaining consistent language and accountability to establish clear student behavioral expectations. The data revealed a notable pattern: teachers should employ clear and direct language when communicating with students. This consistency in language and expectations was determined to be a fundamental element in effectively managing student behavior within the educational context.

Support for Students

The importance of acknowledging students' identities and life experiences as they enter school settings was a central theme in the research. Participants emphasized the significance of recognizing and respecting the unique differences that each student brings. To enhance clarity and effectiveness, modeling and teaching the desired behaviors and providing opportunities for students to practice these behaviors were highlighted as proactive and positive approaches to

support students. The consensus among participants was that direct instruction in prosocial behaviors benefits students, promoting a more inclusive and nurturing learning environment.

Addressing the Challenges

Positive behavior support systems are not without flaws. The issue of teacher stress continues to pose a significant challenge in retaining educators within the classroom. Notably, frustration and stress stemming from student behavior constitute one of the primary reasons for educators leaving the profession. The research underscores the importance of school leadership actively listening to the voices of teachers to provide necessary support.

Additionally, educators face the challenge of feeling ill-equipped to manage increasingly extreme behavior challenges observed in elementary classrooms, which remains a significant source of stress. Conversations with teachers reveal that elevated student behaviors remain a prominent stress factor. Furthermore, the study suggests that the effects of the pandemic may have exacerbated behavior challenges in schools.

In sum, while great strides have been made in creating school-wide positive behavior support systems, it is evident in the research results that there remains a need to further support teachers' management of behavior, particularly for escalated behavior concerns. Future implications from the research would influence school administrators to provide additional support for teachers when implementing school-wide behavior support systems. An additional implication would be colleges boosting course work and field experiences that engage teachers in work that further supports them in managing student behaviors. Teacher stress related to behavior remains one of the top reasons teachers leave the profession. Additionally, teachers continue to need additional support from administration, families, and peers when managing

behavior challenges. Chapter 5 summarizes the critical analysis and discusses the five themes that emerged from this study.

CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS

The most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes from sharing what we know with others. By reflecting on what we do, by giving coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge, we make meaning, we learn.

-Roland Barth

Introduction

This study was designed by a former elementary teacher in service to current and future teachers and the students which they serve. Research shows that teachers need support when navigating behavior challenges in the classroom. This phenomenological case study described the experiences of elementary school teachers and examined their perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. Also gleaned from the research was an insight into how teachers perceive these systems to do the following: lessen or reduce exclusionary practices such as suspension or expulsion, strengthen the relationship between teacher and students, and support the culture and climate of the classroom.

The purposeful sample included 12 elementary school educators from an independent school in North Carolina. Survey data showed a group of 12 elementary educators with varying demographic characteristics. The racial demographic within the cohort was a majority white non-Hispanic, accounting for 67%. The participants exhibited a diverse age distribution, encompassing 25% aged 50 or older, 58% falling within the 30 to 50 age brackets, and 17% under the age of 30. It is noteworthy that all but one participant willingly shared their racial background.

Regarding professional experience, a substantial portion, 58%, possessed more than 16 years of elementary teaching expertise, while 33% had accrued less than eight years. Notably, the participants spanned across the spectrum of elementary grade levels, ensuring representation across all grade levels. This diversity, spanning age, race, experience, and grade level exposure, collectively enriches the research study by providing a multifaceted and comprehensive perspective.

Triangulated qualitative data were collected and analyzed through one-on-one interviews, observations, and artifact collection. This phenomenological case study approach aimed to allow teachers to share their narratives and offer a deeper understanding of how these support systems influenced them. Initially, participants completed a comprehensive survey to collect demographic data, including their race, grade level, and teaching experience. This survey maintained confidentiality and anonymity while revealing the diverse backgrounds of the 12 participants. Collectively, participants exhibited a broad array of years of elementary education experience.

Following the demographic survey, participants engaged in one-on-one interviews structured around open-ended questions to elicit thoughtful and reflective responses about their experiences with student behavior and support systems. This interview format encouraged educators to express their viewpoints and insights openly. The study allowed the researcher to hear the voices of elementary educators as they shared the stories in response to the following research questions:

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be the impact of positive behavior management systems on supporting teachers, students, and families?

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

Furthermore, participants were encouraged to provide relevant documents and artifacts, enriching the qualitative data with tangible examples of school-wide positive behavior support in action. These materials, such as classroom rules and instructional resources, underscored educators' dedication to enhancing student behavior support.

The research also involved observations to capture patterns in student behavior and educators' responses. These observations illuminated the importance of solid classroom dynamics and the strategies employed by teachers. Examples of observed scenarios ranged from teacher-student interactions during playground disagreements to morning meetings discussing classroom expectations and instances of positive redirection to address social challenges among students. These observations deepened the understanding of the relationship between student behavior and educators' approaches to creating a positive learning environment.

Chapter five is organized as follows: Summary of Findings (including significant findings), Discussion, Significance of Study, Recommendations for Future Research, and Conclusions. The essential results are thoroughly analyzed and connected to the research mentioned in the literature review section. Upon gathering information from educators, the study supports the literature that these school-wide systems support teachers and their management and support of student behavior by lessening exclusionary practices, strengthening teacher-student

relationships, and supporting classroom culture and climate. This provides a framework for the study's significance for educators, school leaders, and educational stakeholders.

Recommendations for future research follow, and the chapter concludes with a study summary.

Summary of Findings

Elementary educators were asked first to complete a demographic survey to ensure a diverse array of teachers were reflected in the sample. While their years of teaching experience, level of education, and grade level experience varied for each study participant, common themes surfaced from interviews, artifacts, and observations. Several themes emerged through the analysis of data: (a) centering support for teachers, (b) support through communication and collaboration, (c) support through consistency, accountability, and expectations, (d) support for students, and (e) address the challenges. These findings were selected after analyzing each interview to find commonalities among interview data. Each one has a clear connection to the initial research questions.

Participant Descriptions

Each interviewee's background, experience, and grade level exposure contributed to the rich and diverse perspectives gathered in this research on the impact of school-wide support systems on elementary education. Interviewees are noted as educators as they are all elementary school educators.

Educator 1

Interviewee 1, a woman in her 40s, identified as white and possessed over 16 years of teaching experience. She had taught students in both the fourth and fifth grades. Her perspective on school-wide support systems likely drew from her extensive background in elementary education, which included managing behaviors across different grade levels.

Educator 2

Interviewee 2 is another woman in her 40s. She identified as belonging to an ethnic group categorized as “Other.” She also has over 16 years of teaching experience and has worked with students across a broad range of grade levels, from kindergarten to fifth grade. Her diverse experience allowed her to offer insights into the impact of support systems on students of varying ages.

Educator 3

Interviewee 3 is a woman in her 50s who identified as white and had more than 16 years of teaching experience. Her unique position as a junior kindergarten teacher offered a distinctive perspective on how support systems influenced the earliest stages of a child’s educational journey.

Educator 4

Interviewee 4, a woman in her 20s, identified as white and had between 0-3 years of teaching experience, primarily teaching second grade. Her perspective provides insights into how newer educators perceive and navigate support systems. This educator is currently a part of the New Teacher Cohort at her school, which helps new educators transition to the school.

Educator 5

Interviewee 5 is a woman in her 40s identifying as Black. She has over 16 years of teaching experience and worked with students in both second and third grades. She had worked at over seven public and independent schools in different states, displaying a variety of experiences in other districts. Her diverse background provided valuable insights into how support systems impact students of different backgrounds and ages.

Educator 6

Interviewee 6 is a woman in her 40s who identified as white and had 12-15 years of teaching experience. She had taught students in both kindergarten and first grade, allowing her to offer insights into the early stages of elementary education. This interviewee hopes to acquire a Student Support position as this is where her advanced degree is focused.

