

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL-
WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS IN PENNSYLVANIA
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

Brenda Anne Crispell Zack

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of middle school students in schools that have implemented School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) at the universal tier with fidelity. Much of the research on SWPBS has focused on achievement gains, discipline improvement, implementation process, and school personnel perceptions. There was a lack of research regarding students' perceptions of their real-life experiences of SWPBS. The rationale for this study was that students' perceptions can assist in improving SWPBS implementation at the universal level and promote implementation for schools considering SWPBS. The central question was what meaning do middle school students ascribe to the SWPBS environment? A purposeful sample of students from three Pennsylvania middle schools implementing the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity was selected for this study. This study used a phenomenological approach; therefore, data was collected via focus groups, interviews, and observations. Analysis of transcripts, significant statements, and contextual descriptions created a description of the essence of the students' experiences. Students' perceptions and experiences included having a positive school environment, receiving rewards and recognition, clarity of behavioral expectations, consequences for inappropriate behavior, and a feeling of safety. On the other hand, inconsistency among staff in the dissemination of rewards and discipline was also noted. Implications, limitations, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Keywords: School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports, SWPBS, SWPBIS, middle school, students' perceptions, Pennsylvania, discipline, school safety, school environment

Dedication/Acknowledgments Page

First and foremost, I praise God for the gifts I have received from Him. Through Him all things are possible. He placed this opportunity in my life and provided me with the courage and persistence to complete the task.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Dedication/Acknowledgments Page.....	5
Table of Contents.....	7
List of Tables.....	10
List of Figures.....	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Background.....	13
Situation to Self.....	20
Problem Statement.....	23
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study.....	25
Research Questions.....	29
Research Plan.....	30
Delimitations.....	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	34
Theoretical Framework.....	37
Review of the Literature.....	41
Summary.....	58
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	60
Design.....	60

Research Questions	62
Sites.....	64
Participants.....	67
Procedures.....	69
The Researcher’s Role	69
Data Collection	71
Focus Groups	72
Interviews.....	75
Observations	77
Data Analysis	79
Trustworthiness.....	81
Ethical Issues	84
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	87
School A.....	88
School B.....	101
School C.....	112
Summary of Results	121
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	126
Summary of Findings.....	126
Implications.....	128
Limitations and Recommendations.....	134

Conclusion	137
REFERENCES	139
APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT CONSENT FORM.....	151
APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM.....	153
APPENDIX C: PARENTAL CONTACT	155
APPENDIX D: PARENTAL CONSENT	156
APPENDIX E: CHILD ASSENT.....	159
APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS	161
APPENDIX G: DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE.....	162
APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS	164
APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIBER AGREEMENT	166
APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	167
APPENDIX K: OBSERVATION FORM	169
APPENDIX L: EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS PROCESS FROM SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS TO MEANING UNITS TO THEMES	170
APPENDIX M: EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION DATA, REFLECTION, AND CODING	175

List of Tables

Table 1: Focus Group Discussion Topics.....	73
Table 2: Interview Questions.....	75
Table 3: Observation Schedule Protocol.....	79
Table 4: Main SWPBS Components from Each School.....	88

List of Figures

Figure 1: Continuum of School-wide Instructional and Behavioral Support	36
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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress.....	AYP
Applied Behavior Analysis.....	ABA
Benchmarks of Quality.....	BoQ
Individual Positive Behavior Supports.....	IPBS
Office Disciplinary Referral.....	ODR
Out-of-School Suspension.....	OSS
Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network.....	PAPBS
(PAPBS was used since that is how this organization abbreviates their name.)	
Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network.....	PaTTAN
(PaTTAN uses a small “a” in their name.)	
Positive Behavior Support.....	PBS
School Safety Survey.....	SSS
School-wide Evaluation Tool.....	SET
School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support.....	SWPBIS
School-wide Positive Behavior Supports.....	SWPBS
Socio-economic Status.....	SES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of this study on middle school students' perceptions of the School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBS) environment. Students from SWPBS schools that have implemented the *universal tier* of SWPBS with fidelity as determined by Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network using the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001) and Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) (Cohen, Kincaid & Childs, 2007) have been chosen for this study. Both fidelity and universal tier will be described in this chapter. It is important to note that in some of the literature, the abbreviation SWPBIS (School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) is occasionally used. However, the acronym "SWPBS" is more commonly found in the literature. SWPBIS and SWPBS are synonymous; it is just an adjustment in terms. For the purpose of this study, SWPBS is used since it is used more commonly in the literature.

In addition, this chapter presents my interest and motivation for this study. Students' voices are rarely represented in the literature on SWPBS. The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of middle school students in the SWPBS environment. Since students are stakeholders for SWPBS, studying their perceptions and experiences will add to the body of literature on SWPBS. This study's research questions, research plan, as well as delimitations and limitations are described in this chapter.

Background

Schools face many challenges pursuing their educational missions. One challenge for school personnel is making sure that students are behaving in a manner where teaching and learning can occur. Effective schools provide an environment that is conducive to teaching and

learning (Owen & Valesky, 2007). It is a worthy pursuit to determine what makes schools more effective at providing a positive teaching and learning environment. Behavior problems, coupled with the discipline that follows, interfere with providing a conducive teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, school disorder is associated with student conflict, depression, low motivation, disruptive classrooms, and loss of instructional time (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Connors (2000) pointed out that students come to school wanting an environment that makes them feel safe, secure, and supported. Safe and orderly environments, where students do not fear physical harm, are more conducive to learning (Lezotte, 1997; Marzano, 2003).

Procedures for providing safe schools have run the continuum from zero-tolerance policies to creating a more positive culture. Zero tolerance policies involve implementing strict and consistent discipline. However, zero tolerance policies have not proven to be effective. To keep schools safe, experts are now recommending the use of multiple approaches to improve the school climate, improve student–adult relationships, and reduce bullying and misbehavior (Kerr, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). An evidence-based practice of implementing SWPBS has been shown to improve the learning environment (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Landers, 2006; Mass-Galloway, Payan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008; Medley, Little & Akin-Little, 2007; Simonsen, Britton & Young, 2010; Way, 2011).

SWPBS uses a different, more positive and proactive approach than traditional disciplinary methods (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; OSEP, 2012a; PAPBS, n.d.; Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports website [pbis.org], 2012). SWPBS is a systems approach in which school personnel model and reinforce

socially acceptable behavior of students (OSEP, 2012a). The main features of SWPBS include (a) an emphasis on prevention, (b) defining and teaching students the expected behavior, (c) using positive methods to reinforce appropriate behavior and disciplining for inappropriate behavior, (d) using data to plan for interventions, (e) utilizing a school team to plan, and (f) a continuum of interventions and supports to meet students' behavior needs (Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, & Young, 2011; Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2007). Furthermore, according to the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN, use of small "a" is consistent with the organization's usage), SWPBS school characteristics are

- Interventions are planned and positive, rather than reactive and punitive.
- Conditions (antecedents) contributing to inappropriate behavior are carefully managed or eliminated.
- Multiple opportunities for positive, corrective feedback are created while negative critical feedback is limited or eliminated.
- Pro-social behaviors are taught directly, practiced frequently, and routinized so that they become automatic (PaTTAN, 2011, para. 3).

The Office of Special Education (OSEP) emphasizes four elements of SWPBS implementation: (a) data for making decisions, (b) measuring outcomes and using data, (c) using practices that are evidence based, and (d) systems in place that are effectively supporting SWPBS implementation (PAPBS, n.d.).

There are three levels of student support in SWPBS, often called *tiers*. The *universal tier* focuses on prevention by providing supports for all students (Education Law Center of

Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). This tier is expected to be effective for 80% of students (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2009). The secondary tier, *targeted interventions*, is for students who have more social and behavioral needs; approximately 15% of all students fall into this tier (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2009). The top tier, *tertiary support*, is needed for approximately 5% of all students, and it incorporates individualized interventions (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2009).

Most of the SWPBS studies reviewed are quantitative research studies that focused on the effects of SWPBS on students' academics, and behaviors, and fidelity of implementation. There were also studies on the tertiary and secondary tier interventions which looked at effectiveness of particular interventions. However, there were no found studies on students' perceptions of the universal level of SWPBS in Pennsylvania middle schools that are implementing SWPBS with fidelity.

Not all schools that have implemented SWPBS experience the same results. In fact, a meta-analysis of SWPBS revealed low average effect size ($R^2 = .44$) on problem behavior using an observation tool (Solomon, Klein, Hintze, Cressey & Peller, 2012). This means that even though schools may indicate usage of the SWPBS framework, the usage was not evident upon observation. Experts have indicated that ineffective results of SWPBS seem to be due to some schools not implementing SWPBS with fidelity (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; LaFrance, 2009). *Fidelity* means that the school has implemented the SWPBS framework consistently and as intended, which requires district-level,

building-level, and principal commitments. Two common tools for testing fidelity are the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) (Sugai et al., Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001) and Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) (Cohen, Kincaid & Childs, 2007).

Solomon et al. (2012) pointed out that only 60% of the studies reported fidelity levels. There is a relationship between higher levels of fidelity and lower discipline referrals and suspensions (LaFrance, 2009). Also, there is a strong significant effect on the level of implementation (or level of fidelity) of SWPBS on teacher efficacy (Ross & Horner, 2007). SWPBS takes a serious commitment at multiple levels; it takes training, and it requires staff to look at data (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2009). Therefore, some schools, having good intentions, end up only implementing SWPBS partially or inconsistently, meaning without fidelity.

Schools that have implemented SWPBS with fidelity as evaluated by the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network (PAPBS, n.d.), which is supported by the PA Department of Education, were purposefully selected for this study. According to PAPBS, there are several school commitments needed to implement SWPBS with fidelity. Commitments are required at three levels for fidelity: district, building, and principal. Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun (2008) recommended that all schools be required to commit to the features of SWPBS prior to being provided state support. District-level commitments are to

- establish a leadership team – with a coordinator
- provide an external coach and agree to the external coach's role
- participate in SWPBS overview
- participate in network meetings

- complete district SWPBS Blueprint – goal setting
- ensure schools have an internal coach and core team
- provide time for teams, internal coaches, and external coaches to meet and train
- allocate funds to SWPBS activities
- involve parents/caregivers and students in the district’s SWPBS activities
- ensure a database is available
- support SWPBS for a minimum of three to five years (PAPBS, n.d., Commitment to Fidelity, sect. 1).

Building-level teams must also comply with several fidelity requirements. Building-level teams need to establish a team-based problem solving process. This team is responsible for collecting, analyzing, and submitting data to the PAPBS Network. In addition, this team develops an annual SWPBS plan. The building-level team must support participation from parents, caregivers and students. Lastly, building-level teams are required to participate in training at all three tiers of SWPBS (PAPBS, n.d., Commitment to Fidelity, sect. 3).

Fidelity also includes principal responsibilities. Principals need to endorse and commit to involvement of SWPBS. Professional development is the principal’s responsibility through scheduling a SWPBS overview for entire staff. The principal needs to gain support for SWPBS implementation by 80% of the staff. The principal oversees and ensures the appropriate structure of SWPBS (universal, secondary, tertiary tiers). The principal also identifies an internal coach and the SWPBS core team. SWPBS must be considered by the principal one of the top three building level initiatives. Along with that, funds need to be committed for SWPBS

implementation. Lastly, another responsibility is to ensure that faculty complete required data collection (PAPBS, n.d., Commitment to Fidelity, sect. 2).

According to the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania and The Disability Rights Network of PA (2010), by July 2010, SWPBS was implemented in 10,000 schools nationwide with SWPBS being implemented in Pennsylvania on a limited scale. The initial Pennsylvania cohort of 33 schools began SWPBS implementation in 2007. In 2009, a support network was created entitled *Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PAPBS)* (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). Therefore, it is important to study Pennsylvania schools that have implemented with fidelity since the SWPBS infrastructure is still developing, and it is not supported state-wide as in some other states.

Middle schools have students ranging from ages 11-14, classified as preadolescents. Middle school students have been selected for the focus of this study. Some students, in an effort to become more independent, test out inappropriate behavior during preadolescence. Unfortunately, not enough research has been done on SWPBS at the middle level. A meta-analysis of 20 studies revealed that much of the SWPBS research took place in the elementary setting (Solomon et al., 2012). However, in that meta-analysis “middle schools had a higher, not significant, mean effect than elementary schools” (Solomon et al., 2012, p. 117). Solomon et al. (2012) noted that only three middle schools were found to meet this meta-analysis criterion while 13 elementary schools were included. Solomon et al. recommended that more research be done in the middle school setting due to a strong case being made for its potential to improve the environment.

Furthermore, middle schools present a unique educational experience (Eichhorn, 1966). Eichhorn (1966) pointed out that middle schools have prepubescent, early adolescent, and adolescent students. Therefore, there are a range of developmental behaviors. The theoretical framework for this study falls under the *Behaviorism* umbrella (OSEP, 2012b; Skinner, 1958), which is the study of behavior (Copper et al., 2007). Skinner (1958) stated that behavior is affected by consequences such as rewards and punishments. More specifically, *Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)* was utilized for this study due to ABA being the framework for SWPBS. According to Cooper et al. (2007), ABA is “the science in which tactics derived from the principles of behavior are applied to improve socially significant behavior and experimentation is used to identify the variables responsible for the improvement in behavior” (p. 690). In addition to ABA, *social learning theory* relabeled *social cognitive theory* (Bandura, 1977; 2000) is also related to this study. Bandura (2000) believed that learning was more than just reinforcing one’s behavior. Behavior is more than impulses that come from within; there are outside forces that affect one’s behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Social cognitive theory suggests that behavior can be learned by watching others’ behaviors and seeing the consequences of others’ behaviors (Bandura, 2000). These theories are explained in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Situation to Self

I am the human instrument of data collection utilizing focus groups, interviews, observations, and interpretation. Having been a middle school counselor at School A (pseudonym) in Pennsylvania for 15 years and having had many years of experience working with middle school students, sensitivity to their developmental needs has been established.

My worldview for this study was *social constructivism* since I relied on meaning coming from the participants' experiences and I used a qualitative approach. I positioned myself in the research study (Creswell, 2007). The participants were considered co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994). My philosophical assumptions were based on qualitative methods. These philosophical assumptions are described below.

Creswell (2007) defines *ontology* as the “philosophical assumption about the nature of reality” (p. 248). Reality is truth and subjective as seen by participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994), who was influenced by Husserl, indicated that knowledge is based on what is conscious. Understanding a phenomenon comes from self-reflection and intuition. “Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things...” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Through this research, I wanted the students' experiences and perceptions to be heard. This can be done most accurately by talking to the students and reporting what they indicate their experiences have been in the SWPBS environment. This study revealed what the “students' reality” was in a SWPBS school.

According to Glendinning (2008) *phenomenology* allows readers to “see clearly” (p. 47) what is “hard to see” (p. 47) by exposing the reader to the experiences of the phenomenon. Unlike other research methods, phenomenology does not take up an argument or attempt to prove a point; rather, it allows the reader to form an understanding from a clear, deep description of the phenomenon. Glendinning further pointed out that the purpose of phenomenology is not to create a theory, find a result, or defend a position. Its purpose is elucidation. Phenomenology brings clearer focus on something with which we are already familiar (Glendinning, 2008). The point of this research is to bring a clearer focus on middle school students' experiences in the

SWPBS environment. A phenomenological approach is the best way to allow for this elucidation.

Epistemology is about the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied (Creswell, 2007). Information in human science research needs to come from “first-person accounts” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 20) through discussion with the subjects via conversations, formal or informal interviews, or focus groups. The closer to the original source (in this case - the students) the more accurate the accounts. Therefore, I spent time in the field conducting this research. I was a non-participant observer of the students’ daily lives. I also spent time having discussions with students by conducting both focus groups and interviews.

Axiology is the recognition that research is value laden (Creswell, 2007). I have been working in a SWPBS environment for approximately six years. In line with Moustakas’ (1994) recommendations, I took time to formalize my biases in order to be able to set them aside. Doing this allowed me to hear the co-researchers’ experiences from a fresh perspective.

The *rhetoric assumption* means that qualitative researchers will use the appropriate terms and narratives in their research (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of my study was to hear the voice of the co-researchers (participants) to understand how SWPBS has affected them. Narratives of the co-researchers were used to emphasize or support the essence of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, qualitative research is inductive (Creswell, 2007), determining that specific examples from this study will be used to reach themes. Inductive logic was also used to bring forward the essence of the students’ experience in a SWPBS environment. Moustakas (1994), influenced by Husserl, discussed the importance of using intuition to pull forth the essence of the

experience. The specific examples, along with intuition, worked together in discussing the essence of the SWPBS experience.

My interpretive view was critical theory. Through this study, I pointed out advantages of the SWPBS approach by interpreting the meaning of the SWPBS experience for students. Furthermore, there were some conditions in the SWPBS environments that were not working well. I brought forth these conditions, along with new possibilities. Allowing students' voices to be heard through this study empowered students to be a part of constructive changes by providing information that can be used to make adjustments to the SWPBS environment.

Problem Statement

This study seeks to address middle school students' perceptions and experiences in the SWPBS environment. The co-researchers were students from three Pennsylvania middle schools implementing SWPBS with fidelity at the universal tier. SWPBS has strong potential to improve the middle school environment (Solomon et al., 2012). The universal tier of SWPBS is considered to be effective in maintaining appropriate behavior for approximately 80% of the student body (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania, The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). However, SWPBS programs are not all equally effective (Solomon et al., 2012).

The problem selected for this investigation is that of describing students' perceptions and experiences in a middle school SWPBS environment, which has not been previously explored comprehensively. Interestingly enough, teacher and administrator perceptions have been studied to a greater extent than those of students. Remarkably, students are the main stakeholders that SWPBS is intended to benefit. It is important to understand students' perceptions since perceptions are related to the value of a program and provide constructive information to

implementers (Bracy, 2011; Runge, Staszkievicz, & O'Donnell, 2012; Wentzel, 1997). In addition, since one of the purposes of SWPBS is to create a safer, more secure environment (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010), the use of qualitative methods was appropriate to explore students' perceptions of safety and security as well as their understanding and experiences with behavioral expectations.

Many of the described experiences will likely focus on SWPBS interventions. Exploring how these interventions have meaning for students will provide important information about why interventions are effective or ineffective. Landers (2006) recommended future studies to "examine the impact of school-wide PBS on the different participants in the school" (p. 116) such as students. Cooper (2011) also recommended further investigation of teacher and student perceptions of SWPBS. Understanding students' perceptions and experiences can give educators a better understanding on how to increase the percentage of students who are responsive to the universal interventions. This phenomenological study elucidated students' perceptions and experiences in the SWPBS environment (Glendinning, 2008). Through this research variables have been discovered, from the students' experiences, which are common among schools implementing SWPBS with fidelity.

Perceptions affect how individuals feel and how they behave. For example, Runge, Staszkievicz, and O'Donnell (2012) determined that staff perceptions were related to the fidelity of SWBIS implementation. They also found that there was a difference in staff perception, depending on the level of fidelity implementation of SWPBS (Runge, Staszkievicz, & O'Donnell, 2012). Likewise, it is important for educators to understand students' perceptions of the school environment. For example, Bracy's (2011) ethnographic study on high-security

school environments found that students felt “powerless” (p. 365) due to the way rules/punishments were enforced. Wentzel (1997) studied middle school students’ perceptions of their teacher’s caring. Wentzel found students’ perceptions of the teacher’s caring affected student motivation both academically and behaviorally. Again, the problem is that there is a gap in the literature regarding middle school students’ perceptions and experiences of SWPBS.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of middle school students in schools that have implemented SWPBS with fidelity at the universal level. At this stage in the research, *perceptions* were defined as “the conscious recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli that serve as a basis for understanding, learning, and knowing or for motivating a particular action or reaction” based on the Mosby’s Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing & Health Professionals, 8th edition (2009, p. 1418). For the purpose of this study, perceptions included how students experience their school’s SWPBS environment, along with their understanding of SWPBS and the motivation it provides.

Significance of the Study

SWPBS has become a widely recognized framework for creating a positive school culture and reducing disciplinary problems (Caldarella et al., 2011; Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; PAPBS, n.d., pbis.org, 2012). In a practical sense, research on students’ positive experiences in the SWPBS environment can encourage stakeholder groups such as teachers, parents, administrators, and government officials to promote efforts to increase the number of schools implementing the SWPBS framework. Numerous quantitative studies have been conducted on SWPBS but very few qualitative studies

have been conducted on SWPBS to look more deeply into the student experience. Information on the student experience will add to the body of knowledge on SWPBS effects on discipline, academics, and school climate (Cooper, 2011; Cooper, 2010; Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Landers, 2006; Mass-Galloway, Payan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008; Medley, Little & Akin-Little, 2007; Oswald, 2008; Runge, Staszkievicz, & O'Donnell, 2012; Simonsen, Britton & Young, 2010; Way, 2011). Both quantitative and qualitative studies give a better picture of the phenomenon. For example, Oswald found that even though statistical significance was not found on her study of discipline referrals in the SWPBS environment, stakeholders indicated an improved behavioral environment.

Additional qualitative research can improve the effectiveness of SWPBS for schools beginning implementation of the SWPBS framework and for schools that are experiencing limited success. Prior to SWPBS implementation, it is recommended that the principal “garner and maintain support (of SWPBS) of at least 80% of staff” (PAPBS, n.d., “Commitment to Fidelity,” sect. 2). Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009) recommended, from their study on *Challenges Faced by School Teachers in Implementing Positive Behavior Support in Their School Systems*, “find a way to get more staff buy-in before implementation” (p. 62). Therefore, staff needs to participate in professional development to gain an understanding on the benefits of SWPBS. Presenting research on student experiences and perceptions of the SWPBS environment to staff will help staff make more informed decisions about their support.