Educator 7

Interviewee 7, a man in his 50s, provided a unique perspective. While not specifying his ethnicity, he had 8-11 years of teaching experience, predominantly in the fourth grade. His insights into support systems from a male educator's viewpoint were particularly interesting for comparative purposes. This educator is also the team leader on his current grade-level team. He also represents the lower division of the school's Safety and Security Team.

Educator 8

Interviewee 8, a woman aged 60 or older, also identified as white and had over 16 years of teaching experience, working with students in both the first and third grades. Her extensive experience provided a broad historical context to her perceptions of support systems. This educator was a team member who led the school's search for behavior support systems in Lower School. Additionally, she is highly sought after as a resource for building a solid class community.

Educator 9

Interviewee 9, a woman in her 30s, identified as white and had 12-15 years of teaching experience. She taught second grade and also provided support, offering insights into how support systems impact both classroom teachers and support staff.

Educator 10

Interviewee 10 is a woman in her 30s, identified as white, with between 8 and 11 years of teaching experience. She taught second and third grades, showcasing her perspective on the influence of support systems across these grade levels. As a recent graduate from a Master's Program, this educator held leadership responsibilities on her grade level team and was a team member leading the school's search for behavior support systems in Lower School.

Educator 11

Interviewee 11 is a woman in her 30s who identified as Asian, had 12-15 years of teaching experience and had worked with students in the first, third, and fifth grades. Her diverse grade-level experience offered insights into the impact of support systems on students at various stages of elementary education. As a person of color who has done extensive research on the Cultural Responsiveness Framework, this educator brought up her views on how only some school-wide behavior support systems may give equitable support to children of color compared to their peers.

Educator 12

Interviewee 12, a woman in her 20s, identified as white and had 4-7 years of teaching experience. This interviewee had some of the lowest years of teaching experience. She had experience teaching preschool and kindergarten, providing a unique viewpoint on how early education intersects with support systems. Much discussion with this educator highlighted the impact college education programs have on newer educators.

Elementary teachers' responses to school-wide positive behavior support systems were synthesized into five findings: (a) centering support for teachers, (b) support through communication and collaboration, (c) support through consistency, accountability, and

expectations, (d) support for students, and (e) addressing the challenges. Each theme is described in detail in the following sections and connected to the literature review and theoretical framework. The findings are linked to the research and literature to confirm results and determine new research conclusions.

Table 6

Triangulation Table

Findings	Present in Interviews	Present in Observations	Present in Artifacts
Finding 1: Centering support for teachers	X	X	X
Finding 2: Support through communication and collaboration	X	X	X
Finding 3: Support through consistency, accountability and expectations	X	X	X
Finding 4: Support for students	X	X	X
Finding 5: Addressing the challenges	X	X	X

Finding 1: Centering Support for Teachers

The most glaring theme from interview conversations with teachers is their perception of the vital need for schools to adopt school-wide positive behavior support systems. In their interviews, 12 participants spoke about the high impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. Follow-up observations and artifacts further supported this. Observations showed how interviewees used positive school-wide support systems to proactively address behavior

challenges in the classroom. Artifacts included a spreadsheet that compares behavior/office referrals before and after school-wide behavior support system implementation, teacher checklists for helping support students through the first six weeks of school, books for leading a morning community meeting with students, and printed slides that outline the school-wide guidelines. Every interviewee commented on the need for school-wide behavior support systems and that the benefits far outweigh the challenges. This support takes the guesswork out of teachers tasked with creating their own within their classes.

Every interviewed educator also emphasized the profound influence of school-wide behavior support systems, a viewpoint corroborated by observations and supporting materials. The prevailing theme from these conversations was the consensus among teachers regarding the need to implement school-wide positive behavior support systems in elementary schools. However, a study conducted in 2020 discovered that positive and restorative support systems may unintentionally further perpetuate conventional power structures unless the educators overseeing them already possess strong connections with the students in question (Lustick, 2020). Nonetheless, each interviewee stressed the fundamental role of these systems within educational contexts, underscoring that their benefits far exceed any accompanying challenges. This shared perspective emphasizes the unanimous consensus among educators regarding the pivotal role of comprehensive behavior support frameworks in cultivating positive learning environments.

In sum, teacher interviews highlighted a clear finding: the perceived importance of using school-wide positive behavior support systems. All teacher interviewees shared this view, and it was further backed by observations and artifacts like data comparisons, teacher checklists, books for student meetings, and printed school guidelines. Despite potential challenges with these

school-wide systems, teachers stressed the crucial role of these systems in fostering positive learning environments and ensuring consistent behavior expectations and subsequent behavior management.

Finding 2: Support Through Communication and Collaboration

With the right level of diligent and deliberate implementation on all constituents, including collaboration and communication between teachers and parents, the effects of restorative discipline practices show a decrease in exclusionary discipline practices of elementary school students, decreased disciplinary referrals, and improvement in students' academic achievement and relationships (Schiff, 2018). Students of color are referred at higher rates than their white peers (Schiff). Prior research shows how restorative justice practices are increasingly being used as a way to address not only behavior concerns but also racial disparities in school discipline practices (Schiff). Through this study, further analysis showed that elementary school teachers consider communication and collaboration integral to their feelings of support in managing student behavior. Interviews allowed participants to discuss the importance of partnership when building effective teacher language to confront student behaviors. During interviews, teachers also shared how they partner with fellow educators and school administration to find developmentally appropriate ways to manage challenging student behavior. One interviewee discussed how having a consistent language that is consistent school-wide helps to support teachers' relationships with their students. This interviewee talked about how the consistent system allows her to focus on relationship-building instead of explaining new behavior systems at the beginning of each year. Her approach includes a daily morning community meeting, which helps support the development of a positive classroom culture and climate.

Collaboration with fellow educators and administration is not the only collaboration that helps teachers feel supported when supporting student behavior. The study found that their partnership with families plays a significant role when teachers navigate behavior concerns. The teachers interviewed said collaboration and communication with families are seen more positively through positive behavior systems. This can be attributed to the fact that families are familiar with school-wide expectations consistent from year to year instead of thinking that some teachers may be more “strict” or firm with their behavior expectations than others. Interviewed teachers shared that school administrators and teachers were sure to share the school-wide expectations with families at the beginning of each year. Teachers shared that the expectations, which they also called agreements, were perceived to be well received by families because they are research-backed, include language that is proactive and easy to understand, and are developmentally appropriate for elementary-age students. The study also found that teachers feel they can speak with families more freely about the expectations because they were established and backed by the school administration. The study found that because teachers feel the systems take a more positive spin on supporting behavior instead of a more punitive approach, they will have more collaborative support from families. Not only would this consistency be helpful for teachers, but interviewed teachers feel that the consistency of positive behavior support systems would also benefit families.

Teachers shared that a strong classroom culture and climate and positive student relationships help reduce exclusionary practices. The National Education Association (NEA) reports that 55% of teachers leave the profession earlier than planned (Walker, 2022). Teachers rate student behavioral challenges as one of the most prevalent sources of teacher stress and stress-related illnesses (Bardach et al., 2022; Jerrim, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021).

However, it is essential to note that interviewed teachers felt their stress level was reduced because of positive school-wide systems. This study found that school-wide systems help reduce teachers' stress when managing behavior. This is partly due to the support they get by communicating and collaborating with key stakeholders- fellow teachers, school administration, and families.

This finding highlights elementary teachers' perceptions of how effective implementation of positive behavior support, coupled with collaboration and communication among teachers, administrators, and families, has led to positive outcomes in elementary schools. According to the teachers interviewed in this study, these positive outcomes include reduced exclusionary discipline rates, improved academic performance, and better student-teacher relationships. This also reduces teacher stress, a significant factor in the rising teacher turnover rates. Teachers shared that if consistent, research-backed behavior expectations contribute to these positive results.