In addition, research on students’ perceptions will not only add to the literature on SWPBS at a universal level, it will assist schools that are not experiencing high levels of

effectiveness. For example, Lander's (2006) study of teachers' perceptions of SWPBS found that even though there were positive quantitative results of SWPBS, teachers' perceptions determined areas that those teachers believed needed to be improved. Therefore, even if quantitative studies indicate strong success of SWPBS, research on students has the potential to define students' perceptions of SWPBS that promote student buy-in and motivation for socially appropriate behavior and identifying areas that need to be improved.

SWPBS implementation is constructed based on the specific environment of each school. The implementation team considers their school's context when determining how the SWPBS framework will be implemented in their school (pbis.org, 2012). This makes the contextual descriptions used in this qualitative study particularly useful information. In addition, this study's focus on students' perceptions and experiences highlighted interventions that are particularly meaningful to students in the various environments. Highlighted interventions that students find meaningful provide schools with valuable information on interventions that staff can focus on when implementing SWPBS.

This study broadens the knowledge of SWPBS at the universal tier for middle schools. Middle schools in Pennsylvania were purposely selected for this study. As stated earlier, SWPBS implementation is fairly new in Pennsylvania, as noted on the PAPBS (n.d.) website. In addition, SWPBS has been implemented more in elementary schools rather than secondary schools (PAPBS, n.d.). Only eight middle schools in the state were recognized at the May 2012 implementer's forum as having SWPBS fidelity (J. Palmiero, personal communication, May 31, 2012).

Another reason for choosing middle schools was that research indicates that discipline referrals increased, such as bullying, in middle school (Nolle, Guerino, & Dinkes, 2007), causing lost instructional time (Curtis et al., 2010; Spaulding et al., 2010). Middle school students are also of particular interest due to being in *transescence*, “the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence” (Eichhorn, 1966, p. 3). They are going through many developmental changes, and therefore, middle schools need to provide an environment that meets the needs of students in various developmental stages (Eichhorn, 1966). Lastly, middle school studies on SWPBS are underrepresented in the literature, and researchers have recommended future studies at the secondary level (Caldarella et al., 2011; Fauver, 2008; Solomon et al., 2012), making this study one that attempted to fill that gap in the literature.

This study brought forth the common experiences of middle students in a high fidelity SWPBS environment. This study also allowed for variables to be determined for future quantitative studies by exploring variables that have had meaning for the students. Dukes (1984) wrote about phenomenological research, stating that it “may supply the missing link that renders empirical observations or correlations intelligible” (p. 200). This study also contributed to the body knowledge on *behaviorism*, the study of behavior (Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2007; Skinner, 1958), within the context of SWPBS school environment.

Other studies, Bracy (2011), Lander (2006), and Wentzel (1997), relate to this study due to their focus on perceptions. Their studies demonstrated the importance of exploring perceptions. Wentzel found when studying middle school students’ perceptions of their teachers’ caring, students’ perceptions affected student motivation both academically and

behaviorally. In addition, Way (2011) found that when students perceive teachers to be fair and caring, behavior improves. There is a need to understand students' perceptions of discipline and authority (Way, 2011). Research on students' perceptions will not only add to the literature on SWPBS at a universal level, it will assist schools that are not experiencing high levels of effectiveness. As Dukes (1984) discussed, phenomenology can lead to understanding, which can lead to explanation. Regarding the field of education, Moustakas (1994) writes that "both personal and social knowledge are needed to arrive at valid understandings of reality" (p. 62).

Research Questions

In order to investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of middle school students in a SWPBS environment, the central question was the following:

- What meaning do middle school students ascribe to the SWPBS environment?

Moustakas (1994) pointed out the importance of understanding the meaning of experiences. This study uncovered the research-based practices that students were experiencing that are typical to the SWPBS framework such as active supervision, reinforcement, teaching of rules and social skills instruction (pbis.org, 2012).

Guiding questions were the following:

- What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding the teaching of school-wide behavioral expectations?

One of the main features of SWPBS is teaching students expected behaviors. There are typically three to five behavioral expectations implemented throughout the school. The purpose of three to five taught behaviors is so students understand and remember school expectations (OSEP, 2012b).

- What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding the school's reward system?

Skinner (1958) indicated that rewards reinforce behavior. It is important to know what the students think about the school's reward system to determine if the students perceive it as reinforcing (Bracy, 2011).

- What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school discipline?

Also, in line with Skinner and ABA (Cooper et al., 2007; Skinner, 1974), punishments influence behavior. Student experiences with punishments (Landers, 2006) will shed light on their lived experience with SWPBS (Moustakas, 1994). SWPBS not only reinforces appropriate behavior, inappropriate behavior is handled systematically. School personnel develop a "continuum of procedures" to handle and discourage inappropriate behavior (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). The goal is to have clearly defined consequences to allow for consistency among staff (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

- What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school safety?

A safe and secure environment provides an environment conducive to learning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Lezotte, 1997; Marzano, 2003). Students' perceptions of school safety (Bracy, 2011) add to the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Plan

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study focused on the essence of middle school students' perceptions in the SWPBS environment. Qualitative studies utilize an

inductive process. A qualitative study is appropriate because it enabled the discovery of the nature of the SWPBS experience for students. This was not an attempt to explain or analyze specific variables (Moustakas, 1994), create a theory, or defend a position (Glendinning, 2008). Rather, it was so readers could gain a true sense of the SWPBS experience for students in that environment. A phenomenological approach was the most appropriate way to conduct research with the goal of greater understanding students' perceptions. Data was collected through focus groups, structured interviews, and observations. Conversations with the co-researchers began by asking them to take a moment to focus on the phenomenon as suggested by Moustakas (1994). This qualitative approach is in line with the idea that reality of SWPBS is in the experience of the co-researchers (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

A transcendental, phenomenological study provided the ability to describe the experiences of middle school students in great detail. Again, this type of study can provide information on improving SWPBS to fit student needs. Transcendental phenomenology requires setting aside prejudgments of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A systematic data collection was used. Textual and structural descriptions of the SWPBS school environment were generated.

Delimitations

This study was bounded by a variety of delimitations. Only students from middle schools that have already been rated at the SWPBS fidelity level were studied. Fidelity of SWPBS is a significant factor in effectiveness (LaFrance, 2009; Runge et al, 2012). Therefore, it was important to select schools that have implemented the SWPBS framework with fidelity.

The scope was limited to middle schools in Pennsylvania. Research was limited on SWPBS middle school implementation (Caldarella et al., 2011; Solomon et al., 2012).

Moreover, since Pennsylvania was in the developmental stage of SWPBS (Runge et al., 2012), research specific to Pennsylvania was needed. Pennsylvania differs from some states in that Pennsylvania school districts are not set up by county; rather, they are local districts. Lastly, co-researchers had to be of sound mind and able to communicate verbally to participate. Co-researchers had to be in the SWPBS environment at the middle school level for at least a year.

Dukes (1984) stated that one limitation with phenomenology is that it is not a method at all. Dukes was indicating that there is not a “clear recipe” (p. 202) on how phenomenology is conducted. Therefore, self-checking and flexibility are essential throughout the study (Dukes, 1984). However, in 1994 Moustakas published clear procedures for phenomenological research design that were used in this study. Another limitation was how time consuming phenomenological research is (Dukes, 1984), requiring extensive time in the field. Time was spent in the field to conduct observations and to conduct the focus groups. Many of the interviews were conducted on site while only three were conducted by telephone.

Some students involved in this study may not have experienced anything other than SWPBS schools, making it difficult for them to focus on the SWPBS aspects of the school. However, the study was not focusing on the differences of SWPBS and non-SWPBS experiences. It was on students’ current perceptions and experiences in their school’s SWPBS environment.

Lastly, I knew some of the students in the study. I formally requested permission from my principal and school district superintendent to conduct this study and received approval. It is important to note that I do not have direct supervisory responsibility for the students. I recognized that students may be inclined to answer the questions the way they think I want them

to answer. However, expressing their own views was addressed with the students prior to the interviews and focus groups.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) brought about a mandate that students who are experiencing behavioral obstacles to learning must have positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS or PBS). This mandate was reiterated in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, “providing incentives for whole-school approaches, scientifically based early reading programs, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and early intervening services to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address the learning and behavioral needs of such children” (p. 118 STAT 2650). Originally, PBIS was only for students experiencing behavioral difficulty which impacted learning (Sugai, 2007). PBIS has expanded to include “all students, in all settings, and involving all staff” (Sugai, 2007, p. 117) in the school to improve social behavior, hence, the name “School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support” (SWPBIS or SWPBS).

SWPBS uses a different, more positive approach than traditional disciplinary methods (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). SWPBS teaches students the expected behavior and uses positive methods to reinforce that behavior (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). School personnel collectively determine a common set of appropriate behaviors, called *behavioral expectations*, and spend time teaching those behaviors to students by modeling that behavior (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Lynass, Tsai, Richman & Cheney, 2011). Data is used to make decisions on appropriate interventions and supports to be put into place (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). In a SWPBS environment, consequences for

inappropriate behaviors are clear to all allowing for consistency (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). To discourage inappropriate behavior there is a continuum of consequences (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Conversely, traditional disciplinary methods rely on giving students the rules and often negative consequences for breaking the rules (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). In addition, in traditional disciplinary practices often times consequences are applied inconsistently (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Studies have shown that discipline problems decrease when schools move from a traditional disciplinary approach to SWPBS (Curtis, Karvon, Robertson, & Van Horne, 2010; Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Landers, 2006; McCurdy, Mannella & Eldridge, 2003; McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011; Runge, Staszkiwicz & O'Donnell, 2012; Simonsen, Britton & Young, 2010; Solomon et al., 2012; Spaulding et al., 2010).

SWPBS utilizes a three-tiered prevention logic which is based on the medical model of prevention (Sugai, 2007). A three-tiered approach represents a continuum of interventions (Sugai, 2007). [See Figure 1 for the percentage of students that fall into each tier.] The bottom level, called the *primary level* or *universal tier*, utilizes interventions for all students such as teaching behaviors and reinforcing those behaviors (Sugai, 2007). This level is to prevent inappropriate behavior. The next tier, called the *secondary* or *targeted tier*, targets interventions for students who are unresponsive to the universal supports and need more support (Sugai, 2007). The last tier, the *tertiary tier*, involves interventions specialized for individuals unresponsive to the universal and targeted interventions (Sugai, 2007).

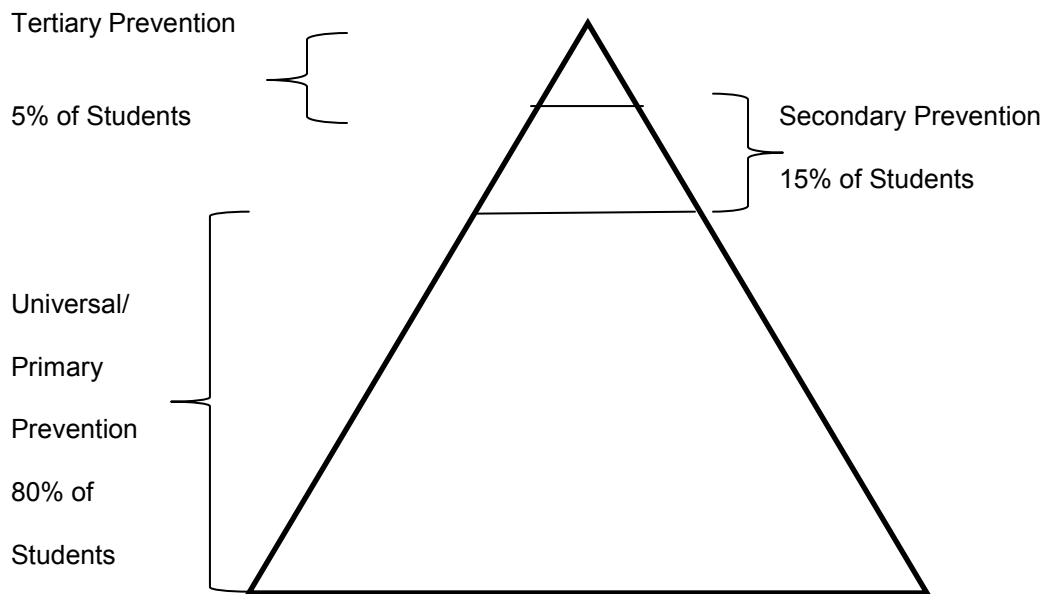


Figure 1. Continuum of School-wide Instructional and Behavioral Support

This study focuses on primary prevention, the universal tier. The universal tier incorporates common *behavioral expectations* for all students throughout school settings. In a study of 216 SWPBS schools across the nation, the most common behavioral expectations at the universal tier drawn upon by SWPBS schools were respect, responsibility, safety, and readiness to learn (Lynass et al., 2011). Behavioral expectations were found to be fairly consistent across these schools. Some other common behavioral expectations at the universal tier were titled: care, work together, do your best, attitude, kind, and self-control (Lynass et al., 2011).

The PBIS Implementation Blueprint and Self-Assessment (for school-wide) (OSEP, 2010) describes the universal tier as preventative. The purpose of this tier is to prevent the development of problem behavior across all school settings (OSEP, 2010). Therefore, systems are in place for all students, staff, and settings (OSEP, 2010). SWPBS takes a proactive approach to behavior, rather than a reactive approach to inappropriate behavior.

This study focused on SWPBS in Pennsylvania. According to the 2009-2010 Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE, 2011a) data, 1.5% of students dropped out. Male dropouts numbered 7,251 and females numbered 5,411 (PDE, 2011a). Students dropped out for the following reasons: academic problems, behavior problems, school aversion, family reasons, run-away from home, expelled from school, or other reasons (PDE, 2011a). The universal tier of SWPBS has been found to be effective with students who are at-risk, such as those mentioned above. For example, in a case study of at-risk students at an alternative education setting, Simonsen et al. (2010) found an increase, over the three year study, of the percentage of students who responded to the universal tier of SWPBS from 65% in the first year to 83% in the third year.

According to PDE (2011b), on the 2011 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), 22.9% of all students were non-proficient on the Math exam, 26.5% of all students were non-proficient on the Reading exam, and 25% of all students were non-proficient on the Writing exam. The research on SWPBS's effect on academic achievement has been mixed. Some studies indicate improved academic achievement (McIntosh et al., 2011; Simonsen et al., 2012) while others indicate no significant difference (Cooper, 2011; Horner et al., 2009). A study of 428 Illinois schools that had implemented SWPBS found that math scores improved as determined by state-wide test scores after SWPBS implementation (Simonsen et al., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Three theories will be used as the framework for this SWPBS study: (a) operant behavior, (b) applied behavior analysis (ABA), and (c) social cognitive theory, which are defined below. Also included in this section are Eichhorn's (1966) concepts on the middle school. Eichhorn

(1987) is thought by many to be the developer of the following middle school concepts: there should be “a direct model relationship between the learners’ characteristics and the school program (socio-psychological model); and *transescence ...*” (p. viii).

B. F. Skinner, operant behavior. SWPBS has its roots in Behaviorism. Behaviorism emphasizes the impact of environment on behavior (Skinner, 1974). According to Cooper et al. (2007), “operant behavior is any behavior whose future frequency is determined primarily by its history of consequences” (p. 31). Reinforcing a behavior increases the likelihood of that behavior occurring again (Skinner, 1974). Skinner provided research on the effects of reinforcements on animals which led to the current applied behavior analysis (Cooper et al., 2007).

Applied behavior analysis. Heward and Wood (2003, as adapted by Cooper et al., 2007) defined *behavior analysis* as “a science of studying how we can arrange our environment, so they make very likely the behaviors we want to be probable enough, and they make unlikely the behaviors we want to be improbable” (p. 15). SWPBS uses *applied behavior analysis* (ABA) as a framework. ABA “is concerned with replicable improvements in behavior” (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 49). ABA is applied in the environment that the behavior is wanted, in context, rather than in a lab or unnatural environment. Measurements of behavior are taken, interventions are put into place based on the principles of behavior (Cooper et al., 2007), and behavior is measured again.

In the SWPBS environment, schools can measure behaviors via number of rewards students receive and number of disciplinary referrals. Since the SWPBS framework is based on ABA, positive reinforcement is practiced regularly. “Positive reinforcement is the most

important and most widely applied principle of behavior analysis” (Cooper et al., p. 257). The term *reinforcement* is based on the effect it has on behavior. For something to be reinforcement, it must increase the probability of the targeted behavior (Cooper et al., 2007). In the case of this study, ABA utilizes socially significant target behaviors. *Target behaviors* (behavioral expectations) are the behaviors that school personnel want from the students.

Bandura, (1969, 1977, 2000, 2001) social cognitive theory. Bandura was not satisfied with the theories of Behaviorism alone to answer questions of learning (1977). Bandura brought in the importance of environment and psychological factors or one’s perceptions (1977). Bandura (1969) also did work with social cognitive theory and discussed his findings on moral development in comparison to Piaget’s framework on moral development. Bandura found that moral judgments are influenced by modeling and observing. “Findings revealed that exposing children to adult models who expressed moral judgments...was effective in modifying their judgmental behavior” (p. 275). Bandura contends that rather than individuals being in specific stages of moral development, such as objective and subjective responsibility, as Piaget indicated, Bandura’s subjects were more likely to use both types of judgment.

Bandura’s (2000, 2001) social-cognitive theory indicates two ways to learn. One way to learn is from the consequences of an individual’s actions. Similar to operant conditioning, the environment plays a large role in learning. The other way of learning is from social modeling. That is, humans learn by observing others; this is termed *modeling*. New behaviors can be learned by watching others and their reactions and consequences to the modeled behavior (Bandura, 2000). A mainstay of SWPBS is defining and teaching students expected behaviors through adults modeling the behavior and students practicing that behavior.

Middle schools. Middle schools have been selected for this study's focus. Middle schools present a unique educational experience (Eichhorn, 1966). Eichhorn (1966) pointed out that middle schools have prepubescent, early adolescent, and adolescent students. Eichhorn coined the term:

Transescence: the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based on many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes in body chemistry that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes (p. 3).

Eichhorn believed that middle school aged students were at an age when children move from dependence to a more independent status within our culture. Eichhorn also emphasized the importance of middle schools developing programs that are sensitive to the characteristics of students 10-13 years of age. He saw middle level students as distinctly different from elementary and high school level students. He felt in many cases that junior high schools were simply patterned after the senior high schools and not meeting the needs of students in the "middle." Eichhorn's idea of middle schools was that the child's development be the driving force for the school program. This is a "child-centered" approach. Since middle school students vary greatly in their development, their perceptions of SWPBS may also vary greatly.

Framework. Behaviorism (Skinner, 1958, 1974) and particularly ABA (Cooper et al., 2007) are the foundations upon which positive behavior supports (PBS) were founded, which led to SWPBS. Therefore, behaviorism is a large piece of the framework for this study. Integrated

with behaviorism is Bandura's (1969) social learning theory. Social learning theory, more recently called social cognitive theory, is fitting since SWPBS emphasizes teaching students expected behavior by modeling expected behavior. This study's framework consists of researching specifically how students are experiencing manipulations of their environment, along with their perceptions of teacher modeling, teaching, reinforcing, and punishing behavior. Furthermore, the context of middle schools plays a significant role for this research. Eichhorn's (1966) work on transescence is considered. Eichhorn discussed the importance of being sensitive to the developmental needs of students in the 10-13 years of age bracket. Therefore, the framework for this study on SWPBS in PA middle schools includes behaviorism, ABA, social cognitive theory, and Eichhorn's transescence.

Review of the Literature

This section focuses on the existing literature concerning SWPBS while presenting an argument for the significance of this study. Student discipline and safety are considered first. SWPBS is a framework to improve behavior which is linked to student discipline and safety. A general SWPBS section follows, presenting recent research specific to schools that have implemented SWPBS. Since this study will be focusing on perceptions, the third section is dedicated to the importance of perceptions of stakeholders in schools. Lastly, the summary pulls the research together and provides an argument for exploring the gap in the literature on SWPBS and the importance of this particular study on students' perceptions of SWPBS in PA middle schools.

Student discipline and school safety. School discipline and student safety are issues that schools must manage on a daily basis. Both Lezotte (1997) and Marzano (2003) pointed out

that to be effective schools need to be safe and orderly. A safe and orderly environment is more conducive to learning, one that is free from the fear of physical harm (Lezotte, 1997). In a study by Cornell and Mayer (2010), school disorder was associated with student conflict, depression, low motivation, disruptive classrooms, and loss of instructional time.

Along with school disorder is the issue of school violence. Students need to feel safe in their learning environment. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2012) conducted a national survey in 2010 on school violence. The CDC found that there were approximately 828,000 non-fatal child (ages 12-18) victims reported in schools. There were 17 homicides (children ages 5-18) which occurred at school. But students are not the only ones victimized. Seven percent of teachers reported being threatened or attacked physically by a student (CDC, 2012). The CDC (2011) also reported that in 2011, 5.9% of students in their survey reported not attending school for at least one day because they felt unsafe in school, going to school, or coming home from school.

Kerr (2009) noted three factors in preventing school violence: (1) school climate; (2) school organization, policies, and rules; and (3) environmental design of the school (p.104). Middle school SWPBS research is relevant in helping improve the school environment. For example, in Caldarella and colleagues' (2011) quasi-experimental study of two middle schools, SWPBS research indicated improvement in the middle school climate according to a PBS-Supplemental Questionnaire and Indicators of School Quality (ISQ) (Taylor, West & Smith, 2006). The effect size of Caldarella and colleagues' study was moderate to high for school climate.

Payne (2005) also emphasized the importance of school climate. Payne described an inviting, supportive, and safe school environment as a place where encouragement outweighs disciplinary comments or actions. Also, there are school-wide activities (Payne, 2005), rather than each classroom running its own system. When students view their environment as safe, they are more likely to take academic risks, question, and explore (Payne, 2005). Payne pointed out that in light of the stronger emphasis on student achievement and school accountability, “establishing and maintaining a positive climate is crucial” (p. 41).

How school discipline is handled has the potential to affect both the school climate and student perceptions of safety. Kupchik and Ellis (2008) investigated students’ perceptions of fairness of school discipline and perceptions of safety. Kupchik and Ellis found that African American and particularly males, perceived school safety practices less fair overall than White and Latino/a students. Notable is that they also found that non-police security heightened students’ perceptions of safety. Schools with a large number of disadvantaged students utilized more severe disciplinary sanctions than schools with fewer disadvantaged students (Han & Akiba, 2011). In fact, according to Han and Akiba (2011), schools with a large number of disadvantaged groups are more susceptible to a negative school environment (Han & Akiba, 2011). Zero tolerance policies, which have been adopted by many schools, have not proved to be effective (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

According to Spaulding et al. (2010) study, discipline referrals are greater in middle schools than in the elementary schools. Students receiving two to five discipline referrals increased from 8.3% in elementary to 17% in middle school (Spaulding et al., 2010). According to a report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Nolle et al., 2007), middle

schools had a significantly higher rate of violent incidents than both primary and high schools. In addition, “middle schools (43 percent) were more likely to report that student bullying occurred at school daily or weekly than were high schools (22 percent) or primary schools (21 percent)” (Nolle et al., 2007, p. 2). Disciplinary referrals in middle schools are typically detention (26.2%), in-school suspension (24.2%), and out-school suspension (17.5%), indicating that students disciplined are likely to miss more instructional time (Spaulding et al., 2010). In Han and Akiba’s (2011) research on the frequency and reasons for disciplinary referrals, most of the severe discipline infractions were for insubordination and fights (Han & Akiba, 2011). Discipline problems in middle school are associated with academic issues in ninth grade (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). McIntosh et al. (2008) found from their study of a small district in the Pacific Northwest that students’ ($N = 330$) ninth grade core GPAs were related to their eighth grade ODRs $F(2, 323) = 23.99, p < .001$. This means students with lower ninth grade GPAs had a higher number of ODRs in eighth grade. Also, ninth grade ODRs were related to eighth grade reading scores on the Oregon State Assessment (OSA), $F(2, 327) = 9.18, p < .001$. Kerr recommended that school employees look at data to be aware of the type of problems that are occurring in their school. McIntosh et al. (2008) pointed to the necessity of supporting the academic and behavioral needs of students particularly in the transition into high school.

Unfortunately, many disciplinary consequences take students out of the classroom. When students spend time out of the classroom, due to disciplinary sanctions, they are at “increased risk for negative outcomes, such as diminished academic identity, deficient academic skills, and higher attrition” (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012). Goodman (2007) discussed

problems of traditional disciplinary approaches such as student behavior being “a constant target of scolding...” (p. 17). In this environment, sanctions result in student apathy and/or rebellion (Goodman, 2007) which could actually increase disciplinary problems. Goodman recommended incorporating a moral code to discipline. McIntosh et al. (2010) stated that one important outcome of SWPBS is reducing the use of exclusionary practices by school staff.

Using longitudinal data, Way (2011) studied the relationship between school discipline and classroom behavior. Way (2011) compared traditional deterrence framework with normative perspectives. The deterrence framework looks primarily towards punishment as an effective way of controlling student behavior. The normative perspective looks at students’ perceptions of fairness of rules, teachers’ authority, and commitment to rules. Way (2011) found that “when students perceive teachers as competent, caring and respectful, classroom behavior improves” (p. 366). The deterrence framework was found to have a higher rate of disruptive behavior and greater defiance among students (Way, 2011). Unfortunately, Han and Akiba (2011) found that schools that have larger disadvantaged groups, such as special education, minority, and low-SES students, used severe disciplinary sanctions more than schools with lower numbers of disadvantaged groups.

As an alternative to traditional approaches to discipline, experts recommend improving the school climate in order to improve school safety. Improving the school climate involves improving student-adult relationships, as well as reducing bullying and misbehavior through multiple approaches (Han & Akiba, 2011; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). It is noteworthy that high poverty schools benefitted the most from SWPBS perhaps due to the very different approach to

behavior (Han & Akiba, 2011). Rather than relying on severe disciplinary infractions, SWPBS focuses on teaching specific behavior and rewarding appropriate behavior.

SWPBS. Much of the SWPBS research spotlights discipline (suspensions, in-school and out-of-school, office discipline referrals), fidelity of implementation, academic achievement, and school personnel perceptions. A considerable amount of research found positive results from SWPBS implementation (Cooper, 2010; Curtis et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh, Bennett & Price, 2011; McCurdy, 2003; Ross & Horner, 2007). McCurdy et al. (2003) conducted a case study on an urban elementary school in the northwestern United States that had a high percentage of students at or below the poverty level. SWPBS was implemented to reduce disruptive behavior and prevent escalation of anti-social behavior (McCurdy et al., 2003). Some of the school's interventions were teaching behavioral expectations, implementing a rewards system, policy revisions, structured playground activities, functional behavioral assessments (FBA), and making decisions based on data (McCurdy et al., 2003). Multiple forms of data collection were conducted including staff questionnaires, discipline data, and implementation fidelity (McCurdy et al., 2003). Fidelity of implementation measured 82%, indicating moderately high fidelity. Office discipline referrals (ODRs) were reduced 46% by the end of the second year. The findings were (a) staff satisfaction increased in program organization, (b) a positive effect on students and a positive effect on staff, (c) parental awareness of the program, and (d) a desire for the program to continue next year. One area that fell slightly was overall satisfaction of the program (McCurdy et al., 2003).

In a larger scale study, Horner et al. (2009) conducted a randomized, wait-list controlled experiment on 30 schools in Hawaii and Illinois. Fifteen of the schools received SWPBS

treatment, training, and coaching on the SWPBS framework, while the other 15 received treatment a year later. Horner et al. measured success in adoption of SWPBS, impact on perceived school safety, reported levels of office discipline referrals (ODRs), and the impact of third graders meeting the state reading achievement standard. The “treatment” included implementing SWPBS with the assistance of training and technical assistance from the state. Horner et al. found, based on the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2011), that the treatment schools implemented SWPBS with fidelity. The School Safety Survey (SSS, Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1996) Risk Factor indicated that schools that implemented SWPBS were perceived as safer. The SSS Risk Factor data indicated a “significant decrease in risk immediately after training for both the Treatment, $t(37) = -2.29, p = .0278$, and Control/Delay, $t(37) = -2.69, p = .0107$, groups” (Horner et al., 2009, p. 140). Therefore, after SWPBS training and technical assistance, schools were perceived as safer.

Horner et al. (2009) reported that they were unable to run statistical analysis on the office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) due to not having pre-SWPBS data. However, this study did note that the reported ODRs from the schools were lower than average rates. Horner et al. reported that “schools implementing SWPBS were associated with increased reading performance” (p. 140). It is noteworthy to mention that both sets of schools, treatment and control/delay, experienced increased reading achievement, but the Time x Condition was not significant. In other words, there was not a significant difference in increased reading scores among the initial treatment groups and the control/delay groups, which were given treatment later.

Another study, conducted by Curtis and colleagues (2010), reported SWPBS results from a four-year study (2002-2003 school year to 2006-2007 school year) on the effects of SWPBS in

a public elementary school. Data on behavioral referrals, suspensions, extended timeouts within the school day, and out-of-school suspensions (OSS) were analyzed. Over the four-year period, the percentage decrease of behavioral referrals was 47.8%, extended timeouts decreased 1.7%, OSSs decreased 67%, and lost instructional days decreased 56.5% (Curtis et al., 2010). Curtis et al. (2010) ran z tests to determine significance proportions of the four dependent variables. The results were statistically significant ($p < .001$) for the difference in dependent variables: lost instructional days, behavioral referrals, and OSS. However, “the difference in extended timeout rates was not statistically significant ($z = .04, p = .48$)” (Curtis et al., 2010, Results section, para. 3) over four years.

McIntosh et al. (2011) conducted a case study on a mid-size, urban, public, Canadian school district that has sustained SWPBS for over ten years. For the purpose of this case study, training was provided and eight of the 12 schools were provided district SWPBS coaches. McIntosh et al. (2011) found in their case study that SWPBS was valuable in those schools’ environments. Eleven elementary schools and one secondary school had implemented SWPBS. McIntosh et al. evaluated the fidelity of implementation and valued outcomes (ODRs, academic achievement, students’ perceptions of safety). The findings determined that SWPBS was implemented with fidelity; students had fewer behavior problems, better academic achievement, and improved perceptions of school safety (McIntosh et al., 2011). McIntosh et al. indicated that SWPBS was particularly beneficial in high poverty schools.

The School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Sugai, et al., 2011) scores determined that two out of nine districts met the 80% implementing with high fidelity criteria. Four other schools between 70% and 79% were at moderate fidelity while the other three schools had low fidelity

(McIntosh et al., 2011). An indication of low levels of problem behavior was that 90% of students responded to the universal (primary) level of SWPBS (McIntosh et al., 2011) measured by ODRs. Academic achievement for the moderate to high fidelity schools, measured by the Foundations Skills Assessment, exceeded the district's average (McIntosh et al., 2011). McIntosh et al. pointed out that the moderate to high fidelity schools had students with lower SES, but their test scores were higher. In fact, all the scores in the moderate to high fidelity schools were at or above the low fidelity schools. McIntosh and colleagues' study is a much larger scale study of multiple schools compared to Cooper's (2011) study of one school, ($N=14$) which did not indicate a significant difference in academics, specifically reading.

The results were somewhat mixed on students' perceptions of school safety. Overall, fourth and seventh grader results in moderate to high fidelity schools were higher scores in feeling safe, knowing school expectations, and being less bullied than low fidelity schools and also higher than the district averages in those categories. There were two exceptions: at the low fidelity schools, the fourth grade students reported less bullying than the district average of fourth grade bullying reports. Also, at the low fidelity schools, in seventh grade, the district result of understanding expectations was higher than the moderate and high fidelity schools (McIntosh et al., 2011). Overall, this study indicates the importance of implementing SWPBS with high levels of fidelity.

The state of New Hampshire, coordinated by the New Hampshire Center for Effective Behavior Interventions and Supports (NH CEBIS), initiated a five-step process to begin SWPBS in a pilot study. The program was titled Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports – New Hampshire (PBIS-NH). The initiative was evaluated to determine if a statewide training

program was able to assist schools in their implementation of an effective school-wide system. Another primary purpose of the study was to see if the implementation had a positive effect on behavior in the schools such as fewer ODRs, “increased time for academic engagement, and ultimately academic achievement” (Muscott et al., 2008, p. 191). Questions addressed were

- Can PBIS-NH schools supported with training and technical assistance by the NH CEBIS reduce major behavioral infractions that result in ODRs and/or suspensions by implementing SWPBS?
- Will schools supported by the NH CEBIS find that implementing SWPBS provides students with increased academic achievement, teachers more time to teach, and administrators and support personnel more time for leadership activities?
- Do PBIS-NH schools supported with training and technical assistance by the NH CEBIS that have implemented SWPBS show associated increases in academic achievement?

(Muscott, 2008, p. 191)

Implementation included a five-stage process: (1) Awareness, (2) Interest (3) Readiness, (4) Implementation, and (5) Sustainability (Muscott et al., 2008). Schools were asked to apply and indicate specific commitments to the program implementation. All 26 schools that applied were accepted into the first cohort. An additional two high schools were added due to those schools’ large drop-out rate. The participant breakdown was one Head Start (at four sites), “13 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 high schools, and 4 multi-level schools” (Muscott et al., 2008, p. 194).

Muscott et al. (2008) findings were that all but seven schools reached fidelity within two years. Overall, there was a reduction of office discipline referrals by 6,010 (Muscott et al.,

2008). Suspensions were down by 1,032. Muscott et al. noted that the secondary schools received the greatest decreases. Of all the schools, 73% of the schools that achieved fidelity noted improvements on math scores from the New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIAP). Math improvements were not as great in the middle schools with only one school out of five improving (20%). Reading scores only improved in 41% of the schools that achieved fidelity. However, three out of five (60%) of the fidelity middle schools improved their basic and below basic reading scores (Muscott et al., 2008).

The significance of fidelity can also be noted in what the SWPBS environment looks like based on outside observation. Rusby, Crowley, Sprague, and Biglan (2011) utilized an observation tool to measure “middle school staff practices, environment characteristics, and student behavior in school common areas” (Rusby, et al., 2011, p. 400). The middle schools ($N = 18$) under study were part of a randomized, controlled trial on SWPBS schools. Rusby et al. found that student behavior was dramatically different in relation to staff practices of providing SWPBS interventions. Findings were that the less support from staff in a particular environment, the more inappropriate behavior from students (Rusby et al., 2011). This study pointed out that the greater the fidelity in a specific school setting, such as in the cafeteria, the better the results are on student behavior.

Perceptions of Stakeholders. Perceptions of stakeholders are an important consideration in any implementation. Researchers have recommended seeking student perceptions of SWPBS (Cooper, 2011; Cooper, 2010; Oswald, 2008). The PBS Implementation Blueprint (2010) identifies students, classroom, school, district, and state as stakeholders.

Students are presented as the core of the stakeholders' groups (OSEP, 2010). Stakeholder perceptions can uncover strengths and weaknesses of a program.

Teacher perceptions of SWPBS have been studied, resulting in positive findings as well as concerns or areas of needed improvement (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Cooper, 2010; Landers, 2006; Ross & Horner, 2007; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers & Collins, 2010). In Briggs' (2012) case study, teachers noted how SWPBS implementation changed the way they thought about things from focusing on the negative and punitive discipline to focusing on the positive and teaching behavioral expectations. In addition, students noted that knowing the school-wide behavioral expectations helped students behave better (Briggs, 2012). Landers (2006) utilized a qualitative approach to find teachers' reactions and perceptions of the effectiveness of SWPBS. He found that teachers also believed SWPBS, particularly school-wide expectations, to be effective in addressing inappropriate student behaviors. Furthermore, SWPBS had a positive behavior impact on the entire school (Landers, 2006).

This finding is in line with quantitative studies on the relationship of teacher's perceptions of efficacy in the SWPBS environment and the level of SWPBS implementation. The higher the SWPBS level of implementation in schools, the higher the teachers' level of efficacy (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Ross & Horner, 2007). Kelm and McIntosh's (2012) study compared teachers ($N = 62$) from SWPBS and non-SWPBS schools, finding a positive result with a significant difference in teacher self-efficacy in the SWPBS schools with a large effect size of $d = 0.80$. Ross and Horner (2007) compared only SWPBS schools but looked at the level of implementation. They found that the higher the level of SWPBS implementation, the higher

teachers' ($N = 20$) efficacy with a "strong effect of level of SWPBS on teacher efficacy $F(1, 18) = 7.34, p < .05$ " (Ross & Horner, 2007, p. 7).

One of the negatives that Landers (2006) found from teachers was that they felt like they did not have enough administrative support. In addition, teachers believed that SWPBS increased their workload due to the time it takes to fill out a reward or a discipline referral (Landers, 2006). Furthermore, it is interesting to note from Landers' study that teachers perceived that school-wide expectations did not change their classroom rules and that expectations within the classroom are still at the teachers' discretion. One of the purposes of SWPBS is to have clear expectations throughout the school. If teachers all have different classroom expectations, students would experience inconsistencies throughout their day. It makes sense that, as Landers noted, teachers perceived that not all educators in their school were enforcing school-wide expectations. On the other hand, teachers believed that having school-wide expectations helped students behave better, was particularly helpful for new teachers, and allowed teachers to focus more on positive student behavior.

Landers (2006) described the limitations of his study were that the principal selected the participants and that there were only two interviews per teacher conducted. Landers recommended future research that used case study methods to examine other stakeholders' perceptions. He also recommended more qualitative studies at various schools to better understand the various contexts of implementation.

Studies have demonstrated school personnel's perceptions of barriers and facilitators/enablers of SWPBS implementation (Bambara et al., 2009; Kincaid, Childs, Blasé & Wallace, 2007). Bambara et al.'s study was conducted on sustaining individual positive behavior

support (IPBS) and stakeholder perceptions of barriers and enablers. This qualitative study by Bambara et al. (2009) had 25 SWPBS stakeholders from six states to determine SWPBS' barriers and enablers or sustainers. The five themes developed were the following: school culture; administrative leadership; structure and use of time; ongoing professional development; and family and student involvement (Bambara, et al., 2009). Each of these themes could be a barrier or an enabler to schools depending on the supports in each theme. A school culture that understands and supports IPBS was found to be most important (Bambara, et al., 2009) expressed by 92% of participants. Kincaid et al.'s (2007) case study approach found that staff buy-in rated highest as a barrier followed by use of data, inconsistent implementation, and reward system. The top facilitators of SWPBS were district support, PBS project support, use of data, and administrative support (Kincaid et al., 2007). One participant expressed "an unsupportive school culture is like 'lack of oxygen', there is no air to feed or sustain the process" (Bambara, et al., 2009, p. 167). Participants suggested implementing SWPBS, celebrating successes with school community, and school-wide training of IPBS to develop a better understanding of IPBS (Bambara, et al., 2009).

Knowing how teachers use the SWPBS framework is also important. Tillery et al. (2010) conducted research on general education teachers' (kindergarten and first grade) perceptions of behavior management and intervention strategies by collecting data via open-ended interviews. The authors pointed out that it is more effective to resolve behavior problems in young children rather than in older children due to problem behaviors becoming more resistant to interventions (Tillery et al., 2010). It was suggested that general education teachers need to make the most of

group and preventative behavior strategies (Tillery et al., 2010). Tillery et al. pointed out that traditionally schools have relied on punitive, reactionary disciplinary practices.

In the Tillery et al. (2010) study, 20 teachers from six schools were trained in RTI and PBIS by their administrator. The study found that even though teachers were trained in PBIS, the teachers viewed behavior on an individual basis, rather than focusing on group strategies (Tillery et al., 2010). Teachers were able to discuss individual strategies for behavior management, but very few expressed strategies for group behavior management (Tillery et al., 2010). In addition, the teachers did not express knowledge of RTI and PBIS even though they were trained (Tillery et al., 2010). On a positive note, the teachers did express preventative strategies that were consistent with the PBIS approach (Tillery et al., 2010). Also, teachers expressed that they had a “strong influence” (Tillery et al., 2010, p. 97) on students’ development of behavior. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that since teachers are SWPBS trained, SWPBS is being implemented or implemented consistently.

On the other hand, Oswald (2008) noted there was “student awareness” (p. 139), meanings even when SWPBS was implemented inconsistently among teachers, the students were all able to verbalize the behavioral expectations of their school. Oswald’s (2008) study involved students as one of the participant groups in the study on student involvement in the PBS environment, specifically the attached bully prevention initiative. Students also thought that teachers took bully prevention more seriously when students took a leadership role in PBS-bully prevention. In this study, SWPBS was not implemented with fidelity. Even though a reduction of discipline referrals was not significant, both teachers and students felt that the school environment was more positive and regarding bullying, students were better able to work out

their differences. Also noted by students was “more supportive interactions between teachers and adults” (Oswald, 2008, p. 145).

Another study that included student perceptions was Cooper’s (2010). Cooper conducted a study of three Maryland SWPBS schools on *Stakeholder Perceptions on the Influence of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports on Academic Achievement and the Educational Environment of Middle School Students*. This study focused on perceptions of administrators, teachers, parents, and students on SWPBS effect on academic achievement. Cooper found five main themes: (a) support for a caring environment, (b) support for the learning process, (c) motivation, (d) governance of behavior, and (e) structure for teachers (p. 87).

It was interesting to note that while teachers and administrators believed there was a connection between PBS and increased achievement, the students did not see a connection (Cooper, 2010). Teachers and students agreed that PBS provided motivation for students. My study complements Cooper’s Maryland and Oswald’s SWPBS student involvement study by expanding upon students’ perceptions of SWPBS in relation to the school environment, teaching behavioral expectations, rewards, discipline, and safety.

Examining students’ phenomenological world is just as important as understanding teachers (Fite, 2012). Fite (2012) expressed that students were “seeing and experiencing lessons differently” (p. 190) than what was expected. Understanding students’ perceptions will help clarify how SWPBS is being implemented. Also, students’ perceptions are important to guide SWPBS interventions. Research on students’ perceptions will give answers as to why some interventions are effective while others are not. Bracy (2011) used ethnographic research to determine students’ perceptions of high security school systems. The findings were that students

believed their schools were safe, but also felt that many of the security systems were not needed such as a school resource officer, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras (Bracy, 2011).

Students felt “powerless” (Bracy, 2011, p. 365) due to the way rules/punishments were enforced. As stated previously, Way (2011) found that “when students perceive teachers as competent, caring, and respectful, classroom behavior improves” (p. 366).

Another study that supports understanding students’ perceptions is Szklarski’s (2011) study on student experiences with motivation to learn in science and math. This phenomenological study on student motivation involved 19 students, ages 15 and 16 years old, from one school. Szklarski found two essential constituents for the phenomenon of motivation to learn science and math: *interest* and *progress*. *Interest* meant students’ interest in the subject and belief in the usefulness of the subject. The strongest component on the interest constituent was the teacher. Students described a teacher’s approach could make the topic interesting. Teacher enthusiasm for the topic spilled over to students and motivated students. Lastly, the teacher-student relationship was listed under *interest*, which means that a positive student–teacher relationship increased motivation (Szklarski, 2011). Students pointed out that teachers need to make learning fun, especially, if it is a subject that the students do not consider to be fun. Teachers can make it fun by providing more variation in learning activities and by using more active techniques. Students thought active learning, for instance “labs, discussions or role-play,” makes learning more fun and interesting (Szklarski, 2011).