Finding 3: Support through Consistency, Accountability, and Expectations

Consistency of implementation and expectations are critical attributes of building a positive school-wide behavior support system (Colvin & Fernandez, 2020; OSEP PBIS Center, 2017; Stormont et al., 2008; Wienen et al., 2019). The study found a strong call for consistency of expectations while supporting student behavior. Examples of this are having a common and consistent language (word usage and phrasing) and accountability used by teachers to clarify students regarding behavioral expectations. Through interviews, teachers shared that their word usage and phrasing when managing student behavior should be clear and direct so students know the expectations. The study found that these clear and explicit expectations also help teachers deal with behavior promptly instead of making decisions as situations arise.

The study also found that holding students accountable for their actions supports teachers when navigating challenges with students as they work to support the culture and climate of the classroom. One observation included a moment where a student spoke with two students to remind them of the expectations in the hallway of not talking. After that conversation, both students followed the directions until they arrived at their destination, where she gave them a thumbs-up signal of approval. This was a proactive approach as the teachers shared that the same students were chatty in the hallway during the prior transition. The school created infographics that show school-wide hallway expectations, one of which is quiet voices that do not disrupt the learning of others in the hallway. An interviewed teacher shared, “They know what they are supposed to be doing and that they are held accountable in the same way in all spaces and not just different rules for different spaces.”

School-wide systems such as Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) and Restorative Justice fall under the behaviorism’s approach to discipline. The Behaviorist Theory has been used as a foundational principle in positive behavior management systems (Kervick et al., 2020). Discipline systems have historically punished negative behaviors by eliminating or lessening them and rewarded those positive behaviors they want to encourage or continue (Clark, 2018). Educators shared that the more they focus on the desired behavior instead of the undesired behavior that a student may exhibit, the better the teacher’s relationship with their students. Behaviorism, a theory first created by John B. Watson, believes that learning occurs through teaching rewards and punishments that lead to changes in behavior (Clark, 2018). The primary goal of behaviorism is that if a student achieves the desired response from the taught positive behavior, then that student is more likely to use that positive behavior again (Clark, 2018). Therefore, the more proactive and positive the teacher is while managing situations, the lower

the chance of the teacher using more extreme consequences, including exclusionary disciplinary practices.

This finding highlights teachers' perceptions of how consistency in implementing clear behavioral expectations is an essential component of establishing a positive school-wide behavior support system. Throughout interview conversations, teachers regularly stressed the importance of using consistent language and accountability to clarify expectations for students. Holding students accountable for their actions, as observed, helps maintain a positive classroom culture. The behaviorism theory, which grounds systems like PBIS and Restorative Justice, focuses on rewarding positive behavior to build better teacher-student relationships and lessening exclusionary disciplinary actions (Kervick et al., 2020).

Finding 4: Support for Students

There are historical levels of disparity among disciplinary practices, particularly among Black and Hispanic students, students living in single-parent homes, and students with special needs (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Lace et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). When entering our schools, school leaders and educators must consider students' identities and stories. Even when involved in the same disciplinary infractions, Black students and students with disabilities were significantly more likely to receive exclusionary discipline consequences (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021). Providing students with opportunities to be authentic is a form of student support. Research on the school-to-prison pipeline shows that certain proactive practices would likely alleviate this problem of high rates of incarcerated people of color, such as better teacher support and preparation as well as restorative disciplinary practices, such as positive behavior support systems (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021). Increased cultural awareness produced more positive behavior management (Stewart, 2022). The research

supported this finding as interviewees shared their perceptions on how important it is to recognize, respect, and value our differences. They also shared their various approaches to supporting the behavior of diverse groups of students in addition to the integration of school-wide positive behavior support systems.

Sociocultural Theory is crucial in understanding teacher relationships and student learning (Stewart, 2022). The Sociocultural Theory touches on the importance of relationships and how these relationships help students learn. Fostering relationships with students is critical, so having a dialogue helps teachers better connect with students as they hear about their different experiences. It also helps the class greatly appreciate their peers and the diverse world around them. This can happen during morning meetings where students can share personal stories daily. Daily sharing is a component of the school's positive school-wide behavior support framework where the case study occurred. The teacher's relationship with their students supports the classroom culture and environment (Lloyd et al., 2022). The study shows that teacher-student relationships are strengthened when students are supported, regardless of their identity or differences. Students having a positive relationship with their teacher helps eliminate exclusionary practices through connection, compassion, and proactive conversation. These relationships help with more challenging situations as teachers are more apt to use restorative practices with students with whom they have more positive relationships.

To be proactive and provide clarity of expectations, educators must model and teach behaviors and provide opportunities for students to practice the expected and appropriate behaviors. This is a positive and proactive way to support students. Students will benefit from direct instruction in prosocial behaviors. An observation of a morning community meeting showcased how a teacher modeled interaction to have students participate in building the

classroom rules, which were called “classroom agreements.” This was the beginning of a six-week experience where students were included in deciding how they wanted the class community to function. The teacher had students go to the center of the room to model how the expectations should look and feel.

Research shows that supporting students by including them in the classroom community also supports the culture and climate of the classroom. It is vital that teachers model and explicitly teach behaviors positively and proactively. This modeling helps foster students’ intrinsic motivation to follow expectations. The study found that teachers believe that intrinsic motivation is an important factor that decreases exclusionary practices in schools. Additionally, teachers should provide opportunities for students to practice the behavioral expectations. Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, also known as social constructivism, states that children learn through interactions with others (Stewart, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978).

The study found that when teachers take the time to build class community proactively, they have relationships in place that they can use when it is time to have difficult conversations instead of removing students from the classroom. When students exhibit challenging behaviors, teachers are mindful of the messages that students receive when they earn or receive exclusionary discipline practices such as administrative office visits, detentions, suspensions, or expulsion. A challenge with removing some students from the classroom is that it can be seen as negative reinforcement for some students (Stormont et al., 2008). Instead, the study found that teachers using school-wide approaches that allow students to reset is more of a positive approach to supporting behavior. An example of time is a calming corner or a movement break, which removes a student from the area temporarily while allowing students the opportunity to reset before rejoining the class community. The study found that these school-wide approaches lessen

exclusionary practices and support the classroom culture and environment while supporting students better. This includes interventions, social-emotional learning, and supports that reward positive behavior, reframe misbehavior, and establish protocols to redirect students to make better choices around behavior (Lustick, 2020).

In summary of this finding, previous research supports the fact that there are historical disparities that exist in disciplinary practices, particularly affecting students who identify as Black and Hispanic, students living in single-parent homes, and students with special needs (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Lace et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). To address this, educators must consider students' identities and stories. This study's finding highlights how proactive practices, such as increased teacher support, restorative disciplinary approaches, and increased cultural awareness, can alleviate the school-to-prison pipeline issue facing our nation. In interviews, teachers suggested how building strong teacher-student relationships through conversations and positive modeling, along with involving students in classroom communities, helps eliminate exclusionary practices while supporting a positive classroom culture and climate. These approaches emphasize positive behavior among students.

Finding 5: Addressing the Challenges

The study supported the finding that stress related to teaching continues to be a significant challenge for educators. Schools' development of positive behavior support systems only solves some challenges related to student behavior. Some teachers feel they need to be equipped to manage all behavior challenges, particularly those more escalated. This includes questioning decision making when it comes to managing student behavior. The lack of preparedness goes back to teacher education programs, where many interviewees shared that they needed to attain the skills needed to be better prepared to manage student behavior

adequately and confidently. The study found that even with the adoption of school-wide approaches, continuing professional development is needed to support best practices. The study also found a need for tools and resources to help navigate students' social-emotional needs that may manifest as extreme behavior challenges. Teachers' perception of their ability to prevent misbehavior and manage disruptive behavior challenges is significant in preventing burnout (Bardach et al., 2022).