Students also described *progress*, or lack of it, as another motivating factor (Szklarski, 2011). Students felt that if they do not feel they are making progress, motivation decreases (Szklarski, 2011). Students discussed the importance of clear signals to determine if they are

making progress. These signals can be internal, such as understanding a subject, or external, such as words of praise from a teacher. One student commented on how important the external indicators are at the beginning of learning, “feeling successful at the start” (Szklerski, 2011, p. 46).

Szklerski (2011) recommends that teachers need to consider both interest and progress to motivate students to learn. The teacher’s approach affects students’ interest (Szklerski, 2011). Szklerski also recommends using “clear signs of progress” (p. 46) for students. According to Szklerski’s findings, teachers should not be afraid of using too many signs of progress, suggesting praise and encouragement for progress and praise and encouragement to help a student to get back on track.

Interest and progress were factors that were considered when looking at students’ experiences and perceptions of the SWPBS environment. This study on motivation to learn in Science and Math classes relates well to motivation to learn behavior in the SWPBS environment. Student perspectives of teachers’ approaches to SWPBS as well as signals of progress are similar to the tenets of teaching behavior in the SWPBS environment.

Summary

This chapter identified the theoretical framework for SWPBS and the framework for this study. SWPBS is based in behaviorism with an emphasis on ABA due to practices being conducted in the actual school environment, not a laboratory. Also considered in this study was social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 2000, 2001) and concepts of the middle school experience (Eichhorn, 1966). Research on the SWPBS environmental influences, student outcomes, and perceptions were examined. There appears to be a gap in the literature when

researching students' perceptions of SWPBS. SWPBS research accounts for effects on behavior referrals, suspensions, academic progress, and fidelity of implementation (Curtis et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009; McCurdy et al; 2003, McIntosh et al., 2011; Muscott et al., 2008; Rusby et al., 2011), with data tending to be quantitative in nature. There was limited qualitative research on perceptions of stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, in the SWPBS environment (Bambara et al., 2009; Landers, 2006; Tillery et al., 2010), but a gap persisted in students' perceptions. Students' perceptions were considered in studies on school safety, discipline, motivation to learn, and students' perceptions of teachers (Bracy, 2011; Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Szklarski, 2011; Way, 201); nonetheless, specific research on students' perceptions in the SWPBS environment needed to be explored further.

Students' perceptions in the SWPBS environment can be a valuable piece in planning, modifying, and evaluating SWPBS implementation. Grover (2004) indicated that students can provide rich information in social research. Experiences that are "children's" experiences should be described by children, rather than an adult's interpretation (Grover, 2004). Data collected directly from the children are more credible than an adult's interpretation of children's experiences. Chapter Three will describe the methodology that will be used for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994) study was to describe the perceptions of middle school students in schools which have implemented SWPBS with fidelity. Along with students' perceptions, student experiences were described.

Transcendental phenomenology indicates that the researcher systematically sets aside personal biases of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, the researcher utilizes intuition and imagination as part of the data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This study focused on students from middle schools that have implemented the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity.

This chapter discusses the qualitative design, research questions, and research sites that were used in this study. Next, the reader will be introduced to how participants were selected, procedures for participating in the study, and the researcher role. Triangulation is met by collecting data in three ways: (a) focus groups, (b) individual interviews, and (c) observations. In addition, SWPBS documents were gathered at each site to add to the descriptive portion of this research. Lastly, the data analysis process is described, along with trustworthiness and ethical issues.

Design

This was a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study. Data was collected through focus groups, structured interviews, and researcher observations. The transcendental phenomenological approach provided an avenue to describe the essence of the SWPBS experience for middle school students. This type of study adds to the research on SWPBS by providing a better understanding of the meaning students take from the SWPBS environment.

The transcendental approach opens and sets aside any pre-judgments of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1931 as cited by Moustakas, 1994) discussed the importance of “the Epoche process” (p. 85). *Epoche* is when the researcher brings forth into consciousness preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and sets them aside. Moustakas discussed how Epoche allows the researcher to open his/her mind to new and fresh information. For example, in this study on SWPBS, I took time to think about my perceptions of SWPBS. Prior to meeting with students, I intentionally tried to clear my mind of my perceptions in order to purposefully listen to their perceptions.

At the same time, phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994) was used in this SWPBS study. The first step was to bracket the phenomenon so that the focus of research was clear (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, textural descriptions of the students’ experiences were written. This process gave me insight into the students’ (co-researchers) experiences and allowed me to process it through my own conscience (Moustakas, 1994). *Horizontalization* means allowing each statement to have equal value until I discerned that some were irrelevant or repetitive, leaving only the horizons (Moustakas, 1994). I read through transcripts several times and grouped similar topics together and explored themes. New insights were gained through the reduction process (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation is the process of exploring actual and possible ideas that relate to the research focus (Moustakas, 1994). In this research, imaginative variation was used by pulling meaning from the students’ experiences and creating structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) emphasized the role that researcher intuition plays during the imaginative variation stage. Structural descriptions were derived from the textual descriptions and by exploring various

themes and possible meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, utilizing each site's SWPBS documentation assisted in writing the structural descriptions.

Lastly, a synthesis of meaning and essence (Moustakas, 1994) was formed. The essence of the collective perceptions and experiences of middle school students in the SWPBS environment was described. Moustakas (1994) reported that at this stage the researcher uses "intuitive integration of the fundamental textual and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 100).

Research Questions

In order to investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of middle school students in the SWPBS environment, the central question was

1. What meaning do middle school students ascribe to the SWPBS environment?

Moustakas (1994) pointed out the importance of understanding the meaning of the experience. In this study, intervention practices that students are experiencing that are elements of the SWPBS universal tier are noted. Some practices that are typically recommended are active supervision, reinforcement, teaching of behavioral expectations, and social skills instruction (pbis.org, 2012).

Guiding questions were the following:

2. What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding teaching of school-wide behavioral expectations?

One of the main features of SWPBS is students are taught expected behaviors. There are three to five behavioral expectations identified and taught throughout the school (pbis.org). The

purpose of only three to five behavioral expectations is so students understand and remember school expectations (Landers, 2006; Tillery et al, 2010; OSEP, 2012b).

3. What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding the school's reward system?

Skinner (1958) stated that rewards reinforce behavior. It is important to know what the students think about the school's reward system to determine if the students perceive it as motivating (Landers, 2006; McCurdy et al., 2003; Tillery et al., 2010; Way, 2011). ABA also emphasized manipulation of the environment to increase the probability of wanted behaviors (Cooper et al., 2007). It was interesting to note what students viewed as reinforcing and rewarding. Rewards may be something other than what the teachers think.

4. What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school discipline?

SWPBS not only reinforces appropriate behavior, inappropriate behavior is handled systematically. Schools are to develop a "continuum of procedures" to handle and discourage inappropriate behavior (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). One goal of SWPBS is to have clearly defined consequences to allow for consistency among staff (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Clarity includes what behaviors should be handled in the classroom by the teacher and what behavior should be handled in the office by the principal (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

Also, in line with Skinner (1958), punishments influence behavior. Student experiences with punishments will shed light on their lived experience with SWPBS (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Spaulding et al., 2010; Way, 2011). Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory states that behaviors can be learned by observing the consequences of others. Even if a student

has not been rewarded or disciplined by school personnel, the student can learn from another's consequences.

5. What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school safety?

A safe and secure environment provides an environment conducive to learning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Lezotte, 1997; Marzano, 2003). Students' perceptions of school safety would add to the essence of the experience (Kerr, 2009; Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Payne, 2005). Students that feel safe in the school environment will feel more comfortable interacting and taking educational risks. This creates an environment that promotes learning.

Sites

Three schools were selected to participate in this study using both a criterion and convenience sample. The selection of these schools was based on their fidelity of implementation as recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through PAPBS in May of 2012 (J. Palmier, personal communication, May 31, 2012). The school district superintendents and principals were contacted via telephone with a follow up letter requesting their written consent (Appendix A, Appendix B). In addition, a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the studies purpose, significance, and methods was sent to the superintendents of the schools.

As of January 2012, there were only four middle schools in Pennsylvania that had been recognized as implementing SWPBS with fidelity (PAPBS, n.d.). According to the director of PaTTAN (Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network) J. Palmiero (personal

communication, May 31, 2012), the number has increased to eight middle schools recognized in Pennsylvania as implementing SWPBS with fidelity in May 2012. The first middle school in Pennsylvania to be recognized was School A described below. Since I am a school counselor at this school, I made an initial request to the IRB for permission to work with students at my school and received an affirmative response. The students were assured that their participation would not affect their status at school. In addition, the district superintendent gave permission to conduct this study at my place of employment.

Site One. School A (pseudonym) was located in a rural area of central Pennsylvania. The 2011-2012 academic year was the fourth year of SWPBS implementation. In November 2012, the middle school under study had 450 students. Approximately 51% males, 49% females, 85% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, 5% Black, 4% Asian, and between 22-25% were from low socio-economic status (SES) homes, according to the free and reduced lunch statistics. Approximately, 11% of students were receiving special education services (J. Kline, personal communication, June 20, 2012). The school was located in a college town (a selective, small liberal arts college) with many parents holding professional positions. As of May 2012, the school had made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) every year and was recognized for the “National Blue Ribbon Award of Excellence from the United States Department of Education in 2002 and as a ‘Schools to Watch Site’ by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform in 2010” (Lewisburg Area School District [LASD], n.d., para. 1). This school was selected due to it meeting the criteria of being a Pennsylvania middle school that had implemented SWPBS at the universal level with fidelity in both 2011 and 2012 (J. Palmiero, personal communication, May 31, 2012; PAPBS, 2011).

Site Two. School C was located in an urban area of north-central Pennsylvania. The 2011-2012 school year was the second year of SWPBS implementation. School C had approximately 560 students, serving grades six through eight in the 2011-2012 school year (B. Pardoe, personal communication, June 12, 2012). B. Pardoe (personal communication, June 12, 2012) reported that approximately 50% of the population was black or biracial, while 49% were Caucasian and 68% of the students were from low SES homes. Twenty-eight percent of the students were receiving special education services (B. Pardoe, personal communication, June 12, 2012). As of May 2012, School C had missed meeting the AYP requirement twice, with 2011 being one of those years (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012). May 2012 was the first year that School C was recognized by the state as implementing SWPBS at the universal level with fidelity (B. Pardoe, personal communication, June 12, 2012; J. Palmiero, personal communication, May 31, 2012).

Site Three. School C was located outside the city limits of a central Pennsylvania city. School C also received its recognition for implementing SWPBS with fidelity in May 2012, their second year of implementation (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012; J. Palmiero, personal communication, May 31, 2012). This middle school also serves students in grades six through eight with 18% minority students (Education.com, 2011). In the 2011-2012 school year, there were 615 students split fairly evenly by gender (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012). As of May 2012, they have been successful at making AYP with the exception of the 2011 school year. The principal reported that approximately 50% of the students are from a rural setting while the other 50% are bused in from an urban setting.

School C had 36-37% students from low SES homes, and approximately 10% of students were receiving special education services (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012).

Participants

Criterion and typical case sampling were used when students were selected from the sites described. Again, all school sites had been recognized for implementing SWPBS with fidelity in May 2012. Students in this study were considered co-researchers. The term *co-researchers* was chosen in accordance with Moustakas (1994) to stress the participants' contribution to the research. Principals were asked to select ten students based on the criteria that they had been in the SWPBS environment for at least a year and were able to communicate with me verbally. In addition, principals were asked to select typical case students, meaning students who would present a "normal or average" student in their school (Creswell, 2007). My goal was to have about eight students who could participate from the principals' lists of ten. The principals' lists included students' names, parents' names, and contact information. Following the principals' recommendations of students, parents were contacted by phone to explain the research and notify them that their child was recommended by the principal as a possible participant. The phone script is available in Appendix C. Parents were asked if they would allow their child to participate. Following parental agreement, written parent consent and student assent forms (Appendix D and Appendix E) were sent. These forms were sent via email, U.S. mail, or home with the student depending on parental preference. All consent and assent forms were sent directly back to me.

Sampling procedures. A total of 24 co-researchers from three different schools were involved with this study. Students were in grades seven and eight and between the ages of 12-

14. After receiving the principals' lists of recommendations, which included contact information, I called the parents of recommended students to explain the research project. When the parents of the co-researchers were called, I offered to provide them with both the focus group and interview questions. After explaining the research, parents were specifically asked if I could meet with their child in a focus group, along with the other students from that school and individually for an interview. Consent and assent forms were secured from the participants prior to any data collection. Co-researchers were offered an incentive of cookies and brownies during the focus group, a \$5 Walmart card for those involved with the individual interviews, and a pizza party for all co-researchers during the member checking session. The pizza party was to demonstrate gratitude for their participation and signify the conclusion of their participation in the study.

Sample size. The sample size was a total of 24 students, nine students from School A, eight students from School B, and seven students from School C (See Appendix F). This sample size is in line with published guidelines (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994) and with other recent phenomenological studies on school-age children (Perrin-Wallqvist & Carlsson, 2011; Szklarski, 2011; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). After criteria sampling, a convenience sample was used. Convenience sampling in this case means that the students selected had the ability and permission to participate. Pseudonyms were used for students for confidentiality. The group size of approximately six students per focus group was based on six being a manageable focus group number for adolescent participants to have an opportunity to speak. For the interviews, I selected two students who were previously involved with the focus group, along with two other students who were not in the focus group, at each school.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, I discussed with the principals at School B and School C information about their school and how SWPBS was being implemented at their school. SWPBS documents were also requested at this time. At School A, I was able to gather the documentation on my own. This information provided a greater understanding of each site's SWPBS implementation and added to my descriptive sections of this research.

As required for research, IRB approval was obtained. In addition, district-level, school-level, and parental consents, as well as student assents were obtained prior to collecting data. Triangulation was applied by collecting data in multiple ways. The following procedures were utilized to collect data on student experiences in Pennsylvania middle schools that have implemented SWPBS: (a) focus groups, (b) interviews, and (c) observations.

The Researcher's Role

Data was analyzed using methods recommended by Moustakas (1994). I was the human instrument of data collection through focus groups, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Moustakas discussed the need of the human instrument to *Epoche*, setting aside bias. I complied with this approach to remove my bias. I have been a part of the implementation of SWPBS in a middle school setting. My prior SWPBS experience may be considered a bias, though a positive bias. I enjoyed the process of implementing SWPBS due to its focus on appropriate behavior, rather than inappropriate behavior. However, I recognize there is room to learn more about SWPBS in middle schools. After this research was fully conducted, I described the essence of student experiences in a SWPBS environment.

Another bias is that SWPBS, used properly, is an excellent behavior management approach for schools. I like the positive and proactive approach that the SWPBS framework emphasizes such as teaching expected behavior and reinforcing it. On the other hand, perhaps a negative bias of mine is that I think that it is difficult for some educators to come to agreement on expected behaviors, let alone teach them uniformly to the student body (Bambara, et al., 2009; Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008; Oswald, 2008). For example, Oswald (2008) observed that teachers were inconsistent in their application of SWPBS principles. It is important to note that Oswald's study site was not implementing SWPBS with fidelity. Lohrmann et al. (2008) found that staff had philosophical differences with SWPBS. Those philosophical differences were (a) wanting to emphasize punitive responses to problem behavior, (b) adults should not have to change --the students should have to change their behavior, and (c) opposition to providing rewards for positive behavior that students are supposed to be doing (Lohrmann et al., 2008).

Epoche was addressed by recognizing first that I have biases related to this study. As stated earlier, I have biases such as feeling that there are benefits of SWPBS and that sometimes SWPBS is not implemented with fidelity by school personnel. I used the *Epoche* process by taking time to clear my head and open my mind prior to collecting data. By recording student responses and using those transcripts and taking notes during observations, the issue of my biases affecting the research was limited. Furthermore, member checks were conducted at each site to give co-researchers an opportunity to confirm or deny my findings. A *member check* is when a researcher takes the findings from the data back to the co-researchers (participants) to allow the co-researchers to make corrections or additions.

My assumption was that students from schools that are implementing SWPBS with fidelity have a positive experience. On the other hand, I also assumed that not all was perfect and that some “disconnects” would be found among the planned universal interventions and the perceptions that students have of those interventions. In addition, I assumed that some students would perceive certain interventions as having more impact than other interventions.

It is also important to note that I have been a middle school counselor in School A for 15 years. As a school counselor, I have had professional experience interviewing students and running student groups, which were a benefit to my study. Additionally, to prepare for the focus groups, I read peer-reviewed articles on how to conduct focus groups with children (Franz, 2011; Gibson, 2012).

On a spiritual note, I believe the Bible is God’s word and should be used as my daily guide. The Bible emphasizes the importance of teaching and disciplining children. Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” And in Proverbs 19:18 (NIV), “Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.” SWPBS is a systematic approach to teaching appropriate and expected behaviors (pbis.org, 2012) and implementing consequences for both appropriate (positive consequences) and inappropriate (negative consequences) behavior.

Data Collection

In phenomenological research methods, data collection needs to focus on how the participant experiences the phenomenon. Three modes of data collection were used for this study including focus groups, individual interviews, and observations. See Appendix G for the

timeline of focus groups, individual interview, observations, and member check data collections. I spent time ensuring that the co-researchers felt comfortable enough to respond honestly and openly (Moustakas, 1994) during the data collection process.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were the first process used to collect data. Five to seven students from each school participated in the focus group sessions. Focus groups were conducted first purposely to allow students to become more comfortable prior to meeting with me individually. Also to add to student comfort, I provided treats, cookies and brownies. Focus groups provided a more secure environment since other students were there.

Incidentally, there were some considerations when working with school-age children in focus groups. Building trust was essential when conducting a focus group with children (Gibson, 2012). A partnership was formed with students by discussing with them that they were “co-researchers.” To add to students’ comfort, a setting in the students’ schools was selected, and students were allowed to move around the room if they wanted to as recommended by Gibson (2012). Students relaxed as the microphone and recording were explained, as suggested by Gibson. *Positionality* was also a consideration (Franz, 2011; Gibson, 2012). This means considering how a person’s “position” such as personal and social characteristics influences the co-researchers’ interactions (Franz, 2011; Gibson, 2012). Rapport was established with students by telling them about me, explaining that I was still learning, and that they were assisting me.

Children’s cognitive and linguistic abilities are likely to be different than adults (Gibson, 2012). Patience was demonstrated by allowing students to use their own words, rather than providing students with verbiage (Gibson, 2012). Peer pressure, power imbalances, and the

students' desire to please the facilitator can play a role in the student responses (Franz, 2011; Gibson, 2012). To alleviate this issue, clarification occurred by explaining that their opinions were needed and that not everyone had to agree. It was explained that there were no "wrong" answers (Gibson, 2012).

Three separate focus groups were conducted, one from each school. (See Table 1 for focus group questions.) Again, the groups consisted of six students from each school. Gibson (2012) recommended ground rules for children's focus groups. The ground rules were

- allowing students the "pass" option,
- encouraging students to think before they respond,
- asking students to let me know if I have misunderstood them,
- telling students that they can use any words to express themselves but that serious responses are expected, and
- explaining confidentiality (Gibson, 2012, p. 155).

Students were also given a card with their pseudonym on it and asked to place that in front of them. Students were asked to protect confidentiality of others by referring to each other by their pseudonym and to refrain from naming their school. Appendix H includes the format, questions, and script for the focus groups.

Table 1

Focus Group Discussion Topics

Questions

General School Experiences

1. Describe your school as if describing it to a student who has never been here.
2. What are the students like in your school?
3. What are the teachers like in your school?

Teaching of Behavior

4. Describe how you learn what is expected of you in this school.
5. Do all the students know what the teachers expect of them? How?

Rewards

6. Explain the procedure if you are doing the right thing (following the rules).
7. What do you think are effective rewards for appropriate behavior?

Discipline

8. Describe what happens if you do not do what is expected. Explain.
9. Do all students have the same rules? Explain.

Safety

10. Do you feel safe in the school? Why or why not?
 11. What would you suggest to make the school safer?
-

The *General School Experience* questions were to warm-up the students and to get an overall sense of their description of the school. I listened for positive and negative descriptions. It gave me an idea of the co-researchers' experiences and school climate (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; McCurdy et al. 2003). These questions were geared towards the central question; however, responses helped with the other guiding questions. Questions on *Teaching of Behavior* were designed to solicit students' thoughts about learning expected behaviors. One of the tenets of SWPBS is to have school-wide expected behaviors that are positively stated (pbis.org, 2011).

Discipline and Rewards questions were designed to understand students' perceptions of punishments and rewards (Kupchick & Ellis, 2008; Way, 2011). Skinner's (1958, 1974) theory postulates that behavior is affected by punishments and rewards. In keeping with behaviorism and ABA, punishments and rewards are main features of SWPBS (pbis.org, 2012). Question nine was designed to solicit how students perceived rule enforcement. Way (2011) found that when students perceive rules to be unfair, there is a higher rate of disruptive behavior and greater

defiance. The *Safety* questions focused on students' perceptions of school safety. Since SWPBS emphasizes appropriate behavior, school safety has been found to improve (Horner et al., 2009).

Focus groups as well as individual student interviews were recorded and transcribed. A transcriptionist was hired to transcribe most of the focus group and interview recordings. Transcription was performed by a Bucknell University college student and me. She was instructed to transcribe verbatim and she signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix I).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted after parental consent and student assent forms were signed. Four students from each school, for a total of 12, participated in the individual interviews. Students were interviewed in their school, whenever possible, or by phone using the interview guide (Table 2). Most interviews were conducted during the Spring parent-teacher conference days in a space selected by the principal. I used office space and classroom space to conduct interviews. Again, interviews were recorded and transcribed. The script and interview form are provided in Appendix J.

Table 2

Interview Questions

Questions

Demographics

1. What is your gender and race?
2. What grade are you in?

Behavioral Expectations

3. How long have you gone to this school?
4. Explain the school-wide behavioral expectations. If needed, prompt what they are.