An observation showed a teacher trying to address extreme behavior from a student who did not adhere to the expectations. Despite the teacher's attempt to proactively converse with the student before recess, the student continued to be physical with peers. In another observation, a teacher had to call the school administration to have a student removed from the room who was not following expectations. While the behaviors observed in both situations are extreme, both support the finding that there continue to be challenges when managing student behavior.

Teachers want to feel supported by school leadership and families when navigating student behavior challenges. This support will only strengthen collective efficacy, an educator's shared belief that they can better meet students' behavioral support needs (Peng Liu, 2019). Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that with collaborative, cooperative, responsive, and accountable minds, educators will succeed when they have buy-in and believe they can meet the needs of those who matter most- the students (Peng Liu, 2019). Educators also want a voice in decisions made regarding school-wide behavior support systems. The study found that some teachers feel that school-wide systems can take away their voice, particularly if they do not agree with the school-wide system. An artifact submitted by an educator is an acknowledgment card that teachers sign and give to the class who are found doing the right thing. The educator shared that this system is challenging because she feels that the students are doing the right thing

because they are motivated by the reward they receive, not because they are intrinsically motivated to follow classroom expectations.

School-wide positive behavior support systems are not without challenges, nor will they solve all of the problems related to student behavior. In sum of this finding, the study confirms that teacher stress remains a significant challenge; and while positive behavior support systems help address some behavior issues, teachers still feel unequipped to handle escalated challenges. Teacher preparation programs should better equip educators to manage student behavior confidently. Continuing professional development and resources for students' social-emotional needs are needed even with school-wide approaches, and teachers want support from school leadership and families to enhance their collective efficacy. Some teachers feel their voice is diminished when school-wide systems are imposed, particularly when they disagree with them. Nonetheless, these challenges do not supersede the strong call for school-wide positive behavior support systems, as outlined in the first finding of this study.

Discussion

The phenomenological case study highlighted the voices of teachers and their perceptions of the impact that school-wide positive behavior systems have on students. Namely, the study was positioned to look at how these systems reduce or eliminate exclusionary practices, strengthen student-teacher relationships, and support the culture and climate of the classroom. The research from the literature review supported the study's significant findings. According to teachers, schoolwide positive behavior support systems have made significant contributions to ways to support student behavior best. It is timely and imperative that teachers' voices are heard to support them and the students they teach.

Support for Teachers

The results indicate that teachers believe that schools should establish positive behavior systems to best support students. The findings of this research showed numerous benefits to students, teachers, families, and the school community when implementing consistent behavior support systems. Historically, schools have instituted disciplinary practices, including suspension and expulsion, to manage behaviors that disrupt student learning (Fadus et al., 2021; Schiff, 2018). The finding directly relates to literature claiming that school-wide positive behavior support systems lessen or eliminate exclusionary practices, strengthen teachers' relationships, and support classroom culture and climate (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Lace et al., 2018; Schiff, 2018; Stormont et al., 2008; Walker, 2022; Yeung et al., 2016).

After being asked how schools would look and feel with a school-wide positive behavior support system, 10 interviewees used the term "chaos" in their initial response. This supports evidence that elementary educators feel that school-wide positive behavior support systems are beneficial and help eliminate chaos and confusion in our schools, thereby centering support for teachers. Furthermore, elementary school educators in this study emphasized that such systems create a structured learning environment where both teachers and students know what to expect, fostering a more conducive atmosphere for learning. This sentiment underscores the idea that school-wide positive behavior support systems play a crucial role in alleviating disruptive behavior, ultimately leading to more positive classroom dynamics. It highlights the potential for these systems to not only benefit educators but also enhance the overall quality of education by providing a supportive and structured foundation for all involved.

Communication and Collaboration

The research findings from interviews, observations, and artifact analysis revealed a shared perspective among teachers regarding the vital significance of communication and collaboration in their perception of support when addressing student behavior. Teachers stressed that their partnership with families substantially influences their sense of support, mainly when dealing with behavior concerns. Furthermore, the interviewed teachers conveyed that positive behavior systems positively impact collaboration and communication with families, rendering these aspects more effective and favorable. The findings of this research highlight the vital importance of nurturing consistent communication and collaboration between educators and families, especially within the framework of positive behavior support systems, as they contribute significantly to creating an optimal learning environment.

In addition, the study found that the teachers' emphasis on consistency and clarity in communication and collaboration extends to their interactions within the school community. The teachers interviewed stressed the importance of unified language and expectations among educators, administrators, and students to maintain a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere. This underscores the notion that clear and consistent communication not only strengthens relationships within the classroom but also extends to the entire school environment. Teachers recognized that such uniformity in language and expectations promotes a sense of unity and shared responsibility, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of positive behavior support systems and ensuring a more supportive and conducive learning environment for all. When teachers use uniform language and expectations within a positive behavior support system, they provide a structured and predictable environment for students. This clarity and consistency create a set of expectations and consequences, reinforcing the desired behaviors. This practice is rooted

in behaviorist principles that suggest that well-defined expectations and consistent responses can lead to the desired student behaviors, as students are more likely to exhibit behaviors that result in positive outcomes. In essence, the principles of behaviorism underlie the idea that clear communication and consistent expectations are effective tools for shaping student behavior, creating a positive and conducive learning environment in which students understand the relationship between their actions and the consequences.

Consistency, Accountability, and Expectations

Consistency emerged as a central theme in teacher interviews and observations, underscoring its vital role. Teachers emphasized the importance of consistency in language and accountability to establish clear behavioral expectations for students. The findings also consistently demonstrated a notable pattern: teachers should utilize clear and direct language when communicating with students. This consistent approach in both language and expectations was deemed fundamental for effectively managing student behavior within the educational context.

The emphasis on consistency in language and expectations further aligns with behaviorism as it reinforces the idea that a predictable and consistent environment helps students connect their actions with specific outcomes. In a behaviorist framework, students learn to adapt their behavior based on the expected consequences (Kervick et al., 2020). When educators maintain a clear and unwavering approach, they provide students with a structured environment in which they can readily anticipate the consequences of their actions. This, in turn, fosters a more effective way of managing student behavior by leveraging behaviorist principles, ultimately contributing to a positive and productive learning atmosphere.

Support for Students

The research centered on acknowledging students' identities and life experiences upon entering school environments. Participants stressed the importance of valuing and honoring the distinctive differences that each student brings with them. To bolster clarity and efficacy, the study highlighted proactive and positive strategies, including modeling and teaching desired behaviors, as well as creating opportunities for students to practice these behaviors. The consensus among participants strongly favored direct instruction in prosocial behaviors as a valuable means of supporting students and fostering a more inclusive and nurturing learning environment.

This focus on valuing students' identities and life experiences upon their arrival at school resonates with the principles of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in education, also known as constructivism. Constructivism emphasizes the role of a student's prior knowledge, experiences, and individual perspectives in the learning process (Stewart, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). By acknowledging and honoring the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students, teachers align with constructivist principles, which stress the importance of building on students' existing knowledge and experiences to facilitate meaningful learning (Stewart, 2022). Moreover, the proactive strategies of modeling and teaching desired behaviors, along with providing opportunities for practice, align with constructivist theory by actively engaging students in their learning process and promoting a cooperative and inclusive educational setting (Stewart, 2022).

Challenges

Teacher stress remains a critical challenge in retaining educators in classrooms, as highlighted in the study. An examination of more than 25 vignettes underscored recurring themes of "stress" and "frustration." Notably, stress and frustration stemming from student behavior

emerged as a primary factor leading educators to leave the profession. The research underscores the vital role of school leadership in actively listening to teachers' voices to offer the necessary support. Furthermore, educators grapple with feeling ill-prepared to address the escalating behavior challenges in elementary classrooms, which is a significant source of stress. Conversations with teachers reveal that elevated student behaviors consistently increase stress. Additionally, the study suggests that the pandemic's effects may have exacerbated school behavior-related challenges, further complicating the issue.