Discipline

5. What are your thoughts about the school-wide behavioral expectations?
6. Have you received any discipline this year? Describe that experience.
7. Tell me about student behavior in this school.

Safety

8. Describe your feelings of safety in this school.
9. What makes you feel safe in this school?
10. Are there things that could be done to make you (or students) feel safer?

Rewards

11. Explain what happens when a teacher sees you doing something right.
12. Tell me about a time that you received any rewards/reinforcement for your appropriate behavior this year. (I will use the term the school uses.)
13. Can you tell me about another student receiving rewards for behavior? (Bandura, 2001, 1969)

Environment

14. Describe if SWPBS in this school helps you be a better student (behaviorally or academically). How?
15. Describe if there is something in this school that deters you from being a better student (behaviorally or academically).

These questions were designed to look more deeply into how SWPBS is affecting the students' daily lives at school. The first section is to document demographic information. Next, perceptions on behavioral expectations and discipline were addressed (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Curtis et al., 2010; Han & Akiba, 2011; Spaulding et al., 2010; Way, 2011). Way (2011) found that students' perceptions on discipline were related to the students' behavior. Way pointed out that when students believed rules to be fair and/or had positive teacher-student relationships, those students were less disruptive. On the other hand, Way found that the more authoritarian discipline environments had higher levels of discipline issues.

Safety is addressed in the next section. Creating a safe environment is one of the goals of SWPBS (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010). The safety questions determined students' perceptions of school safety (Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2011; Payne, 2005). Payne (2005) noted that when students felt safe, they were more likely to take academic risks.

The rewards section focused on students' perceptions of the school reward system, which is based on Behaviorism and ABA (Skinner, 1958, 1974). Responses assisted in getting a sense of the relationship between teachers and students. Kerr (2009) and Skiba and Peterson (1999) noted that improving student-teacher relations reduced bullying and student misconduct. Lastly, school environment was addressed in the literature, indicating that the environment has the potential to assist or hinder the learning environment and student motivation (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Wolsey & Uline, 2010). Therefore, environment was included to find students' perceptions of the environment and how the environment affected them academically and behaviorally (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & The Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Landers, 2006; Mass-Galloway et al., 2008; Medley et al., 2007; Runge et al., 2012; Simonsen et al., 2010; 2012; Way, 2011; Wolsey & Uline, 2010). Cooper (2010) found that teachers believed that SWPBS assisted with academic improvement while students did not see a connection among SWPBS and academic improvement.

Observations

Arrangements were made with the school principal to conduct observations at each school as a non-participant observer. Observations were conducted in the following locations: hallway, classroom, student break, cafeteria, and school entry/exit area. Table 3 describes the observation schedule protocol. A total of seven observations were conducted, two extensive observations at School B and C and three at School A. Each observation at School B and C lasted about three hours. The observations at School A were about three hours for the first and about two hours for the other observations.

My observations were based on ideas presented in Rusby et al. (2011), *Observations of the Middle School Environment: The Context for Student Behavior Beyond the Classroom*.

Rusby and colleagues' research indicated the importance of direct observation in evaluating an SWPBS environment. Their baseline observations from a non-SWPBS environment indicated low rates of reinforcement, and that few schools had rules posted (Rusby et al., 2011).

Interestingly, differing staff to student ratios did not make a significant difference in student behavior. The example that Rusby et al. (2011) gave was that in the cafeteria, the staff to student ratio was low; however, staff used more positive supports. Behavior management in the cafeteria was working well. On the playground, staff to student ratio was also low, but support was also low, which resulted in more inappropriate behavior. This study only included baseline data, since it was testing an observation instrument; implementing SWPBS is expected to increase the observable features of SWPBS, such as posting of rules and more positive supports from staff for students.

The observations for this study included looking at the school environment (expectations posted, achievement posting, condition of the school facilities, etc.). My observation instrument was different than Rusby et al. (2011); however, my observation protocol in Table 3 is based on their protocol. My observation protocol is provided in Appendix K (based on Creswell, 2007). Observations assisted with the contextual description of this research as recommended by Moustakas (1994). I also considered research from Oswald (2008) by observing students' behavior to see if it matched the behavioral expectations and teacher use of positive behavior supports.

Table 3

Observation Schedule Protocol

Observation Area	Parameters
Entry/exit	Collected when students are arriving or leaving school. Collected in bus area and school entryway (approximately 20 minutes).
Hallway	Collected when students are transitioning between classes (approximately 5 minutes each).
Lunchroom	Collected in cafeteria when students are eating lunch (approximately 30 minutes each).
Student break	Collected during break when students are finished with lunch. Collected in outdoor areas, game room, gym, library, etc. (approximately 20 minutes).
Classroom	Collected in classrooms (approximately 30 minutes each).

Adapted from Rusby et al. (2011, p. 404)

Data Analysis

The analysis procedures were based on the van Kaam Method, which was modified by Moustakas (1994). Relying on theoretical propositions (Moustakas, 1994), the analysis procedures described below were used to analyze the data collected for this transcendental phenomenological study. Observations provided a rich description of the environment and assisted with the transcript analysis. Visible outputs of SWPBS were gleaned from observation data and coded. Observation notes were also compared to data gained from interviews and focus groups.

Analyzing transcripts. Focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcribing was conducted by a Bucknell University student and me. The transcriber was paid and signed a statement of confidentiality. All transcripts were “read several times to obtain an overall feeling for them” (p. 270) as suggested by Creswell (2007). *Horizontalization,*

statements having equivalent value (Moustakas, 1994), were used as I listed the co-researchers' statements for evaluation.

Significant statements. Significant statements and meaning units were identified. Data was synthesized from the transcripts of individual interviews, focus groups, and observations. Significant statements were identified from individual interviews and focus groups. This list was evaluated to develop ["nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping"] (Moustakas, 2007, p. 180) themes. Meaning units were formed from significant statements. Meaning units were clustered into themes. This process allows the researcher to begin to find themes regarding the participants' experiences. Appendix L provides an example of my analysis process from significant statements to meaning units to themes.

Provisional coding. In order to systematically use the observation data with the transcript data, provisional coding was used. *Provisional coding* is a type of coding that involves having a pre-determined list of codes for which to apply data (Saldana, 2009). Provisional coding was used to begin the process of breaking down the observation data. Both descriptive and reflective notes from observations were coded as well as transcript data. These initial codes were generated from the research questions (Saldana, 2009). Codes that were provisional were: environment, rewards, discipline, and safety. Some other examples of codes that developed were relationships, clarity, recognition, and teachers. For example, one of the codes was safety. Data in each code, in this case safety, was considered and compared to the transcript data. Therefore, in my observations, locked entryways were noted along with how I gained entry. This data was then compared to what students said about safety and what made them feel safe. See Appendix M for an example of observation data, reflections, and coding.

Textual and structural descriptions. Next, textual and structural descriptions were formed. Using verbal examples from the participants' interviews and focus groups, significant statements were applied to support the themes. Textual descriptions were created after themes and delimited horizons were developed and provided the reader with the nature of the experience and supported it with actual text from participants (Moustakas, 1994). Structural descriptions require imaginative variation, reflection, and analysis (Moustakas, 1994) on the researcher's part to bring about a greater description of the experience. The researcher explains how the phenomenon was experienced. Recognizing both structural and textual factors in the study assisted in seeing the full picture of the experiences of the phenomenon. At this point, imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) was drawn upon to pull together structural descriptions. Individual site textual and structural descriptions were formed as well as composite textual and structural descriptions from all three sites (Moustakas, 1994). This means that for each site, I looked at themes within the transcripts (textual) and the why (structural).

Essence. From the individual textural-structural descriptions, a "composite description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) was formed. This incorporated the meaning and the essence of the student experience in the selected Pennsylvania middle schools that implemented SWPBS with fidelity. The essence of the PA middle school student SWPBS experience was made clear through use of the research questions as a guide.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed differences between conventional scientific inquiry and naturalistic evaluation. The paradigms of conventional and naturalistic studies differ. Naturalists look at the phenomenon holistically, how that phenomenon occurs within the context

of that particular environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), rather than separating out pieces of the whole to test. Naturalists accept multiple realities, depending on the environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Conventional study implies the ability to generalize results (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Another axiom difference is that naturalists consider research to be value-bound, compared to conventional studies promoting value-free research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Moustakas (1994) emphasized limiting the bias the researcher brings to the study through use of *Epoche*, which involves “setting aside prejudgments” (p. 180).

Creswell (2007) discussed the use of rigor in qualitative studies. Creswell indicates that a researcher “employs rigorous data collection” (p. 45). The data should be from multiple sources (triangulation), and the researcher will have spent significant time in the field collecting data (Creswell, 2007). Data should be checked for accuracy either through member checks or peer review (Creswell, 2007). Thick descriptions in the research allows for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I employed triangulation, *Epoche*, bracketing, member checks, rich and thick descriptions, and extended time in the field with the co-researchers to increase the level of trustworthiness.

Multiple sources/triangulation. Multiple sources of data were collected via interviews, focus groups, and observations. In research, multiple forms of data collection assist with the accuracy of the themes. Multiple sources also allow for the data to be cross-checked (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The focus groups, interviews, and observations occurred over a period of four to five months, adding to this study’s credibility.

Bracketing. Personal bracketing was exercised to recognize and reduce the possibility of bias. In this document, I clarified my position and my bias towards SWPBS. This transparency

is important so the reader can make his/her own interpretations from the study. Furthermore, *Epoche* involves recognizing that all researchers have potential bias that need to be owned and put aside to allow for clear judgment (Moustakas, 1994) of the co-researchers' experiences. My experiences as an educator with SWPBS have been positive. I believe that positive and proactive teaching of behavior creates a better climate for learning than a punitive, unclear environment. I have some doubt that all the interventions put in place for students are actually experienced or realized by students. I think that even in an environment that is implementing SWPBS with fidelity, students may still experience some inconsistencies in the way different teachers implement SWPBS (Solomon et al., 2012; Tillery et al., 2010). However, prior to the focus group and interview, as recommended by Moustakas (1994), I took a moment to clear my mind of those biases.

Moustakas (1994) used the word "bracketing" (p. 180) to mean clearly defining one's focus of study. This type of bracketing was used in this research. The focus was to look at the experiences and perceptions of middle school students in schools that have implemented SWPBS with fidelity. In accordance with phenomenology, I attempted to describe the common experiences of my co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994).

Member checks and peer review. Member checks and a peer review provided an accuracy check on my analysis work. Creswell (2007) recommended member checks to add to the credibility of research. Member checks were accomplished by bringing my themes back to the co-researchers, via focus group, and allowing the co-researchers to correct or add to my findings. Lincoln and Guba (1986) emphasized involving the stakeholders' groups during the content analysis process, adding to the fairness of the research. The peer review of my data

analysis was conducted by a behavioral support consultant from the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, PA.

Rich and thick descriptions. Rich and thick descriptions allowed the reader to determine if the context being described were transferable. Textual and structural descriptions were provided. Due to maintaining confidentiality, site names and student names were not used in this study. However, demographic information of the schools and how they are implementing SWPBS were described. Descriptions give the reader valuable information about the nature of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions will be used to support the themes and essences of the experience. Structural descriptions, taken from the textual, were created through intuition, judgment, thinking, and considering various possibilities (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are an essential consideration for researchers. One important issue was whether the benefits of the research for the participants outweighed the risks (Creswell, 2007). The benefits of this research to participants were that it gave co-researchers a voice to describe their SWPBS school experience. It empowered the co-researchers to be part of improving their schools and other schools. Protection of the school sites and co-researchers was of primary importance. There were no known risks of this study. The purpose of the study, along with a clear explanation of participant expectations, was given prior to data collection. Below are the ethical safeguards that were in place for this study.

Consent and Assent. Parental consent and student assent forms were used to obtain permission to participate in the study (Appendix D and Appendix E). The consent and assent forms also reiterated the purpose of research project for parents and participants. In addition,

prior to sending the forms, I called all parents to explain the research. Parents and school administrators were provided with focus group and interview questions upon request. Lastly, I explained the purpose of the research again with an opportunity to withdraw for co-researchers just prior to beginning interviewing.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. Pseudonyms were applied for the school sites and for the co-researchers. It was essential to protect the participants by not releasing their identification. Students and school administrators were informed that their identification would not be released in this study.

Data security. Much of the data was collected via computer technology. For example, focus groups and interviewing were recorded by way of a computer microphone and recording. All computer data was stored in a password-protected computer. Responses were coded with pseudonyms. Printed data and transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet. The transcripts had the pseudonyms on them, rather than the real, names for added protection.

Influence. Influence was considered, particularly at School A, my worksite. I addressed influence by asking the students to give responses that reflect their experiences, and that they should not be concerned about what they think I want to hear. I indicated that their responses would not influence any treatment of them, such as how a teacher treats them at school. However, their responses may help improve the SWPBS program. To make students more comfortable with their responses, they were assured that their names would be kept confidential.

Abandonment. Creswell (2007) discussed the importance of being sensitive to vulnerable populations. In my research, I considered that students may have developed a favorable relationship with me and enjoyed the extra attention. I considered that students may

have felt abandoned when I withdrew after the completion of the study. Therefore, a slow withdrawal was incorporated, as Creswell recommended, with early notification to participants of the need to exit. When member checks were conducted, the pizza party symbolized the conclusion of our meetings.

Compensation. Students were thanked and my appreciation was shown for their time in several ways. I provided treats for students during the focus group sessions. In addition, each interviewed student received a five-dollar Wal-Mart card after his/her individual interview. Lastly, a pizza party was given during the member checks' meeting. The building principals were given treats when I visited schools to collect data on the first occasion and were provided with the research report after completion.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study examined the perceptions of Pennsylvania middle school students in schools that have implemented the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity. The schools from which 24 co-researchers (participants) were chosen were selected using both criterion and convenience sampling. The three participating Pennsylvania schools met the criteria of being a middle school that was recognized in 2012 by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the implementation of the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity. Fidelity, meaning implementing SWPBS according to the framework, has been found to be a significant factor for improved results in schools (McIntosh et al., 2011; Rusby et al., 2011). Principals from each of these middle schools recommended students for participation. Principals were asked to use criterion and typical case sampling to select the co-researchers.

The qualitative data presented in this chapter includes a description of each school's universal SWPBS implementation gleaned from SWPBS documents, informal principal/staff discussions, observations, co-researcher focus groups, and individual co-researcher interviews. Table 4 exhibits the main SWPBS components for each school site. Presented first are the individual structural and textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) from each of the three site locations. Descriptions from each site are broken down by topics consistent with the research questions: SWPBS environment, behavioral expectations, rewards, discipline, and school safety. The individual school's results include descriptions of each sites' universal SWPBS implementation. Furthermore, student perceptions and experiences are depicted. Textual and structural descriptions were formed and supported by significant statements from co-researchers'

interviews and focus groups. Next, all site outcomes were combined to portray a composite experience to embody the essence of the SWPBS middle school student experience. Themes were extracted to both provide answers to the research questions and to evoke the essence of students' perceptions and experiences of the universal tier of SWPBS in Pennsylvania middle schools.

Table 4

Main SWPBS Components from Each School

School-wide Expectations		
<i>School A</i>	<i>School B</i>	<i>School C</i>
<u>SPARRR</u>	<u>The Four B's</u>	<u>The Four B's</u>
Safe	Be Present	Be Present
Peaceful	Be Respectful	Be Respectful
(and) Respectful	Be Responsible	Be Responsible
Responsible	Be Safe	Be Safe
Ready		
School-wide Rewards		
Dragon Stars	200 Club Ticket	200 Club Ticket
Gold Card Privilege	Cherry and White Activities	Mystery Motivator
Special Events Invitations		TGIF
Levels of Discipline		
Homework	Minor	Minor
Concern	Major	Major
Foul		
Strike		
Severe Infractions		

School A

School A was a middle school located in a rural area of central Pennsylvania with 450 students. Approximately 15% of the students were in a minority group, between 22-25% were from low socio-economic status (SES) homes, and approximately 11% of students were receiving special education services. The school was located in a college town (a selective, small liberal arts college) with many parents holding professional positions. In the actual

responses below, AFG indicates any co-researcher response from the School A focus group. AI# indicates a response from a School A co-researcher during an individual interview.

SWPBS environment. Co-researchers expressed pride and a positive view of their school environment. The first words used to describe their school in the focus group was “award winning.” In the focus group, co-researchers were asked what students and teachers were like in their school. Students were described as “good,” “friendly,” “pretty nice,” “nice to other students,” “welcoming,” and “well-mannered.” Teachers were described as “helping,” “really helping,” “instruct us well,” and “some are [more strict], but others are more lenient.” Co-researchers were asked to describe their school as if they were describing it to a student who had never been there before:

AFG: Award winning. We’ve won some awards here.

AFG: I think there [is] really good teachers that teach us, like curriculum well, I guess.

AFG: It’s like not that big, compared to other schools.

AFG: Most people are friendly.

Overall, co-researchers described an environment in which they had a clear understanding of the expected behaviors as well as the importance of having behavioral expectations. Co-researchers experienced being recognized by staff for appropriate behavior. They also noticed other students being rewarded for appropriate behavior by being given a dragon star. Co-researchers found the reward system that was in place to be motivating. Some confusion was expressed by co-researchers on the implementation of discipline, indicating they felt that discipline was not always consistent. For example, co-researchers believed some students got warnings while other students immediately received a consequence or that some

teachers gave warnings while other teachers immediately issued a consequence without first warning the student. Co-researchers felt safe in their school environment, and many attributed that feeling to, among other things, the presence of adults who were around to help protect them. Co-researchers believed there was a connection between SWPBS and students being better behaved. Co-researchers also believed that connection extended into better academic performance.

Noted during observations was that students conducted themselves according to the behavioral expectations that were both clearly stated and posted throughout the school. For example, in the cafeteria, library, entrance area, and classroom, students demonstrated a clear understanding of routines. Several positive student-teacher interactions were noted. In the classroom, a teacher often used humor with her sixth graders. In addition, many positive student-teacher interactions were observed throughout the school. Throughout the halls, students and teachers interacted with each other with greetings, small talk, and “thank you.” Clarity was also noted in the observed classrooms, with agendas and daily schedules utilized to keep students focused. Furthermore, school pride was evident in the good condition of the facility. The floors were clean, with neither graffiti nor needed repairs noted. Banners of school awards, live plants, student school work, and murals posted also contributed to a positive climate.

Behavioral expectations. School A had five behavioral expectations; the acronym SPARRR was used, which stands for “Safe, Peaceful, And, Ready, Respectful, Responsible.” The behavioral expectations were taught to all students the first week of school, and a booster session was provided in January, following winter break. A two-hour special SPARRR schedule was in place for two days to teach behavioral expectations and to model, practice, and

acknowledge appropriate behaviors. Students were taught expectations at specific locations such as the bus, playground, bus-waiting platform, cafeteria, hallways, AM homeroom, bathrooms, assemblies, and laptops.

Co-researchers in both the focus group and individual interviews expressed a clear understanding of the behavioral expectations. When asked about behavioral expectations, responses included the following:

Interviewer: Explain the school-wide behavioral expectations.

AI1: We use the SPARRR, which is, like, safe, peaceful and ready, respectful, responsible. So you have to follow those or you can get a foul or a strike. And I think, like three or four fouls is a strike, and a strike is, like, a detention.

AI3: Ah, we have something called SPARRR, which means to be safe, peaceful, ready, respectful and responsible.

AI3: Um, they basically are expectations that are different for each class or area that you're in. And for safe, it's things like, um, not running in the hallways, ways to be safe on the bus, in school, in class. And for peaceful, it's just like being quiet and, um, in all sorts of different areas.

AI3: And for ready, it's more like bringing materials to class, and each class has certain materials that you need to bring. And for responsible, a lot of it's, like, things that you are responsible for are things you need to do, bring, or say, and doing your homework. Stuff like that. And for respectful, it's about respecting your teachers; giving them the respect that they deserve by, ah, not talking when they are talking.

Interviewer: How do students learn what is expected of them? [paraphrased]

AFG: Teachers at the beginning of the year and halfway through the year either instruct us or reinstruct us...re-teach us expectations that we're supposed to learn.

Interviewer: Do all the students know what is expected of them?

AFG: Yeah.

AFG: Yeah, I think most of them.

Interviewer: Explain that.

AFG: They have, like, signs hanging up that tell you what the rules are.

AFG: They give you SPARRR sheets.

AFG: Yeah, that has all the rules on it.

AFG: Someone calls it the SPARRR matrix.

Observations at School A supported clarity of behavioral expectations that the co-researchers expressed. Behavioral expectations postings were noted in all areas that were observed: cafeteria, library, entrance, hallway, and classroom. In fact, many times SPARRR expectations with differing designs were posted several times at specific locations with differing designs.

Not only were co-researchers able to state what the behavioral expectations were, but they also articulated their understanding of the significance of having school-wide expectations. Co-researchers noted that the behavioral expectations helped motivate students and that they made it clear what was expected. Co-researchers discussed their appreciation of the clarity of expectations. On the other hand, co-researchers noted that not all students followed the expectations but that those students represented a small minority. They also noted that the reasons for student misbehavior were not due to misunderstanding the expectations. When co-

researchers were asked if there was anything in the school that deterred them from being a better behaved student or better academic student, the responses were all negative, meaning there were no deterrents.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts about the school-wide behavior expectation?

AI3: I think they're, ah, what we need to do. I think they're enforced really well.

AI2: I think it's good to have those expectations so the students stay rounded and respectful to others, listen to others, and are respectful.

AI1: I think they are good expectations to have, and I think most people follow them. Some people don't, but I'd say a majority of people do.

AI1: I think that there is a lot of people that behave well, and then there are some people who do not behave well. I think it just kind of depends on who you're with.