Teacher stress is a significant factor contributing to high turnover rates in the profession, as discussed with teachers during interviews (Bardach et al., 2022; Jerrim, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021). The research highlights the importance of school leadership in attentively addressing the concerns of educators who face mounting stress and frustration, often stemming from challenging student behavior. Moreover, teachers' feelings of being ill-equipped to manage escalating classroom behaviors add to their stress, a situation exacerbated by the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bardach et al., 2022). This underscores the critical need for proactive support and professional development to alleviate teacher stress and promote a more sustainable and fulfilling teaching career.

Table 7

Comparison of Important Findings With Existing Research on Positive Behavior Support Systems

Important Finding	Previous Research
Finding 1: School-wide positive behavior support systems provide elementary school teachers with a form of support for teachers when managing student behavior	Research on the school-to-prison pipeline shows that certain proactive practices would likely alleviate this problem of high rates of incarcerated people of color, such as better teacher support and preparation as well as restorative disciplinary practices, such as positive behavior support systems (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021).
Finding 2: School-wide positive behavior support systems provide elementary school teachers with support through	With the right level mix of diligent and deliberate implementation on all constituents, including

communication and collaboration with families, peer educators, and school administration	collaboration and communication between teachers and parents, the effects of restorative discipline practices should show a decrease in exclusionary discipline practices of elementary school students, decreased disciplinary referrals, and improvement in students' academic achievement and relationships (Schiff, 2018).
Finding 3: School-wide positive behavior support systems provide elementary school teachers with support through consistency of language, accountability for actions, and clear expectations for students	Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a research-backed teaching method that connects students' culture, language, and exposure along with their education (Reno et al., 2017). Through CRT, the weaving of these connections enriches a student's academic experience by giving them access to a curriculum that develops higher-level academic skills.
Finding 4: School-wide positive behavior support systems provide elementary school teachers with support for students	Exclusionary practices are disruptive to a child's need for consistency and routine, potentially causing children to fall behind. If children feel misunderstood or mistreated, this punishment may also incite negative emotions like anger and resentment. It also stands to note that more aggressive physical behavior could be more of a way for elementary school children to manage emotions, particularly among students who are in the process of learning the verbal skills needed to regulate emotions (Jacobsen et al., 2019).
Finding 5: School-wide positive behavior support systems provide elementary school teachers does not solve all problems. There is a call to continue to address the challenges with student behavior	Teachers continue to report high levels of stress and frustration, citing frustration as one of the top reasons for leaving the profession (Walker, 2022). While most research has been data-driven in looking at the success of positive systems in lessening exclusionary discipline practice, there is limited research in understanding these systems' impact on teachers.

Tying Theory to Findings

Both behaviorism and social-cultural theory provide valuable perspectives for understanding and addressing the findings. These theories offer insights into the individual behaviors of teachers and students (behaviorism) and the broader social and cultural context in which these behaviors occur (social-cultural theory). As an example, consistency, accountability, and clear expectations align with the behaviorist principle, which reinforces the importance of providing clear expectations and reinforcement (Archambault et al., 2017). Seemingly, when teachers have clear expectations of their students and students and teachers are held accountable through a school-wide positive behavior support system, it creates a structured environment that

can influence positive behaviors. According to Vygotsky (1978), children are significantly influenced by the classroom environment and the expectations set of them during their time in that space, thereby connecting to sociocultural theory.

Centering Support for Teachers

In understanding the theory of behaviorism by Skinner and Watson, we find a natural connection to School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Systems. These systems are rooted in the idea that promoting positive behaviors is more effective than punishing negative ones (Skinner, 1913). In behaviorist terms, centering support around teachers aligns with the idea of providing positive reinforcement for desired behaviors (Skinner, 1913; Watson, 1938). Positive behavior support systems, when implemented effectively, can reinforce and encourage teachers' positive actions and interactions within the school environment (Leite et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). By prioritizing support for teachers, schools acknowledge the significant influence that the environment (social and cultural factors) has on the teaching context. It connects the social-cultural perspective with the importance of supporting teachers within their specific context (Miller, 2011; Stewart, 2022). Providing support within this context is essential for their professional growth and effectiveness.

Support Through Communication and Collaboration

Effective communication and collaboration can be viewed through a behaviorist lens as reinforcing positive interpersonal behaviors among teachers. Positive interactions and collaboration can be reinforced to create a more supportive and cooperative educational environment (Leite et al., 2022; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Social-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interactions and collaboration in learning and development. Effective communication and collaboration among teachers are consistent with the sociocultural idea that

learning and development occur within a social context (Thurlings & den Brok, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Support Through Consistency, Accountability, and Expectations

Consistency, accountability, and clear expectations align with behaviorist principles, which illuminate the importance of providing clear expectations and reinforcement (Archambault et al., 2017; Evertson et al., 2021; Wienen et al., 2019). When teachers have clear expectations and are held accountable, it creates a structured environment that can influence positive behaviors (Bardach et al., 2022; Lloyd et al., 2022). The importance of consistency, accountability, and expectations also fits into the social-cultural framework by recognizing the influence of societal norms and expectations on educational practices (Bardach et al., 2022; Lloyd et al., 2022). These elements contribute to a shared understanding within the educational community.

Support for Students

From a behaviorist perspective, the positive outcomes for students resulting from effective teacher support can be seen as the reinforcement of desirable teaching behaviors. The interconnectedness between teacher support and student success reinforces the idea that positive teacher behaviors contribute to positive student behaviors (Evertson et al., 2021; Skinner, 1938). This finding is consistent with social-cultural theory because it emphasizes the interconnectedness between teachers and students within a cultural and educational setting. The finding supports the idea that social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the dynamics between teachers and students (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Evertson et al., 2021; Skinner, 1938). The support for students is situated within the broader social and cultural dynamics of the educational setting.

Addressing Challenges

Addressing challenges within the educational context can be approached from a behaviorist perspective by identifying and modifying behaviors that contribute to challenges. When addressing challenges within the educational context from a behaviorist perspective, the focus will be identifying and modifying behaviors that contribute to those challenges (Skinner, 1938; Watson, 1913). It could also involve implementing strategies and interventions to shape more adaptive behaviors among teachers to achieve the positive results that they want to see (Skinner, 1938).

Study Implications

There has been a shift in thinking about managing student behavior through exclusionary practices being used to address these behaviors (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021; Schiff, 2018). Schools are designing and implementing school-wide systems that include positive and proactive interventions, consistent modeling of appropriate behavioral norms, and common school-wide expectations and language. A school-wide shift from a punitive style of discipline to a positive, proactive one is not simply implementing a program. Instead, it is a cultural change to the school community. Ultimately, those responsible for executing this shift are our classroom teachers. The study provides new insight into the relationship between how elementary teachers perceive positive behavior support systems and their overall success in best supporting students' behavior. Prior research looked at teachers in general without highlighting one specific group, while this research shared the stories, experiences, and perceptions of elementary school teachers.

Shift in Behavior Management Approach

What is implied is that these systems work, and the benefits associated with them far outweigh the continued challenges. Research highlights a compelling shift away from what

research identifies as traditional exclusionary practices (Lustick, 2020). These systems support students, teachers, administrators, and the school community. Schools should continue to use these practices while reflecting and refining best practices. It is not merely about adopting a program; it is about cultivating a cultural transformation within the school community.

Cultural Change in Schools

This cultural shift is particularly evident in the implementation of school-wide systems. It is crucial to understand that this shift is not confined to merely adopting a new program; it represents a fundamental change in the very fabric of the school community. This transformation involves aligning school-wide expectations with a shared vision, language, and set of practices that collectively contribute to a positive school culture.