AI4: I think they're good expectations, and you should probably follow them.

Interviewer: And why do you think that?

AI4: Due to ... if we follow them, the school will run smoothly, and it will be a better school.

When co-researchers were asked specifically if and how SWPBS affected student behavior, co-researchers indicated it encouraged and motivated students to behave. For example, when asked if and how SWPBS affected behavior, students responded,

AI1: Yeah, I would say so because you are motivated to, like, do things good so you could get a reward and stuff.

AI3: Ah, it's just really encouraging. Letting me know the right and wrong things are, also. It's very specific about that.

AI3: Yeah, definitely because they know that they'll get rewarded if they do behave well. And if they don't, they will get reprimanded.

AI4: Yeah, like it shows you what the teachers think of you – what they expect of you and what you should try to do. And it shows that if you do what you're supposed to do you can get rewarded.

Likewise, when co-researchers were asked if and how SWPBS affected students academically, co-researchers expressed a positive connection with SWPBS and better academics. However, although positive, the comments were not as strong for the effects on academics.

AI3: Um, I think for a lot of students, it does. For me, it probably would have anyways because I have a lot of encouragement from my parents about that.

AI2: Well, I guess it could help academically 'cause it makes the person feel good. And they have more confidence in themselves.

AI1: I would say it would because if you weren't positive, I would say that that would carry on into your schoolwork and your teachers could see that. And you might not do as well in school.

AI4: I think it does because some teachers show you what you should do, how to study. They give you links on [that'll] help you on the computer.

Rewards. School A used “Dragon Stars” to reward expected behaviors. Dragon stars were printed on colored paper with a check off for the behavior expectation for which the student was recognized, the time and place of behavior, student name and teacher name. Students took the star to the office at designated times to enter their dragon star information into the computer. The computer program was set up to alert when there was an *instant winners*. Instant winners

immediately received a small prize such as a pencil or candy/gum. Again, students entered their own information into the computer. The computer entry system allowed the school to track dragon stars. After entering the information on the computer, students picked a number and entered their name on a large bingo-type board. When the board had ten names in a row, any direction, those were dragon star winners. Those student names were called on the announcements to receive a prize. In addition, a staff member's name was drawn from the submitted dragon stars for a prize. Dragon star prizes varied but have included small toys, free snack coupons, free dance pass, pizza party coupon, Valentine's breakfast with a friend, raffle tickets for bigger prizes and special parties.

Another incentive for eighth grade students was the privilege of holding a "Gold Card." The gold card was printed and laminated on gold-colored cardstock with the student's name on it. Eighth grade students who held this card had special privileges. They could attend quarterly events such as bingo, karaoke, and fun day. They also had the privilege of leaving two minutes early at the end of the day, eating free popcorn at specified lunches, and chewing gum during mid-day activity period. Eighth grade students had their gold cards taken away for the rest of that marking period if they did not follow the behavioral expectations. Every new marking period, all eighth graders received a new gold card, along with the gold card privileges.

All focus group members and co-researchers individually interviewed at School A indicated they had received a dragon star at least once. They also all witnessed other students receiving dragon stars. Co-researchers perceived that more dragon stars were given out in the beginning of the year, and they got less as the school year went on. These co-researchers also perceived that eighth graders received fewer dragon stars than any other grade and that sixth

graders received the most dragon stars. Co-researchers acknowledged the extra privileges that the gold card gave eighth graders. The eighth grader co-researchers indicated that it was difficult to find the time to turn in dragon stars.

During the school observations, the giving of a dragon star was not observed. However, the dragon star board had several boxes filled with student names. Co-researchers verbalized that they each had received at least one dragon star this year. They received stars, although not every time, when teachers noticed them doing something right. Receiving the dragon star event was something remembered by co-researchers and they knew specifically why they got their star. For example,

Interviewer: Tell me about a time that you received a reward or reinforcement for appropriate behavior this year.

AI1: Well, I was – there was a girl who was sitting at lunch by herself. And I asked her to come sit with us; one of the aides gave us all dragon stars.

AI2: Well, we were in the hallway, and somebody dropped their books and a teacher was somewhere around. I helped them pick up their books, and the teacher gave me a dragon star for helping another student.

AI3: Ummm, I mean, in DTV we got a little food and stuff and ice cream for being good with the new people.

AI4: A teacher dropped papers and I helped her pick them up, so she gave me a dragon star.

When co-researchers were asked about seeing other students getting a reward, they were able to describe the event and understood the reason the student received the reward. Co-

researchers indicated that the rewards, receiving them or seeing others receiving them, helped motivate students to behave. These experiences were

AI1: One time I saw somebody drop their books. And then someone helped pick them up, and they got a dragon star 'cause their teacher was watching.

AI2: Yeah, sometimes a teacher needs help passing out papers, or something, and usually the teacher will give a dragon star for helping out.

AI4: Earlier a teacher...some teachers give out rewards for being prepared for class so if someone comes to class ready with their pencils, binders and books.

Interviewer: Does that help other students, when other students see that, does it help them (other students) get ready or anything?

AI4: I think it helps others get ready and think about it more when they come to the next class; do the right thing.

Discipline. In addition to the reward system, School A had a tiered and defined disciplinary system when behavioral expectations were not met. The discipline system consisted of the categories: concerns, fouls, strikes, and severe infractions. All discipline was categorized into one of those classifications. Concerns were the lowest level of classification and merely meant the teacher had a “concern.” The discipline continuum followed with a foul, strike and severe infraction. A strike was an automatic detention. In addition, four fouls became a strike. Teachers were able to immediately assign a category to a student’s behavior via an intranet database. All staff personnel entered their own discipline into the database. The computer program allowed behavioral data to be manipulated to produce behavior reports in multiple formats. After three fouls, the computer program generated a letter indicating that the student

received a detention and the letter was sent to that child's parent/guardian. For any strike, a letter was also generated to be sent home and signed.

When co-researchers in School A were asked about discipline in their school, they described the foul and strike system. Even though there was a school-wide discipline system, co-researchers perceived that there were some inconsistencies in how discipline was handled. Co-researchers indicated the expectations were consistent, but that consequences for not meeting expectations varied. Co-researchers found it confusing that teachers handled discipline differently. Responses to disciplinary issues included the following:

Interviewer: Do all students have the same rules?

AFG: Some (teachers) are more forgiving, though.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

AFG: Like, maybe, if that person acts out a lot in class, you are likely to be giving...given something.

AFG: Yeah.

AFG: And, like, maybe a person who never does anything, maybe they'll get a warning.

AFG: Some of the teachers will warn them.

AFG: Some of them (teachers) will just hand out fouls right away.

AFG: Some will give you a lot of warnings, and then some will give you fouls or strikes.

AFG: It can be different throughout the class, [for] some people.

Interviewer: Do they have the same rules, though? Or is it different rules?

AFG: Pretty much the same.

AFG: They're pretty much the same.

AFG: Yeah.

AFG: Some are more [stricter] over certain rules than others.

Interviewer: Is that hard (understanding discipline), or do you get it pretty quickly?

AFG: Confusing.

AFG: Yeah, it's confusing.

AFG: Sometimes you just forget.

AFG: Sometimes you just have to ask.

AFG: Teachers will say they are going to write you up, but you don't know if it's for a foul or a strike.

In the individual interviews, only one of the co-researchers described being written up and that was for talking in class. She had received fouls but she did not receive enough to get a detention. Another co-researcher described others being disciplined for disrespect. Another co-researcher observed other students getting disciplined for "acting up or being lazy." Contrary to what was mentioned in the focus group, in the individual interviews, two of the co-researchers described that the teacher specifically told the disciplined students they would receive a foul.

School safety. Co-researchers unanimously expressed feeling safe in School A. Among other things, adult supervision was cited most as something that made the co-researchers feel safe. Adult supervision was also noted in the observations. Staff monitors were noted in all locations when observing. For example, there were at least two staff members at several locations throughout dismissal time and at least three aides during lunch time. Other items that made co-researchers feel safe were drills that were in place, knowledge of a "safe" place in

school, the location of the classrooms away from the front entrance, nice students, and the feeling that other people would be willing to help.

Interviewer: Why do you feel safe? (Also asked as “what makes you feel safe?”)

AFG: Because you have a flock of teachers watching you.

AFG: (In the beginning of the day)...you always see police officers outside.

AFG: The police station is right across the street.

AI3: Um, everybody...we all get along well, so we don't have to worry about anything like that...safety regarding each other? The teachers and staff really care about our safety so they make sure it is enforced.

AI2: I feel pretty safe in this school because nothing bad has really happened here at our school. I don't really think about it that much because nothing has happened, and there aren't that many bad students in our school that, like, would put us in danger.

AI2: I think the teachers and aides that are always around at lunch or recess if you want to go outside. And there are usually teachers in the hallways between classes.

AI1: The teachers are very nice. Everybody's looking out for everybody, and nobody seems really mean or, like, out to get you.

AI4: The teachers, and I guess, the cameras and the people at the desk (office personnel) who make sure the people coming in are who they say they are.

As noted in the observations, one must push a buzzer to enter the school. The personnel stated, “Welcome to the middle school. Please state your name and nature of your business” prior to unlocking the door. Cameras throughout the building, including at the entrance buzz-in area, were also noted as a safety measure.

School B

School B was located in an urban area of north-central Pennsylvania. This middle school had approximately 560 students. B. Pardoe (personal communication, June 12, 2012) reported that approximately 51% of the population was black or biracial, 49% were Caucasian, 68% were from low SES homes, and 28% of the students were receiving special education services. Actual responses from School B are labeled BFG indicating any co-researcher response from the School B focus group. BI# indicates a response from a School B co-researcher during an individual interview.

SWPBS environment. Co-researchers were asked to describe their “school as if you were describing it to a student who has never been here before.” Co-researchers expressed a positive perception towards the teachers and students in their environment. Mentioned several times were the helpfulness and kindness of the staff. Co-researchers described the students at their school as helpful and accepting of others. They acknowledged that “some students can be bad, some can be good.” Some of the ways co-researchers described their school are as follows

BFG: Um, it is a good school to come to and the staff will help [everything] when you first get here, so you won’t get lost before classes, and the students will help you, like, get into your lockers.

BFG: It is good because, like, the students get along with people very well, and the teachers will take their time out of their day to help you, and they care.

BFG: Some teachers are very strict, but everyone’s, like, they are strict in a good way. They are very helpful, and they will help you a lot. The students are very kind, and the staff is really cool.

BFG: I'd say that our school is actually pretty good because when you talk to the teachers, you can tell that they care about your grades and how they want you to grow up and go to college; so I think that they teach us and motivate us.

Co-researchers also brought forward the diversity of their school and how they mixed together. One co-researcher mentioned that they did not have "social cliques." Another stated, "there are those who are Asian or Black or White, and we don't really make fun of them because of what their background is. We're just kind of mix[ed] together."

School B's co-researchers had a clear understanding and appreciation for the behavioral expectations. The co-researchers perceived that learning and following behavioral expectations would have a positive influence on their futures. All student co-researchers had the positive experience of being recognized for their appropriate behavior. On the other hand, their recognition of other students being rewarded was not as clear. Co-researchers agreed that the SWPBS environment was motivating and helped with students' behaviors and academics. The most mentioned disciplinary issue was fighting (verbal or physical). Noteworthy was that even with fights mentioned, co-researchers indicated they felt safe. Adults, like the principals and teachers in School B, seemed to play a major role in co-researchers feeling safe; co-researchers sensed that an adult would protect them.

Clarity of behavioral expectations was supported in the observations. Students were orderly in the hallway, and orderly procedures were in place in the cafeteria. There was a safety issue of two girls fighting in the cafeteria which occurred during the first observation. Just as the co-researchers had mentioned in the individual interviews, the incident was taken care of very quickly by a male staff monitor. Later, the principal and assistant principal were on the scene.

This incident only lasted a few seconds and things were back to order, and students were dismissed at the normal time.

A sense of pride was also noted in observations. There were awards hung in the entry way to the school as well as red and white (school colors) displays. On the first observation visit, staff personnel were wearing school colors with the school's logo. School B was an older building, but the facility was well kept, hallways clean, carpet in good shape, and walls looked newly painted. In addition, student work was displayed throughout the building, also adding to the sense of pride as well as student recognition.

Behavioral expectations. School B had four behavioral expectations, titled, the "Four B's." The Four B's were Be Present, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe. These behavioral expectations were consistent throughout the entire district. Students had a half-day the first day of school, and this time was utilized to teach behavioral expectations. School B taught behavioral expectations in the following settings: classroom, hallway, cafeteria, bathroom, and bus/field trip/dismissal. Staff taught students the behavioral expectations by use of a slide show that gave a general overview and then by going to each setting, where students were asked to demonstrate the appropriate behavior in that setting. For example, to be safe in the hallway students need to walk, stay to the right, and keep their hands and feet to themselves. During school observations, the Four B's were posted throughout the building: in the halls, entrance area, classrooms, and cafeteria. Also noteworthy was that before school started, School B communicated to parents the "School-wide Positive Behavior Plan" by sending home a clear and simple pamphlet with the Four B's.

During the individual interviews, co-researchers expressed both a clear understanding and endorsement of the Four B's. In fact, some of the co-researchers commented that following the behavioral expectations could influence students' futures in a positive way. When discussing the behavioral expectations, a focus group participant said, "All students know it but some students don't mind it," meaning not all students follow the expectations. When co-researchers were asked to clarify the number of students, they indicated that it was only "some" students who had repeated discipline issues. Co-researchers explained they knew this because the principal went over the data with the students. Below are significant statements from co-researchers on the behavioral expectations.

Interviewer: Explain what the school-wide behavioral expectations are.

BI2: It's to be present, respectful, responsible, and safe, which means getting to class on time, respecting the teachers, and making good decisions.

BI1: They have, like, simple expectations that are, like, be present, be safe, be respectful, and be responsible. We have to follow them every day or else we'll, like, get in trouble.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts about the school-wide behavioral expectations?

BI2: I think they're good because they help kids stay on task and, you know, to focus on school more because there's a lot of kids that don't do, you know, that stuff and they learn to, after a while, because, like, if you don't have a pencil or something, you can't do work. So, sometimes the teacher will give you one, but you have to learn to be responsible, [so].

BI3: They are great. They keep people from getting into a lot of trouble.

BI1: I think it's pretty good because it shows kids what they need to do to be educated and to be able to go through school without any problems.

When co-researchers were asked if SWPBS helped motivate them to behave appropriately, they responded,

BI1: The school-wide behavior teaches kids that they need to be the person they want to grow up to be like, you know? And so, it helps them, I guess.

BI1: And so, when kids learn that, they are more focused on school and more focused on what they need to do to reach their goals.

BI2: (Yes)...They teach you to do those things and if you do, you get rewarded. Like some days you get a ticket for just being good in class, like if they have extras. You do better in school when you follow them.

BI2: Mmhmm (yes). They have to be responsible and not do dumb things.

BI3: Because, being present, even if you are a little bit sick, they always want you in school. They don't want you missing any days.

Furthermore, co-researchers expressed an indirect relationship between SWPBS and better academics. Some sample comments were

Interviewer: Does SWPBS help you be a better academic student?

BI1: I think it teaches kids that if they respect the rules and do them, they're gonna go farther in life than kids that aren't, you know? I think if a kid's like smart, but doesn't respect anything, then he's not going to go as far as anybody else.

BI2: Mmhmm (yes). I think it does because when you don't have to worry about finding a pencil or your binder, it helps you stay focused in class and stuff.

BI4: Well, just being present.

BI4: Yeah, since you got to be to class on time.

Co-researchers expressed if and how SWPBS can affect their future:

BI3: (yes) 'Cause then you get used to, like, when you have to be in school every day and then you get used to having to do something every day.

BI3: So then when you get older, you can get a job.

Rewards. Moreover, School B recognized appropriate behavior with 200 Club tickets.

Students who received a 200 Club ticket went to the office to sign the signature book and indicated in the book why they received a ticket. The school sent postcards home to the students' parents/guardians informing them that their child received a 200 Club ticket and the reason their child received it. Students at School B entered their name on a grid to be eligible for the prize. When there were ten names in a row, those ten students won. The students who won were announced on the afternoon announcements and got their picture taken. Prizes included taking students out for lunch, bowling, going to Hooplas (a game center), having ice cream parties, and going out to breakfast. In addition to the 200 Club tickets, students had end-of-the-month incentives such as volleyball or basketball assemblies where students and teachers played together. Teachers nominated students for these cherry and white activities (named after the school colors). These activities were planned at the end of the month, and students who behaved appropriately were able to participate in the activity. Students' names were announced and a group picture was taken at this activity, as well.

Individual interviews revealed that all the co-researchers had received some type of reward for behavior. Most had also known of other students who had also received a reward, but

co-researchers were not as specific when discussing other students. One co-researcher commented that the tickets were given privately to students. Co-researchers were able to articulate why they received a reward, suggesting that they saw a connection between their appropriate behaviors and receiving a reward. Co-researchers also verbalized that the rewards were motivating.

Interviewer: What have you received those (200 Club Tickets) for?

BI4: For...I got one for helping a student out and the rest of them for just being good and ready.

BI2: I, um, it was the first day of school, and they were in piles (of paper) that were like in a mess and I stacked them up, and a teacher gave me one. And I just got another the other day for stapling a bunch of papers.

BI3: Usually, it's like, in math. Because sometimes when we [got to go] to computer lab, we have to go to Study Island (a computer program to prepare for the PSSA's); I get like five a day for doing that. Or sometimes it's for helping students.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about another student receiving a reward?

BI2: Um, there's a lot of kids who try to help the teacher. They, like, run errands for them around the school. And a lot of time, they get tickets for that.

BI1: I've actually had a couple of my friends that have gotten their names on the 200 Club Ticket Charts and gone to Hooplas or went down and had ice cream, or had lunch with Mr. (assistant principal name) and Mr. (principal name). And they actually enjoyed it because number one, it got them out of class; and number two, it was fun just because they knew they did something good.

BI4: Ah, reading when you're supposed to (without being reminded). Like when you're done and she doesn't tell you to do anything, you're supposed to read and she'll fill the ticket out and give it to you.

BI3: Ah, I haven't seen anyone else (get ticket) – I don't think this year I've seen anyone getting it.

BI3: No, 'cause usually teachers pull kids aside so other students don't get jealous and stuff.

Discipline. School B divided problem behavior into two categories, minor problem behaviors and major problem behaviors. Examples of minor problem behaviors are disruption, tardiness, and property misuse, while examples of major problem behaviors are arson, bullying, and fighting/physical aggression. Discipline Referral Forms were filled out by the staff member reporting the behavior. Staff members were also required to call the parent/guardian to discuss the incident. Following the referral and parental contact, an administrative decision was made regarding student consequences.

None of the co-researchers who were individually interviewed had received any negative disciplinary action this year. When the focus group discussed discipline, co-researchers said that “the teacher will give you a warning” and then if the student continues, the student will receive a yellow Discipline Referral Sheet. Co-researchers felt that everyone had the same behavioral expectations but not abiding by the expectations was handled differently among teachers. Co-researchers did witness other students receiving disciplinary action. Fights were mentioned a few times as the reason for the students being disciplined. Co-researchers were asked why others

were disciplined. They stated the reasons and added their understanding of the consequences for the behaviors:

Interviewer: Can you tell me about another student being disciplined? (paraphrased)

BI2: There's a lot of, well, I know that there was a fight, but like, a verbal fight that turned into, like, cyber-bullying, it [kinda] needed to be stopped, and it did, it stopped.

Interviewer: How was it stopped?

BI2: Well, um, well people went to the counselor and told them about it, like it was stupid, too, and just drama.

BI4: Well, they just talked back to teachers. Ah, don't listen and they get sent to time out or ISS.

BI1: Sometimes we have school fights where people are just, like, getting on each other's nerves and just start hurting each other for no apparent reason.

BI1: Usually the teachers come and pull them apart. And they get detention or whatever.

BI3: Well, one of them was a kid named -----.

BI3: He was talking back to a teacher.

Interviewer: And so what happened to him?

BI3: He got sent to a time out and the next day he got sent to detention.

In addition, School B had regular school-wide assemblies with all students. In these principal-directed assemblies, students were reminded of the behavioral expectations. Discipline data was also shared with students so students were aware of areas where behavior had improved and areas in need of more improvement. The principal talked with students about a goal to reduce negative behavior. Another SWPBS approach for School B was that of specifying

supervision of the halls. Teachers were expected to be watching the halls from their doorway at the change of classes while non-teaching staff were assigned particular areas of the school to monitor at the start of school and dismissal.

School safety. Co-researchers at School B said they felt safe in their school. Effective at making students feel safe were safety drills, locked doors, visitors having to go through the office, only one entrance area after the students come inside, rules being enforced “like not having weapons,” and “there are teachers out patrolling.” Repeatedly, co-researchers mentioned the principal(s) and teachers as the reason they felt safe. There was a feeling that the co-researchers felt protected by the principal(s) and the teachers:

BI3: It’s really good because the principal enforces all these safety rules and procedures.

BI1: I think the safety is pretty good because we have a lot of teachers around that are always keep watch for us, making sure that no harm will come to us.

BI2: Um, I feel safe. The classroom and the teachers are prepared for something, but there’s nobody who would, like, bring a gun or weapon or anything to school. [And, yeah].

Interviewer: What makes you feel safe in this school?

BI1: I feel safe because – like I said before – the teachers are always watching, and they have, like, locked doors. And the only main door...the only door that we have is near the office, and you have to go through the office.

BI2: The environment, I guess. The principals are good. I’ve had Mr. (assistant principal) since elementary school. I’ve only not had him for, like, two years.

BI2: Yeah. He's good, and Mr. (assistant principal)'s nice, too. Like the teachers, they're pretty cool and nice, also. They're like, I don't know, they're kind of like your parents. You learn that you need to trust and respect them.