Additional Support for Teachers

Support is essential. This study was purposefully designed to concentrate on a crucial element of this educational landscape – elementary teachers. To better prepare teachers, colleges should boost coursework and field experiences in our elementary schools that engage teacher candidates in work that further supports them in managing student behaviors (Bardach et al., 2022; Hirsh et al., 2022). Additionally, to keep teachers in schools, we must continue dedicated professional development and other tools of support (Bardach et al., 2022; Hirsh et al., 2022)

Limitations

As with any study involving human researchers and subjects, researchers come with biases that can influence their study. One limitation of this study is researcher bias, which happens when the researcher focuses on data that supports their own beliefs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To address this, the researcher was open-minded and acknowledged her biases, ensuring those biases did not influence the study. The researcher was careful to adhere to the planned

questions and sought clarification when needed. This prevented the participants from sharing desired answers. The researcher also used inductive reasoning to understand the participants' responses, judging the information's quality without asking leading questions. From start to finish, the goal was to prioritize the perspectives of teachers in the research. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Trochim et al., 2016).

Another limitation of the study was the number of participants and geographical location. While this phenomenological case study allowed the 12 diverse participants the opportunity to share their unique experiences to be heard, they do not represent all of the voices who want to be heard. The study was conducted exclusively with elementary school teachers in North Carolina. Schools across the United States may have different approaches to understanding and managing student behavior challenges. Therefore, the results of the research reflect the culmination of each participant's experiences and should be interpreted as such. Additionally, these schools may vary in the support they provide to manage behaviors and behavior support systems. This support can include training for teachers and administrative help for both teachers and students. Gathering insights from teachers in different types of schools should reflect diverse data. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the results of this research and the information derived from each teacher's experiences should hold as points of view among a multitude of potential responses.

Recommendations Overview

Moving forward, future researchers can consider broadening the geographical scope for comprehensive insights to extend the study. There is also an opportunity to closely examine teachers' perspectives on extreme behavior challenges through focused group discussions. Future researchers can consider expanding the research to middle and high school teachers to evaluate the impact of positive behavior support systems. Additionally, mixed methods studies can be

used to gather numerical data on the systems' effectiveness, particularly in looking at exclusionary practices. Lastly, cast a wider net by including teachers from different counties or internationally for a diverse range of perspectives. These steps will contribute to a more holistic understanding of positive behavior support systems.

School leaders should always reflect and refine initiatives. Integrating positive behavior support systems can alleviate teacher stress and enhance retention. Additionally, school leaders are encouraged to provide continuous training on positive support systems and interventions for extreme behaviors. College programs play a vital role; they should consider offering hands-on courses for better teacher preparation and allocate time for training to reduce feelings of unpreparedness. Lastly, incorporating behaviorism principles into teacher training programs can equip educators with effective tools for understanding and modifying student behavior.

As teacher departure rates rise, schools need robust support systems. Despite positive results with behavior support systems, elementary teachers face challenges with extreme behaviors (Reno et al., 2017; Stormont et al., 2008). I encourage teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities, especially in restorative practices. Immediate implementation of restorative practices may help eliminate punitive systems (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018).

Recommendations for Future Researchers

There are multiple directions for future studies related to positive behavior support systems. Future studies can be conducted to include teachers' perceptions from other areas to broaden the findings to include more diverse thought. This would add to the findings of the current research, which includes one state. A second direction for further research should be to explore the voices of teachers further by bringing them together for a focus group meeting to

hear how they approach more extreme behavior challenges. This would elicit a great response rate from teachers who could come together to hear from others to gain an increased understanding of the ways educators manage student behavior and the impact that positive systems have on their work. Additionally, the research can be expanded to include middle school or high school teachers to see whether the impact would be the same. A mixed methods study could provide numerical data to better gauge how exclusionary practices were lessened or eliminated by positive behavior support systems. A final direction would be to gather more voices by casting a wider net of teachers across the county or internationally.

Diverse Geographic Sampling

Conduct surveys and interviews with teachers from at least three different states or regions. Ensure representation from urban, suburban, and rural areas to better understand how positive behavior support systems are perceived and implemented across diverse educational landscapes.

Focus Group Sessions

Organize and facilitate focus group meetings with teachers who have successfully handled extreme behavior challenges using positive behavior support systems. Collect qualitative data on specific strategies used and challenges faced, gaining a deeper insight into the practical application of these systems in challenging scenarios.

Grade-Level Variation

Expand the research to include middle school and high school teachers. Compare the effectiveness of positive behavior support systems across different age groups. Use a mixed methods approach to gather quantitative data on behavioral outcomes and teacher perceptions in each educational level.

In-Depth Exclusionary Practices Study

Use a mixed methods design to quantitatively measure the reduction or elimination of exclusionary practices in schools implementing positive behavior support systems. Combine this with qualitative insights from teachers to explore the details of how these systems impact and alter disciplinary measures.

International or Countywide Perspective

Cast a wider net by involving teachers internationally or from various countries. This can be done through online surveys, virtual interviews, or collaboration with educational institutions globally. Compare and contrast the implementation and effectiveness of positive behavior support systems in different cultural and educational contexts.

Recommendations for Schools

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the study successfully answers the research question of what elementary teachers perceive to be the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems. To aid in the integration of positive behavior support systems, it would be beneficial for schools to look at how these systems are implemented in elementary school. The findings of this research could shape how school leaders help teachers with behavior support systems across the whole school. Specifically, integration of these systems could alleviate some of the stress that teachers are experiencing, which causes them to leave the profession at alarming rates. To equip teachers with the tools needed to successfully implement these systems in their classrooms, school leaders should work diligently to provide ongoing training that focuses on building and refining positive support systems as well as interventions that help teachers know how to navigate to more extreme and challenging behaviors that they see in their classrooms.

College Education Programs should consider offering additional courses that will provide hands-on experiences that prepare teachers better for handling student behavior. Teacher stress linked to behavior issues is a big reason why they leave the education profession. Therefore, it is critical that teachers receive help from school leaders, families, and colleagues when they face behavior challenges. Creating time within education programs for rising teachers to receive training and assistance may reduce some of the feelings of being unprepared to enter the classroom. By providing aspiring teachers with training and assistance focused on behavior management, education programs can equip them with the knowledge and tools to understand and modify students' behavior effectively (Hirsh et al., 2022). Incorporating behaviorism principles into teacher training programs can also help alleviate teachers' feelings of being unprepared to handle classroom behavior. By teaching future educators how to use external reinforcements and structured systems to encourage positive behavior, education programs can better equip them for the challenges they may face in the classroom, ultimately improving teacher retention and the quality of education for students (Hirsh et al.).

Implementing these concrete next steps for school leaders and key stakeholders will contribute to a more effective integration of positive behavior support systems in schools, addressing teacher stress and improving the overall quality of education for students.

Review

School leaders can conduct a comprehensive review of how positive behavior support systems are implemented in elementary schools, considering the specific findings from this research. Through this, they can identify areas for improvement and develop guidelines for effective integration across the entire school.

Ongoing Teacher Training Programs

Leaders should consider developing and implementing ongoing training programs for teachers, focusing on building and refining positive behavior support systems. Previous research highlights the importance of teachers learning together as a way of enhancing professional development (Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). This professional development can include teachers working collectively with leadership to establish interventions to navigate extreme and challenging behaviors in their classrooms effectively.

Stress Reduction Initiatives

School leaders can find opportunities to collaborate with teachers to implement initiatives that reduce stress among teachers, such as mentorship programs, well-being workshops, or support groups. Also, schools should monitor the impact of these initiatives on teacher retention rates.

College Education Program Enhancement

Work with college education programs to enhance their curriculum by offering additional courses that provide hands-on experiences in handling student behavior should promote improvement in preparation. The collaboration will help to ensure aspiring teachers feel that they receive sufficient training and assistance in behavior management.

Behaviorism Principles Integration

Incorporate behaviorism principles into new educator training programs, accenting the use of external reinforcements and structured systems to encourage positive behavior. Monitor and assess the effectiveness of these principles in preparing future educators for classroom challenges.

Evaluation and Feedback Mechanism

Establish a system for ongoing evaluation and feedback from teachers, school leaders, and education program graduates regarding the impact and effectiveness of implemented changes. Use this feedback to continuously refine and improve support systems and training programs.

Community Collaboration

Foster collaboration between school leaders, families, and colleagues to provide support to teachers facing behavior challenges. Develop community initiatives that contribute to a supportive environment for teachers, enhancing their ability to manage classroom behavior effectively.

Recommendations for Elementary Teachers

With teachers leaving the profession with rates at an all-time high, this research is timely and essential in getting schools to find ways to better support teachers. Despite the successes experienced through school-wide positive behavior support systems, elementary school teachers continue to be challenged by more extreme behavior issues in the classroom. As teachers were interviewed, they shared stories of students' more challenging behaviors that cause them a great deal of stress. For example, one teacher said:

I think right now, because of what these kids have gone through during COVID, they are dealing with a lot of other problems. They didn't get to experience a lot of things when they were three and four years old because they were at home due to COVID. So now, we're seeing more problems, and we aren't prepared for them.

The effects of the pandemic may have an impact on student behavior.

Teachers are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities that increase their understanding of best practices in dealing with more challenging student behaviors. As some teachers shared, managing the many facets of student behavior is not a course offered in college programs that they were a part of. Teachers are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities early on in their careers, including restorative practices (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018). A similar study suggests that schools should implement intense and immediate restorative practices to eliminate punitive systems that include exclusionary practices (Lustick, 2020). However, the potential of restorative practices actually reducing the school-to-prison pipeline may not be fully realized unless it can challenge the existing social and organizational systems that perpetuate racial inequality in schools (Schiff, 2018).

In light of the current challenges faced by elementary school teachers, it is crucial for educators to proactively address the stress and difficulties associated with more extreme student behaviors. With an increasing number of teachers leaving the profession, this research emphasizes the need for schools to enhance support mechanisms (Jerrim & Taylor, 2021; Mérida-López et al., 2021). Despite the successes observed through school-wide positive behavior support systems, teachers continue to grapple with the complexities of extreme behavior issues in their classrooms.

Acknowledging the Challenge

Recognize the pressing need for enhanced support systems in schools due to the rising departure rates among teachers (Jerrim & Taylor, 2021; Mérida-López et al., 2021).

Professional Development for Behavioral Challenges

Actively engage in continuous professional development opportunities focusing on understanding best practices in managing more challenging student behaviors.

Gaps in College Programs

Advocate for improvements in college programs to address the lack of preparation for managing diverse facets of student behavior.

Early Career Empowerment

Early-career educators are encouraged to proactively participate in professional development, particularly in restorative practices, to strengthen their skills in managing challenging student behaviors.

Embracing Restorative Practices

Implement intense and immediate restorative practices in schools as a proactive measure to replace punitive systems, including exclusionary measures, in addressing challenging student behaviors.

Beyond Exclusionary Practices

Acknowledge the potential of restorative practices while recognizing their limitations in addressing broader issues of racial inequality within the educational system.

Navigating the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Understand the potential impact of restorative practices on broader social systems and their role in challenging and reshaping existing structures contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

Take a proactive approach toward personal and professional growth, aligning efforts with broader initiatives to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Conclusion

In light of the importance of addressing behavior challenges, the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support systems is a significant step in the right direction for supporting teachers and students. Given the behavior challenges that teachers face in addition to their other essential duties, the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support systems is a major step in the right direction of support for teachers and students. These systems are established to counter the lasting adverse effects of more punitive discipline systems that already stressed teachers are left to manage. While the systems are not perfect, the benefits of school-wide positive behavior support systems greatly outweigh their imperfections. Previous studies found that these systems are established to meet rising needs in three areas: lessen or eliminate exclusionary practices, strengthen student-teacher relations, and further support the established culture and climate in the classroom (Bastable et al., 2021; Fadus et al., 2021; Horner et al., 2010; Kervick et al., 2020; Lace et al., 2018; Schiff, 2018; Stormont et al., 2008; Walker, 2022; Yeung et al., 2016). The research showcases the advantages of these systems as shared by those directly influenced by student behavior. Furthermore, it systematically examines each of the three goals of positive behavior support systems by examining educators' narratives through interviews, presenting illustrative instances through artifacts, and observing real-life scenarios of school-wide positive behavior support systems in operation. In addition, the study offers insights into potential future enhancements aimed at fortifying these systems.

As a former elementary school teacher with experience in different grades and school sectors, this research allowed me to learn firsthand from those who are ultimately responsible for classroom management and student behavior support- the teachers. This qualitative phenomenological case study provided 12 diverse educators with an opportunity to share stories of the impact of these school-wide positive behavior support systems. The research questions were in line with the established purpose of these systems.

The results of this study show that school-wide systems lessen situations where students are removed from the classroom (exclusionary practices). School-wide systems also support the relationships that teachers establish with their students. Additionally, schoolwide systems support teachers as they build a strong classroom culture and climate. Through observations, interviews, and artifact collection, findings related to the research question showed a substantial finding of the following:

- Positive behavior support systems work best for students, particularly when compared to more punitive practices.
- Administrative and parental support for teachers when managing behavior is beneficial for the success of positive behavior support systems. Teachers find it valuable when they have access to professional development opportunities and collaborative experiences with peers and school administration around best practices for supporting and managing student behavior.
- The design of consistent school-wide expectations, procedures, and guidelines when managing student behavior significantly benefits school-wide positive behavior support systems.

- Support for all students, particularly those with diverse backgrounds, and training for teachers on how to use positive restorative practices helps teachers meet the needs of all students. There are many benefits to this, including an increase in overall student achievement.
- School-wide positive behavior support systems still need work and refining in some areas, mainly when dealing with more escalated behavior concerns. Teachers desire regular opportunities to evaluate and revise current systems of behavior support.

Contributions to Research

School leaders are increasingly adopting school-wide alternatives to exclusionary practices, known as restorative practices (Lustick, 2020; Schiff, 2018). While these practices are associated with lower exclusionary rates, students from Black, Latinx, and Native backgrounds continue to experience more frequent and severe disciplinary actions compared to their white peers, as reported by the Office of Civil Rights in 2014 (Lustick, 2020). Studies have shown that these disproportionate disciplinary measures lead to more negative outcomes, including academic failure and what is known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021). This study showed that teachers find school-wide systems integral when managing and supporting student behavior. Having these systems in place helps teachers feel supported by school leadership and their students' families. The research results matched the researcher's expectations. As a former classroom teacher with over 15 years of experience in public and private schools, working at a school with established school-wide expectations was much more sustainable.

Proactive practices would likely alleviate this school-to-prison pipeline problem, such as better teacher support and preparation, as well as restorative disciplinary practices, such as

positive behavior support systems (Lace et al., 2018; Morgan, 2021). Therefore, this study shared teachers' stories and vivid examples of how our schools are working to better meet the needs of students of color or students with learning disabilities, who are those most directly impacted by the pipeline. The study also shows teachers' steps to build and continually support their relationships with students, including using a school-wide universal language that redirects negative behavior and reinforces positive behavior. Additionally, the study found that school-wide positive behavior systems strengthen the classroom culture and climate.

Future Considerations

As a former elementary classroom teacher, now administrator responsible for student life, belonging, and behavior support, I keenly recognize that teachers' voices matter. The focus on elementary teachers was intentional, as they lay the foundation for the youngest learners. This study is significant because information can be crucial for developing effective strategies to introduce and sustain these programs in schools. Examining their perceptions helped identify barriers and action steps. This knowledge can guide administrators in creating targeted professional development that addresses teachers' concerns and increases their support for positive behavior systems. This study is also significant because it provides an opportunity to look at factors that contribute to the long-term success of these systems and provides recommendations for maintaining their effectiveness. Essentially, unpacking educators' narratives contributes significantly to establishing supportive and inclusive educational environments conducive to the success and well-being of all stakeholders.