BI4: I would say the people in the building because we got Mr. (principal) in the school and we got all the other teachers.

Interviewer: What about Mr. (principal) and the other teachers?

BI4: They're there. I don't think they would let anything bad happen to anybody in the school.

Co-researchers mentioned improvements that would help make the school safer:

BI1: Overall, I think it's okay right now. There are some improvements...maybe metal detectors, just to make sure you don't bring in anything you're not supposed to, but mostly everything's okay.

BI3: Maybe if they had, ah, like, someone who patrols the halls.

BFG: Maybe like metal detectors.

BFG: Yeah, in case somebody wants to smuggle something in.

BFG: And security.

BFG: Different doors, like, not glass doors.

BFG: The side doors could just be broken easily.

In addition, co-researchers indicated that a trash door was open in the morning, and it was unlocked. Sometimes people were watching that area, but the co-researchers felt perhaps someone could gain entry that way.

School C

School C was located outside of the city limits of a central Pennsylvania city. All students required transportation to school due to the school being outside of the district's boundary. There were approximately 615 middle school students (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012), 82% Caucasian and 18% minority (Education.com, 2011.). The principal reported that approximately 50% of the students were from a rural setting while the other 50% were from an urban setting, 36-37% students were from low SES homes, and approximately 10% of students were receiving special education services (J. Dougherty, personal communication, June 20, 2012). In the actual responses below, CFG indicates any co-researcher response from the School C focus group. CI# indicates a response from a School C co-researcher during an individual interview.

SWPBS environment. Co-researchers expressed a positive view of the school, particularly of the staff and other students. They pointed out that not all the students complied with the rules, but in general, the students were "nice." Co-researchers felt their school was welcoming to others. A theme of the importance of academics came through via the focus groups and interviews. Co-researchers mentioned several times the importance of academics and how the teachers would help students improve academically. The co-researchers emphasized in both the focus groups and individual interviews how teachers really supported students to improve academically. Regarding academics, students commented,

CI4: Um, well, our environment is very good because all of our teachers are willing to help anybody who is struggling in their classes to help them get back on track. And we have after-school programs that are like a tutoring program for children who need help.

CFG: Um, the teachers are always, like, trying to raise your grade and get you to the next level, like if you're at a "C" they'll try to get you at a "B", if you are at a "B", they will try to get you at an "A". And they do a really good job at preparing us for the PSSAs (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment).

CFG: Like what (co-researcher name) said, they really just want what's best for you. If you're struggling with something that the class is fine with, they'll take you out and help, just work with you and improve, pretty much.

CFG: Um, they're (teachers) ongoing, if you have an assignment due, they'll help you, um, they want you to over-achieve and not be basic.

CFG: They (teachers) push you to try harder if you're not doing so well and they're nice, most of them don't yell at you or scream at you when you do something wrong. That's about it.

CII: ...The teachers are usually pretty good....They always want to help you, and they do a good job at the PSSAs and helping you prepare...

In observations of two different classrooms, the teachers were positive when interacting with students. In both classrooms, teachers were providing activities to prepare students for the upcoming PSSA assessment.

Like School A and School B, co-researchers in School C believed that SWPBS helped students behaviorally. Co-researchers found the rewards and the discipline to be motivation to behave. Also mentioned was that just the idea of knowing the expectations and "knowing policies" helped students to be aware of their responsibilities and to be "respectful to everyone."

When asked if SWPBS helped them academically, co-researchers connected that SWPBS helped students behave appropriately, thereby improving academic achievement.

Behavioral expectations. School C and School B are in the same district and shared the same behavioral expectation, the Four B's: Be Present, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe. Students were taught this behavior in the beginning of the year. Similar to the other two middle schools in this study, School C staff took the students to the targeted locations when teaching the behavior for that location. Locations on the behavior matrix included classroom, hallway, cafeteria, bathroom, bus, assemblies/auditorium, school-related activities, and library/labs. In addition, School C used videos to teach the behavior. The videos were "school-made" and showed the teachers, as actors, not meeting behavioral expectations first and then demonstrated the students, also actors, meeting behavioral expectations. The co-researchers found the behavioral expectations video humorous.

All co-researchers interviewed were able to recite the school's behavioral expectations, the Four B's. Co-researchers indicated that all students knew the expectations due to the displaying of posters everywhere, the principal reciting them daily on the school announcements, teachers wearing t-shirts with the Four B's on the back, and being taught the expectations directly. Three out of the four individually interviewed co-researchers expressed endorsement of the behavioral expectations because it helped students to behave and decreased problem behavior.

CI2: I like it (the Four B's) because most kids listen to it and follow it because you'll get rewards if you're safe or any of them. Most kids kind of like doing the Four B's, like, walking around the lockers and up in the cafeteria. Um, that's about it.

CI3: I think they're good. I think it helps students stay respectful, safe, responsible and present.

CI4: My thoughts about them are very good. I think it's a very great program that they have about the Four B's and, um, good behavior.

When the CI4 co-researcher was asked why,

CI4: Because, um, before we had them, there were commotions but now they are in place and rules are enforced. I noticed that a lot of fights have been stopped and a lot of people have started listening more, and I think they're really helpful.

Co-researchers comments were supported by the observations at School C. For example, behavior expectation posters were noted throughout the school: in the classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria. In addition, students moved about the building in an orderly fashion, demonstrating being respectful, safe, and responsible.

Rewards. Similar to School B, School C used the 200 Club to promote and increase positive behavior. Each day, ten faculty/staff received a 200 Club ticket and they needed to give it to a deserving student that day. Students brought the ticket to the library during homeroom or lunch time. Students turned in their ticket by lunch the next day. When a ticket was turned in, the student wrote in the 200 Club book: his/her name, address, reason for earning the ticket, and the teacher's name who gave him/her the ticket. The librarian called the student's parents that day and a postcard was sent home to the student's parent. In addition, the student received a certificate to take home. The student's name was written on the 200 Club grid in the location of the drawn number. The names of the students who turned in a 200 Club ticket that day were announced on the afternoon announcements. Lastly, there was a *mystery motivator* when the

board reached ten in a row. The mystery motivator was a special privilege to go on a trip. Teachers were encouraged to give out tickets to students. The tickets that were turned in by students with the teachers' name were entered into the teacher prize drawing.

All the participating co-researchers indicated that they had received at least one reward during the present school year. According to the co-researchers, 200 Club tickets are given out sparingly with most interviewed co-researchers only receiving one or two this year. In contrast to School A, co-researchers believed that the tickets were given out consistently throughout the school year, meaning just as many were given out in the beginning of the year as the end of the year. However, co-researchers indicated that not all teachers used the 200 Club tickets. School C co-researchers found the rewards motivating for student in all the grades, six through eight. Co-researchers pointed out that "privileges" were motivating. Other co-researchers indicted that another effective reward would be "getting something small" when they turned in a 200 Club ticket. The reason they gave for "getting something small" was that a student could receive five tickets, hence, have his or her name on the board five times; yet if he/she were not in the line of 10, he/she would not get to go on the trip. Co-researchers also discussed another incentive at the end of the month called "TGIF." Students who have their work done and did not receive any disciplinary consequences that month can participate in the activities of TGIF. These activities are games students can play together on the last Friday afternoon of the month.

Co-researchers recalled receiving rewards for a variety of reasons that included helping out others (respectful) and being responsible:

Interviewer: Tell me about a time that you received a reward or reinforcement for appropriate behavior this year.

CI1: A kid emptied the hole-puncher and he dropped the hole-puncher, all the little pieces came out of it, the little, like, pieces of paper, the circles fell all over the ground. The kid just left and I picked them up and got a 200 Club ticket for that.

CI2: Um, it was early in the year, during class one time, I wasn't talking and I turned in my work on time, and a teacher gave me a 200 Club ticket for that.

CI3: I got mine for helping other students pick up their books and helping the teacher out.

CI4: Um, somebody dropped their books down the stairs, so I offered to help pick up their books.

In the focus group, again co-researchers indicated getting rewards for helping out others:

CFG: They (teachers) recognize you helping someone or like being peaceful in the halls

...

CFG: If someone book checked another kid and you helped them and the teachers saw you helping that person with his books and stuff, the teacher would probably give you one.

During the school observations, I did not see any students receiving a 200 Club ticket; however, there were 43 names posted on the 200 Club board at the time of my observation. On another observation day, winning students were having lunch at the mall.

Discipline. School C utilized the same discipline system as School B. Problem behavior was defined as either minor or major. Teachers filled out the Discipline Referral Forms when an incident occurred. Teachers were required to call the parent of the child who was written up to inform the parent of what had occurred. The written discipline plan listed problem

behavior as well as the consequences of detention, in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), Saturday school, and referral to youth commission. Consequences were outlined for many behaviors such as gum chewing - one detention, disrespect of teachers or staff - one to five detentions, fighting - one to three days ISS, insubordination - one to three days ISS, possession of a weapon - one to ten days of OSS and police intervention and possible expulsion, disorderly conduct - one to ten days OSS and possible police intervention, and excessive truancy or tardiness - Saturday school and/or referral to youth commission.

None of the individually interviewed co-researchers said they had been disciplined this year. All were able to discuss another student being disciplined for inappropriate behavior. In addition, the co-researchers were able to talk about that student's consequences. Even though they all knew of someone receiving discipline, co-researchers perceived that most students were well behaved and that only a few got into trouble. Co-researchers felt that discipline was taken care of appropriately by teachers and principals by having consequences. Regarding another student's inappropriate behavior, the following insights were shared,

Interviewer: ...tell me if you know of anyone else getting in trouble this year.

CI4: I've seen some people getting into trouble, but they're for like minor stuff, like, maybe not turning in a homework assignment. Or some of the major discipline stuff I've seen is like breaking up a fight. Besides that, that's basically it.

Interviewer: So what happens when someone gets into a fight in your school?

CI4: Um, the fight usually doesn't last that long, like they don't last for more than a minute before a teacher comes out and stops it and takes both of the students to the office.

CI4: ...there are consequences, we have ISS, which is *in school suspension*, and they stay in for at least three days, and at least get detention. And if the fighting continues, then it's out-of-school suspension.

Interviewer: Tell me about student behavior, in general.

CI1: Um, it's usually pretty good. Once in a while there's some fights, but the principals do a really good job – so do the teachers – at, like, stopping it right away. And they don't just put the kid in ISS, they'll give him OSS for a couple of days. And they actually sit down with them and figure out what was the problem between them.

CI2: Um, for the most part, kids are good. There's only a handful that are bad and get in trouble often. But for the most part, our kids are respectful and listen.

CI3: In general, I think it's pretty good. We haven't had anything bad happen in the past month. So...

CI4: Student behavior is very good; there are rarely fights, which I think is really good. Also mentioned about discipline in the focus group,

CFG: Um, there's a few fights but, ah, every once in a while kids get out of hand, but the teachers and the principals do a good job of taking care, um, and like, giving them the right punishment. If someone's been in the incident before they will give a deeper punishment, and they'll be lighter on people that haven't been in it before.

School safety. Once again, participating co-researchers unanimously agreed that they felt safe in their school. Facility safety features (locked doors, cameras, location), safety procedures (running drills), and adult monitoring were all mentioned by co-researchers as things that made them feel safe in school. The doors being locked was mentioned several times from

co-researchers as a feature that made them feel safe. In the focus group, co-researchers mentioned having an adult that they could go to with a problem made them feel safe. When asked about what could be done to make students feel safer, one co-researcher mentioned scanning student backpacks, like at the airport. Another co-researcher mentioned having more adults monitoring the halls during class time. Again, co-researchers felt safe in their environment, even those who came up with additional safety suggestions. See co-researchers comments below on school safety.

Interviewer: Can you describe your feelings about safety in your school?

CI4: Our school is very safe. We have a lot of school safety issues put out in place.

CI4: We have, um, we have a lot of good teachers who know how to handle a situation. And we have a lot of, um, every time a student enters the building – or a parent or like a guest – they have to, um, scan to get in because all the doors are locked. They have to wait for a secretary to open it, and yeah, our school's very safe.

CI2: It's very safe. It's not the city, so there's not a lot of people around. The doors are locked so no one can get in if you go out. Um, the teachers protect us well and it's a nice environment.

CI1: I feel pretty safe because all the doors are locked so no one can get in; you can only get out. There's a lot of cameras too so if anything would...were to happen, we could find out what happened. There's an officer ... the man... and he'll come in and out, just to check on things.

CI3: I feel safe all the time, but I think everyone else does, too.

CFG: Yeah, I feel very safe because I know some of the officers like Officer B-----, um, he's usually in and out throughout school, and he does a good job at the school and he's always around. And um, the doors are always locked, so once you go out, you can't get back in, the secretary has to let you in.

During my five observation and interview visits to School C, the doors to the building were locked, yet I was buzzed into the building without identifying myself. I was asked to sign in and wear a visitor name badge on some of the visits. Both the principal and assistant principal were observed in the halls monitoring and interacting with students during change of classes. In addition, during the lunch observation, there were several adults monitoring students in the cafeteria. During the free time (outdoor recess) observations, at least two staff members were outside at two distinct locations.

Summary of Results

What meaning do middle school students ascribe to the SWPBS environment?

Positive climate. Overall, co-researchers expressed school pride in individual and focus group interviews. Co-researchers had positive remarks about their environment, mentioning good teachers and staff as well as friendly students. School staff and students were observed interacting in a friendly, positive manner.

SWPBS helps behavior. Co-researchers indicated that SWPBS helped students behave. Co-researchers explained that SWPBS helped students behave because students were aware of what was expected of them. In addition, the rewards were motivating for students to behave appropriately. Learning appropriate behavior was thought of as a positive influence on their future by the co-researchers.

SWPBS helps academics. Co-researchers pointed out that there was a connection between knowing how to behave in school and better academics. Co-researchers perceived improved academics achievement as an indirect outcome of SWPBS implementation. Lastly, co-researchers implied that their teachers also gave strong academic support and encouragement.

What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding teaching of school-wide behavioral expectations?

Clarity of expectations. At all three sites, co-researchers experienced being taught four to five brief behavioral expectations and used both visual and verbal reminders of expectations via posters and staff reminders. All co-researchers were able to recite the behavioral expectations and explain what the expectations meant. Co-researchers perceived that all students in the school were aware of the behavioral expectations. Co-researchers perceived that students who did not comply with expectations did, in fact, have knowledge of expectations but did not follow the expectations. Co-researchers at all three sites felt that it was only a small number of students who did not follow behavioral expectations.

Co-researchers endorsed expectations. Co-researchers perceived the expectations to be helpful. Co-researchers found that having a clear understanding of the expectations helped improve behavior. Co-researchers remarked that learning the expectations would help them not only be a better student but also a better person. Co-researchers also indicated that the behavioral expectations were motivating and decreased problem behavior.

What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding the schools' reward system?

Students recognized. All co-researchers experienced being recognized by a staff member for appropriate behavior and had received at least one tangible reward (such as a ticket or piece of paper) as recognition. Co-researchers also noticed at least one other student in their school receiving a reward. All three schools utilized a bingo-type game for students to write their name on with the goal of getting ten names in a row. Students were given additional recognition when their names were posted in a prominent place. Finally, students gained prizes or privileges when they won. Some of the schools sent postcards home to parents that indicated their child was rewarded that day. Some co-researchers reported a diminishment of rewards given as students went to higher grades and also as the year progressed in all grades. Also, some co-researchers believed that some teachers did not use the reward system at all.

Rewards motivating. Co-researchers found that being rewarded and recognized was motivating. For some, simply the act of a teacher pointing out their behavior and giving a positive comment made them proud. Others commented on the excitement of hoping their name would be one of the ten in a row. Co-researchers indicated that rewards were valuable to them, particularly special privileges.

Rewards connected to behavior. Co-researchers were able to indicate why they received a reward by recounting their particular experience for which they received it. Most co-researchers were also able to connect another student's behavior to the reason why that student received a reward. Therefore, rewards had meaning because rewards were not random but reflected appropriate behavior.

What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school discipline?

Most students were well behaved. Co-researchers perceived that the students in their schools were well behaved. Co-researchers pointed out that there were a small number of students who did not always follow the behavioral expectations. Co-researchers believed that those students who misbehaved knew and understood the school's behavioral expectations.

Consequences for inappropriate behavior. The co-researchers did not have any major disciplinary infractions. The co-researchers observed other students getting disciplinary consequences. Co-researchers expressed that students exhibiting inappropriate behavior suffered consequences for their behavior. Co-researchers connected disciplinary consequences to the inappropriate behavior just as they connected good behavior with rewards. Co-researchers did express that there were some inconsistencies in how inappropriate behavior was handled.

What are the middle school students' perceptions and experiences regarding school safety?

Feeling of being safe. Clearly, co-researchers felt that their school was safe and that they were safe. Some of the reasons that co-researchers felt safe were adults monitoring the halls, locked doors, emergency drills, cameras, location of their school, location of their classroom (away from entrance), and having nice students and teachers at their school.

Staff contributes highly to students' feeling of safety. Mentioned repeatedly by co-researchers was that the teachers and administrators monitoring the halls made them feel safe. Co-researchers sensed that teachers "are always watching." Co-researchers also perceived that the teachers and administrators cared about them and would not let anything happen to them. Co-researchers felt that people would be willing to help if something happened to them. In addition, co-researchers felt they had someone they could trust, such as a counselor, teacher, or principal if they needed to talk.

The results above give a clear awareness of the meaning that students ascribed to the SWPBS environment in Pennsylvania middle schools. A more detailed discussion of the research summary will be presented in Chapter 5. In addition, implications and future research are considered.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study provided insight of students' perceptions of the SWPBS environment in Pennsylvania middle schools which could serve as valuable information for school personnel planning, modifying, and evaluating their school's SWPBS implementation. This chapter includes the following: (a) summary of the findings, (b) implications, (c) limitations and recommendations for future research, and (d) conclusion of the research on the perceptions of middle school students in schools that have implemented School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) at the universal tier with fidelity. The term *fidelity* means implementing SWPBS according to the suggested Office of Special Education Blueprint (2010). Fidelity has been found to be a significant factor for improved results in schools (McIntosh et al., 2011; Rusby et al., 2011). More in-depth information on SWPBS fidelity is available in Chapter One. This study only investigated students' perceptions at middle schools that have been recognized by PAPBS of the PA Department of Education for reaching fidelity in 2012, the year prior to study. One further note, according to the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, all three participating schools were also recognized in May 2013 (L. Brunschlyer, personal communication, June 21, 2013), the year of this study, as implementing the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity.

Summary of Findings

The middle school co-researchers from the three SWPBS schools described a positive school environment that included good teachers and staff and friendly students. Students believed that the SWPBS environment helped students to behave appropriately due to having expectations clearly taught and by being rewarded when meeting those expectations. Following

the behavioral expectations was considered by students to have a positive influence on academics and also on their future. The co-researchers had a clear understanding and appreciation of their schools' behavioral expectations. Furthermore, the co-researchers believed that all students had a clear understanding of what was expected of them.

All co-researchers experienced being recognized for appropriate behavior with a tangible reward, such as a 200 club ticket or dragon star. The co-researchers also noted other students being rewarded. Rewards were considered motivating to students. Privileges, such as being involved in planned school activities or being dismissed two minutes early, were considered particularly valuable to students. Co-researchers indicated that there were some inconsistencies in teachers giving rewards. At one site, co-researchers indicated that eighth grade students received fewer rewards and recognitions for appropriate behavior than sixth graders. At another site, co-researchers believed that some teachers did not use the reward system at all. None of the co-researchers in this study experienced any major disciplinary consequences. Co-researchers implied that most students followed the behavioral expectations but a small number of students did not. Similar to rewards, students expressed some inconsistency in how discipline was applied.

Overwhelmingly, co-researchers in the SWPBS environment felt safe. Adults monitoring the hallways were mentioned repeatedly as something that made them feel safe. Co-researchers perceived that teachers and administrators cared about them and they would not allow anything happen to the students. Other reasons co-researchers felt safe were locked doors, emergency drills, cameras, location of their school (in a safe area), location of their classroom (away from the entrance) and having nice students and teachers in their school. In addition, co-researchers

felt there was a trustworthy individual they could go to, such as a counselor, teacher, or principal, if they needed to talk.

Implications

This research has illuminated variables within students' perceptions and experiences that are common among PA middle schools implementing the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity. This information can provide constructive information to SWPBS implementers. Next, the implications of the research are discussed as well as how these findings relate to other recent studies. To begin, the theoretical framework of this study was revisited in light of the findings. The framework of this research was based on operant behavior, applied behavior analysis (ABA), and social cognitive theory.

Theoretical framework. The theoretical framework for this research was based in behaviorism (Skinner, 1974), applied behavior analysis (ABA) (Cooper et al., 2007), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 2000, 2001). This research found these three theories incorporated into the SWPBS interventions at the participating schools. Again, operant behavior (Behaviorism) “is any behavior whose future frequency is determined primarily by its history of consequences” (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 31). Both rewards and disciplinary consequences were in place in the three SWPBS environments. Co-researchers expressed that the rewards and disciplinary consequences motivated students to behave according to the stated expectations. This coincides with what Skinner (1974) stated that reinforcements increased the likelihood of that behavior occurring again.

ABA is also concerned with “replicable improvements in behavior” (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 49); therefore, measurements of behavior are taken, implementations are put into place, and

differences are measured. ABA is applied in the environment in which the behavior is wanted, rather than in a lab or outside setting. Co-researchers in one school expressed that disciplinary behavior was tracked (measured) and that the principal showed students their progress. Lastly, reinforcement was practiced at all three sites via tangible rewards and privileges.