Recognizing the significance of school-wide positive behavior support systems in alleviating the challenges educators face opens the door to a multitude of potential avenues for future research endeavors. Exploring the long-term effects of these support systems on student

behavior and academic outcomes could provide invaluable insights into the sustained impact of such interventions.

Data to Support the Narrowing Pipeline

A 2020 study found that positive and restorative behavior support systems, while designed to be democratic and fair to all students, can unintentionally reinforce traditional power dynamics unless the teachers who facilitate them already have strong relationships with the students involved (Lustick, 2020). While the current study found that exclusionary practices are lessened through these positive support systems, there is an opportunity for a study to focus on this area, specifically looking at qualitative data to support the initial finding. Researching specific strategies and practices within these systems that produce the most hopeful results for diverse students could further refine the implementation of effective school-wide behavior support programs.

Alternative Perspectives

New questions raised through the study include how to best support new teachers who enter schools unprepared to manage student behavior, including more escalated behaviors that could result in exclusionary practices. This provides an opportunity to expand by examining diverse perspectives of school leaders, parents, and students regarding the effectiveness and acceptance of school-wide positive behavior support systems that can offer a holistic view of their impact on the entire educational community. While the study results align with research throughout all five chapters, another consideration is increasing the scope of educators to include teachers in various geographical areas or grade levels to include middle school or high school teachers.

COVID's Lasting Impact on Teacher Stress

Further examination of the connection between the recent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and student behavior patterns in the context of these systems could shed light on new and emerging considerations for educational institutions. Teachers also continue to leave the teaching profession at an alarming rate, with soaring rates following the 2020 pandemic. A further future consideration is how to keep teachers from feeling the stress related to student behavior.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB PERMISSION LETTER

Friday, January 5, 2024 at 16:04:16 Eastern Standard Time

Subject: 2023-258 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
Date: Thursday, May 11, 2023 at 9:13:17 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com
To: Deanna L Dobbins, Jane Beese
Attachments: ATTO0001.jpg



May 11, 2023 9:13:10 AM EDT

Jane Beese
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-258 Teachers Impact of School-wide Positive Behavior Support

Dear Dr. Jane Beese:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Teachers Impact of School-wide Positive Behavior Support

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol

1. The researcher will take time in the morning of the observation day to go into the classroom to greet the students as part of the morning routine. In the researcher's role as Lower School Dean who supports students and teachers, the researcher is a regular visitor in classrooms, stopping by each lower school classroom to greet students and teachers each morning. As an observer with an insider's identity, the researcher has regular access and is able to obtain a wide range of information from observations.
 2. The researcher will walk into the classroom during the time predetermined by the teacher. The researcher will sit in an area that allows them to be out of view of most of the students while also having a full scope of the teachers and students in the room. This will more than likely be in a corner toward the back of the classroom. The researcher will ask the classroom teacher to verify that the selected space is the best space in the room to observe without distracting the students in the classroom.
 3. If anyone in the room comments about the researcher's presence, it will be shared that the researcher is present to observe the participant as a part of the researcher's study on teachers. No other information will be shared.
 4. The researcher will observe at least two classes a week. Each observation will last 15-30 minutes and will take place at different times in an effort to get a full picture of student behaviors through different times of the day. The researcher will use a student behavior observation chart to collect information on how teachers manage behaviors in their classrooms. The researcher will take the stance of a non-observer as a participant.
 5. After the observation, the researcher will quietly leave the room to avoid disruption.
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APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

	<p>Title of Study: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support</p>
	<p>Researcher and Interviewer: Deanna L. Dobbins</p>
	<p>Interviewee:</p>
I. Preparation	<p>Interviewee's Contact:</p> <p>Location of Interview: Zoom or in person</p> <p>Interview Date and Time:</p> <p>Interview inventory of items needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interview protocol with questions• Writing materials (paper, pen, pencil)• Location with limited distractions
II. Introduction	<p>My name is Deanna Dobbins, and I am a doctoral student at Youngstown State University. I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The topic that we will review is your perception of the impact of positive behavior support systems in elementary schools.</p>
III. Informed Consent Process	<p>The interview may take between 45 and 60 minutes to complete or until data saturation is reached. I would like to record this Zoom meeting, as it will allow me to document what is shared during the interview. After this interview, I will send you a copy of the transcript and ask you to check it for accuracy. All recordings will be kept confidential which means that I will be the only one who will view your interview responses and ensure that any information included in the study does not identify you as the respondent.</p> <p>If at any time, there are interview questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not wish to answer, please let me know. There is no pressure to answer each question and you can pass at any time. Are there any questions that you may have at this time?</p> <p>May I have your permission to record the interview? (If yes, researcher will begin recording. If no, the researcher will start note-taking.)</p>
IV. Research Questions	<p>Three specific questions will guide the study's design and analysis:</p>

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be the impact of positive behavior management systems in terms of supporting teachers, students, and families?

Sub Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

Sub Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

Sub Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

V. Corresponding Interview Questions

Central Question: What do teachers perceive to be best ways for schools to improve positive behavior management systems to best support teachers, students, and families?

IQ 1: How do you define positive behavior support systems?

IQ 2: Why do you believe that schools implemented positive behavior management systems?

IQ 3: Describe in what ways do you find these systems to be beneficial? Challenging?

IQ 4: Provide an example of how this system has supported you as an educator.

Sub Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems help to reduce or eliminate exclusionary discipline practices?

IQ 5: Why is exclusionary discipline a problem in our schools?

IQ 6: Some educators say that behavior management is one of their biggest challenges- what would you say to that?

IQ 7: Describe what changes, if any, have you observed in exclusionary practices since implementing a school-wide system?

IQ 8: Share your thoughts on how have the school-wide behavior support systems supported students? Provide an example.

Sub Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve school culture and climate?

IQ 9: How would you describe the ideal classroom culture and climate?

IQ 10: Describe what changes have you noticed about your classroom culture and climate since implementing a school-wide system? Provide an example.

Sub Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of how positive behavior support systems improve student-teacher relationships?

IQ 11: In your opinion, why are teacher-student relationships important?

IQ 12: Describe how have the school-wide behavior support systems supported families? Provide an example.

IQ 13: What if there was no school-wide system in place-what would school be like?

VI. Closing

Thank you for your time and participation in this interview process. Over the next few days, I will take the time to review and transcribe your responses. I will email you a copy and ask you to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.

I have listed your email address as _____
(participant's email address). Is this correct?

If you would like to add information or have additional questions regarding this interview, please feel free to email me at Ddobbins@student.ysu.edu. Again, thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

Which category below includes your age?

- 20 -29
- 30-39
- 40-40
- 50-59
- 60 or older

Which do you consider to be your to be your race? Choose one or more

- African American or Black
- American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- White or Caucasian
- Other
- Prefer not to say

How do you describe yourself?

- Man
- Woman
- Third-gender/ Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say

Which category below includes your number of years of experience as a classroom teacher?

- 0-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 8-11 years
- 12-15 years
- 16 or more years

Which grade(s) do you currently teach?

- Kindergarten
- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
- Fifth Grade

APPENDIX E
ARTIFACTS PROTOCOL

Artifact Protocol

1. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher will ask interviews to share artifacts that showcase their perceptions of the impact of school-wide positive behavior support systems.
 2. The researcher will collect materials from interviewees, making copies as needed, and ensure proper documentation of the source, date, and context.
 3. When needed, the researcher will digital physical documents to create a searchable digital archive.
 4. Respect data privacy and confidentiality guidelines. Remove any personally identifiable information from artifacts.
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