Bandura's social cognitive theory states that moral judgments are influenced by modeling and by observing others. Co-researchers were questioned on whether they observed any other students receiving rewards and discipline. Students had observed both the positive and negative consequences of other students' behaviors. Co-researchers indicated that when they saw others receiving rewards, it motivated them to do the same behavior that was rewarded. Students also noted that they were aware of enforcement of consequences for inappropriate behavior from observing other students receive consequences. For example, some students did not get a specific privilege due to inappropriate behavior. Co-researchers indicated that some students strived to behave appropriately so as not to receive the consequence of losing a privilege. Moreover, co-researchers stated that they learned behavior by the teachers teaching and modeling that behavior in the specific locations throughout the school. This research on students' perceptions and experiences in the SWPBS environment supports social cognitive theory that moral judgments can be learned by modeling and observing others' consequences of behavior.

Behavioral expectations. Findings from this research supported the study by Lynass et al. (2011) which found that behavioral expectations were fairly consistent in SWPBS schools across the nation. In that study, the most common behavioral expectations were respect, responsibility, safety, and readiness to learn. In this current study, two of the schools used The

Four B's: Be Present, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe while the other school used SPARRR: Safe, Peaceful, And, Ready, Responsible, Respectful. This was noteworthy since school personnel created their own behavioral expectations, and it was recommended that only three to five be selected. Therefore, this suggests that universally, the behavioral expectations of respect, responsible, safety and readiness are deemed to be fundamental by school personnel when teaching students appropriate school behavior. School personnel in the initial stages of SWPBS implementation may want to consider using similar behavioral expectations.

On a further note, co-researchers in this study expressed that behavioral expectations assisted with students behaving appropriately. This was consistent with Brigg's (2012) previous case study in which students indicated the school-wide behavioral expectations helped students behave better. However, co-researchers in this study, at all three sites, pointed out that not all students followed the behavioral expectations. Even though co-researchers did not indicate why other students did not follow the behavioral expectations, co-researchers felt confident that it was not due to not knowing the behavioral expectations since the expectations were reiterated often in school. It is worth reminding the reader that SWPBS is a three-tiered approach and this study only explores the first tier, the universal tier. The universal tier is expected to be effective for 80% of students (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2010). Co-researchers' descriptions of a small group of students who do not follow the behavioral expectations are consistent with the tenets of the universal tier being effective for 80% of students.

Safety. On December 14, 2012, 20 students and six adults were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut (Candiotta, Botelho, & Watkins, 2010, March 28).

Data collection on this research began just three months following this highly publicized and mourned event. Students' perspectives on safety are particularly informative given the timeliness of this research. Students at all three sites felt safe in their school environment. Another recent study (Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1996) on students' perceptions of school safety indicated that schools implementing SWPBS with higher fidelity had higher scores (than low fidelity schools) on feeling safe, knowing school expectations, and being bullied. Again, all three sites in this current study were high fidelity schools.

What was it that made all the co-researchers feel safe? An enlightening theme was that the presence of adults such as teachers, aides, principals, and police made students feel safe and protected. Staff monitoring is something that could be increased in schools with little to no cost. Monitoring halls, cafeteria, free time, dismissal, and arrivals are typically done by already employed personnel. It is typically a matter of purposeful scheduling of staff and assigning them locations to monitor. In the case of police presence in the school, an agreement of police informal visits could be formed between district and the local authorities. Providing students with an environment that they perceive as safe and secure is important since that environment is more conducive to learning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Lezotte, 1997; Marzano, 2003). Payne (2005) indicated that when students felt safe, they were more likely to take academic risks, question, and explore. Schools in the early implementation of SWPBS as well as schools already involved in SWPBS should consider the strong impact that adult monitoring had on the students' perceptions of safety.

Consequences. Co-researchers believed that SWPBS improved student behavior. This finding supports previous studies that also found SWPBS to improve behavior (Curtis et al.,

2010; McCurdy et al., 2003; McIntosh et al., 2011; Muscott et al., 2008). All schools used a continuum of consequences, as Lewis and Sugai (1999) recommended, discouraging inappropriate behavior. Co-researchers noted that there were consequences for inappropriate behavior. Co-researchers did indicate that there was some inconsistency in how inappropriate behavior was disciplined. Previous SWPBS studies found that even when teachers were trained in PBIS, the teachers viewed behavior on an individual basis, rather than group behavior strategies (Tillery et al., 2010). Co-researchers in this study felt that consequences depended on the teacher and sometimes the student. Some teachers were considered more lenient than others. This is congruent with Landers' (2006) results that teachers from SWPBS environments believed that within their own classrooms, they had discretion over the rules. As stated previously, co-researchers felt, at times, the consequences depended upon the student, such as whether that student had previous infractions. Landers' found that teachers also perceived an inconsistency in enforcing behavioral expectations. It is worth mentioning that even with the discussion of inconsistency, at no time did co-researchers mention that discipline was "unfair." Traditional disciplinary practices often have inconsistent consequences, as well (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Goodman (2007) found that the traditional, negative disciplinary environment could actually increase inappropriate behavior due to student apathy and/or rebellion. There was sparse indication of apathy or rebellion of students by the co-researchers. However, knowing that students' perceptions were that of inconsistency of consequences for both appropriate (disseminating rewards) and inappropriate behavior (disciplinary issues), a recommendation to SWPBS implementation personnel is to provide additional staff training on the consistency of consequences and group behavior strategies. Furthermore, schools implementing SWPBS

should consider carefully the appropriateness of teachers having full discretion of student behavioral expectations within their classroom. Schools should consider a requirement of a more consistent approach of classroom expectations matching school-wide expectations. Perhaps, administrators have been leery to impede on teachers' freedom to run their own classroom by requiring classroom expectations to complement or match school-wide expectations. However, the research indicates that a perception of inconsistency lingers in the SWPBS environment from both students and teachers.

School environment and academics. Previous studies on the effect of SWPBS on academics have been conflicting. Some have noted improved academic progress following SWPBS application (Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2011; Muscott, 2008; Simonsen et al., 2012), while other studies have indicated no significant difference (Cooper, 2011; Horner et al., 2012). Cooper's (2010) dissertation research on student participation in the implementation of SWPBS in Maryland schools found that even though teachers believed there was a connection between PBS (SWPBS) and increased achievement, the students did not see the connection. In this current study, co-researchers expressed that they believed there was a connection among SWPBS and higher academic achievement. The co-researchers' statements linked SWPBS to better behavior and better behavior to improved academics. Co-researchers believed that well-behaved students provided an enhanced school environment for learning since improved behavior eliminated many barriers to learning. For example, being "present" or "ready" (behaviors) helped students academically (since they were in class or had what they needed to learn).

Rewards. As already noted, the students found rewards motivating. When students were asked what were the most effective rewards, students often mentioned privileges such as attending an event. Also significant is that students mentioned that simply receiving recognition from a teacher by way of a Dragon Star or a 200 Club ticket gave them a satisfied feeling. Given this information on rewards, schools may want to consider incorporating more privileges and more recognition into their reward system. Lastly, co-researchers mentioned rewards diminishing throughout each school year and as students moved to higher grade levels. Co-researchers views on inconsistency of rewards should be considered cautiously. Rewards often decrease after behaviors are learned.

Limitations and Recommendations

As with all studies, there were limitations to this study on middle school students' perceptions of SWPBS. The first was that the co-researchers were only from Pennsylvania middle schools, making it unsuitable to generalize the results to students in other states and at other levels. Although a limitation, the selection of only Pennsylvania middle school participants was purposeful due to the newness of SWPBS in PA and due to the unique characteristics of middle school students (Eichhorn, 1966) and the increased disciplinary issues that arise in middle school (Nolle et al., 2007). The literature review indicated that the research on SWPBS at the secondary level was sparse therefore to add to the SWPBS body of knowledge, middle schools were selected. This study could be duplicated with high school students in Pennsylvania to appreciate and learn high school students' perspectives, or it could be duplicated in middle schools in other states, particularly states in the early phases of implementation, to gain a greater understanding of students' perceptions and experiences in the SWPBS environment.

Another limitation was that co-researchers were all selected by their principals, rather than a random-type selection. Principals were asked to select “typical” students. Random selection is not necessary in qualitative studies, but it is noted as a limitation due to none of the co-researchers having any major disciplinary infractions. Therefore, all co-researchers in this study would be considered “responsive” to SWPBS universal supports. It is expected that at least 80% of students will be responsive to the SWPBS universal tier (Education Law Center of Pennsylvania & Disability Rights Network of PA, 2010; Sugai, 2010). For this research, the purpose was to gain the experiences and perceptions from the typical student. Now that the responsive population has been explored, a recommendation for future study would be to gather students’ perceptions and experiences from students who are “non-responsive” to SWPBS universal supports. This means selecting students who have had a few major infractions within one year. Learning the perspectives and experiences of students who are unresponsive to the universal tier may provide insight as to why these students are “non-responsive” and if they experience the SWPBS environment differently than students who are responsive to the universal tier.

Another limitation was the timeframe of this study. This study occurred during the second semester of the 2012-2013 school year for a period of four months, March through June. In one way, the observations and student behaviors could be considered more “authentic” at this time of the year since it is the end of the school year. However, teaching of behavior was not observed nor was the receiving of rewards by students, which may occur more often at the beginning of the year. Co-researchers described their experiences of learning behavioral expectations and receiving rewards, but I did not directly observe them. It was not possible to

extend the study into the fall of the next school year since two of the research sites are restructuring their schools, and the current schools will be closing. One could not assume fidelity at the newly, reorganized schools. Teaching of behavior and receiving rewards by students was observed at School A, but it was not observed during designated observation sessions; rather, both had been observed at School A at other times due to being employed by that school.

A noteworthy procedural limitation is that Epoche should have been made more deliberate at the time of interviews and focus groups. My bias was written out in this document, mediated upon and cast away mentally prior to interviews and focus groups. However, I should have written my bias down prior to interviews and focus groups to both mentally and physical cast away bias by putting away my writings.

Lastly, another recommended study would be to investigate the consistency among staff with regards to consequences. Co-researchers indicated inconsistency among staff in SWPBS implementation with both discipline and rewards. Hence, research comparing consistency of discipline and rewards in schools implementing SWPBS with fidelity to schools without SWPBS would shed light on whether SWPBS makes a significant difference on consistency of consequences. It would seem logical that SWPBS schools would be more consistent than non-SWPBS schools, but it should be investigated to see if greater consistency actually is a result of SWPBS implementation. Moreover, research on how consistency vs. inconsistency of consequences effects students' perceptions of fairness ought to be explored.

Conclusion

This study has investigated students in three Pennsylvania middle schools that have been recognized as implementing the universal tier of SWPBS with fidelity. It has illuminated the phenomenon of students' experiences in the SWPBS middle school environment and the meaning students give to their SWPBS experience. Co-researchers conveyed that their school environments were positive and believed that SWPBS aided students both behaviorally and academically. Co-researchers experienced clarity of expectations and verbalized an endorsement of having behavioral expectations. Co-researchers believed that most students in the school complied with the behavioral expectations. Rewards and recognitions were experienced by all co-researchers and were linked to appropriate behavior while disciplinary consequences were linked to inappropriate behavior. Co-researchers perceived that rewards and recognition were motivating for students. In the SWPBS environments, co-researchers felt safe. Contributing factors of feeling safe were adults monitoring the halls, locked doors, emergency drills, cameras, location of the schools, location of the classroom (away from entrance), and having nice students and teachers. Staff visibility in the halls contributed greatly to co-researchers feeling safe.

This study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the SWPBS environment. This qualitative study of students revealed what meaning PA middle school students gave to the SWPBS environment. The significance of this research is that it adds to the body of knowledge on SWPBS, particularly the student experience. This research can assist in improving the effectiveness of SWPBS due to it highlighting interventions that were particularly meaningful to students such as staff monitoring, rewards, and clarity of expectations. Equally, this study uncovered some conditions that could be improved such as the consistency of both rewards and

disciplinary consequences. Perhaps most importantly, the positive findings of this research could be utilized by school personnel considering implementation of the SWPBS framework to assist with an essential factor of implementation which is to “garner and maintain support (of SWPBS) of at least 80% of staff” (PAPBS, n.d., “Commitment to Fidelity,” sect.2), which is also considered a challenge to implementation (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009).

The meaning students ascribe to the SWPBS environment was that of a positive school where students clearly understood and appreciated behavioral expectations. It was also an environment that recognized students for appropriate behavior and implemented consequences for inappropriate behavior. Lastly, it was an environment where most students behaved and got along with each other and had a staff that was friendly, trustworthy, and supportive to students.

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APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT CONSENT FORM

February 11, 2013

Dear _____ :

Congratulations to you and your district for being one of the few Pennsylvania Middle Schools to be recognized as implementing School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBS) with fidelity.

Please consider having your school participate in a study about student experiences in a Pennsylvania middle school that has implemented SWPBS with fidelity. The following information is provided to you to help with your decision. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. I am a school counselor at a Pennsylvania middle school and am conducting this study through Liberty University as part of my doctoral degree. Your participation would mean that I could observe in your school and interview approximately eight of your students, for which I will obtain parental consent and student assent. I will conduct a focus group at your school with six of the students and interview four students individually. At the end of the study, I will meet with all students, to check my data. At the initial focus group and end of study group session, I will provide food for the students. Also, individually interviewed students will receive a \$5 Wal-Mart gift card.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of students in a Pennsylvania middle school that have implemented SWPBS with fidelity. Student participants will be interviewed in a small group and individually. Also, I will conduct two observations in the school. Your school's name and students' names will be kept confidential in the study results.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits are that your students will have an opportunity to express their experiences and be part of the growing research on SWPBS to improve schools. In addition, I will share my results with your school. In addition, your school's information will assist other schools in implementing SWPBS. This study will be reviewed and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any data collection.

Feel free to contact me at the numbers below regarding the study. I would be happy to discuss this study with you and provide the research protocols. Please sign your consent to participate and allow me to work with eight of your students (with parent consent). This indicates you have full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Brenda A. C. Zack, M.A.
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
(removed phone contact)

Consent Signature

Title

Date

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

February 11, 2013

Dear _____ :

I congratulate you and your school on being one of the few Pennsylvania Middle Schools to be recognized as implementing School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBS) with fidelity.

Please consider having your school participate in a study about student experiences in a Pennsylvania middle school that has implemented SWPBS with fidelity. The following information is provided to you to help with your decision. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. I am a school counselor at a Pennsylvania middle school and am conducting this study through Liberty University as part of my doctoral degree.

Your participation would mean that I could observe in your school and interview approximately eight of your students, for which I have parental consent and student assent. I will conduct a focus group at your school with six of the students and interview four students individually. At the end of the study, I will meet with all students, to check my data. At the initial focus group and end of study group session, I will provide food for the students. Also, individually interviewed students will receive a \$5 Wal-Mart gift card. I will be asking you to recommend eight appropriate participants for this study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of students in a Pennsylvania middle school that has implemented SWPBS with fidelity. Student participants will be interviewed in a small group and individually. Also, students will be observed in the school setting. Your school's name and students' names will be kept confidential in the study results.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. I will work with you or your designee to secure an appropriate time and school location to meet with participants. The expected benefits are that your students will have an opportunity to express their experiences and be part of the growing research on SWPBS to improve schools. In addition, I will share my results with your school. Your school's information will assist other schools in implementing SWPBS. . This study will be reviewed and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any data collection.

Feel free to contact me at the numbers below regarding the study. I would be happy to discuss this study with you and provide the research protocols. Please sign your consent to participate to allow me to work with eight of your students (with parent consent). This indicates you have full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Brenda A. C. Zack, M.A.
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
(removed) Work
(removed) Home

Principal Consent

Date

APPENDIX C: PARENTAL CONTACT
Script for Phone Call to Parent

Hello, my name is Brenda Zack and I am calling because your child was recommended to me by the _____ school principal. I would like you to consider having your child participate in a study on middle school students in schools with School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBS).

Your child's middle school was recognized by the state as one of the few that has implemented SWPBS with fidelity. I am a school counselor at a Pennsylvania middle school and am conducting this study through Liberty University as part of my doctoral degree. I would like to document the experience of students in this type of environment.

It is not a big time commitment. Some participants will be interviewed with other students (two times) in a focus group at the school. Others will be interviewed individually at school or via Skype or another distance method. Some students will be asked to be in both the focus group and individual interview. Discussion topics will be about their experiences at school related to SWPBS. Your child's name will be kept confidential in the study results.

If you decide to have your child participate, he or she may withdraw at any time. Your child's participation has no bearing on his/her relationship with the school district or teachers. Can you think of any reason why your child would not be able to complete participation in this study, such as travel plans or illness?

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits are that students will have an opportunity to express their experiences and be part of improving their own and other schools. Students will also be provided treats at the group interviews and pizza party at the conclusion of the study. Students who are interviewed individually will also receive a \$5 Wal-Mart gift card. This study has already been reviewed and approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

You may contact me at any time regarding the study at the number listed below. I would be happy to discuss this study with you and send you the questions that will be asked. Do you have any concerns or questions? Would you be willing to allow your child to be a part of a focus group and/or interview about their school's SWPBS?

I will mail or email you a copy of the permission form, titled Parental Consent Form/Student Assent Form, for you and your child to sign. Please go over this letter with your child and have him/her sign if he/she is willing to participate. I will also explain it to him/her prior to the focus group discussion. Please return the form to your child's middle school.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D: PARENTAL CONSENT

Parental Consent Form

A Phenomenological Study: Students' Perceptions of School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in Pennsylvania Middle Schools

Brenda A. C. Zack

Liberty University, Education Department

Your child is invited to be in a research study about middle school students' perceptions of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS). Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she has been in the SWPBS environment at school for at least a year. In addition, your child was recommended by the school principal. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Brenda A. C. Zack, doctorate student at Liberty University Education Department.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perceptions of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) in Pennsylvania Middle Schools.

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him/her to do the following things:

Participate in one focus group – This will be audio recorded.

Focus group date: **March 27**. This is during parent-teacher conferences. Participants will need a ride to and from school.

Or

Participate in one individual interview – This will be audio recorded (date to be arranged with you). The interview will take 25 minutes.

Or

Participate in both a focus group and an interview – Both will be audio recorded. See times listed above.

And

All participants:

Participate in a group discussion on the study's results.

Date: Date to be arranged (1 hour) @ school.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risk is no greater than every day activities. This study is focused on experiences in the school, however, if I become privy to information that triggers the mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse or intent to harm self or others. I will

need to report that to a school official. The study will be terminated if any students are at risk or if the school withdraws from the study.

The benefits to participation are...

Focus group participants will receive snacks at the initial focus group such as Dunkin Donuts. Participants who are interviewed will receive a five-dollar Wal-Mart gift card as appreciation for their participation. The last meeting, group discussion with all participants, there will be a participant pizza party.

Another benefit is that students will have an opportunity to improve their school's SWPBS implementation as well as other schools' SWPBS implementation. Students will be considered co-researchers in this study.

The other benefits are socializing time with their peers, the enjoyment of treats at the group sessions, and the Wal-Mart gift card. The participating schools will benefit from the study by receiving the results from this study.

Compensation:

Focus group participants will receive snacks at the initial focus group such as Dunkin Donuts. Participants who are interviewed will also receive a five-dollar Wal-Mart gift card as appreciation for their participation. The last meeting, group discussion with all participants, all participants will be provided with a pizza party. .

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, the report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

All participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Students will be given a card with their pseudonym on it and asked to place that card in front of them for all to see. Students will be asked to protect confidentiality of others by referring to each other by their pseudonym and to refrain from naming their school. Mrs. Zack cannot assure privacy and confidentiality because the participants will be in focus groups together. In the focus group script, Mrs. Zack will request that students do not mention names or discuss the information that others are talking about outside of the focus group.

Only pseudonyms will be used in the written transcripts. Electronic data (such as audio recordings and written transcripts) will be stored in a password-protected computer. All hard copies of data collection will be stored in locked file cabinets in Mrs. Zack's office. The document linking names to pseudonyms will be stored in a separate locked file cabinet from the other data. Only Mrs. Zack will have access to the locked file cabinets. As required, data will be

stored in locked file cabinets for three years. After the three-year time period, written work will be shredded. Computer data will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not your child participates will not affect your or your child's current or future relations with Liberty University, (district information removed). If your child decides to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Brenda A. C. Zack. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (removed) or by cell at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or her advisor, Dr. Veronica Sims, (removed).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to having my child participate in the study.

Please check this box to indicate your approval for your child to be audio recorded during the focus group and individual interview.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____
(The child will be asked to sign an additional assent form at the focus group.)

Signature of parent/guardian: _____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: 3/6/2013

Please return this signed consent form to me by **March 18th** at (removed) or at (removed). Thank you.

I-RB Code Numbers: 1549.030413
IRB Expiration Date: 3/4/2014

APPENDIX E: CHILD ASSENT

Assent of Child to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

The name of the study is School-wide Positive Behavior Supports in Pennsylvania Middle Schools. Mrs. Zack is doing the study.

Why am I doing this study?

Your middle school was recognized by the state for their quality implementation of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports called SWPBS. Mrs. Zack is interested in studying your experience in your middle school. She is school counselor at a Pennsylvania middle school and is conducting this study through Liberty University as part of her doctoral degree. She would like to document the experience of students in SWPBS schools.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you have been in this school for at least a year. Your principal indicated you would be a good student to talk to about your experience.

If you agree, what will happen?

If you are in this study, it is not a big time commitment. Some participants will be interviewed with other students in a focus group at the school. Others will be interviewed individually at school or via Skype or another distance method. Some students will be asked to be in both the focus group and an individual interview. Discussion topics will be about your experiences at school related to SWPBS. Your name will be kept confidential in the study results.

The date of the focus group will be ().

Do you have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child

Date

Brenda A. C. Zack
(removed) email
(removed) Home Phone
Dr. Veronica Sims (faculty advisor)
(removed)
(removed) Work Phone
Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502
or email at irb@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS

School A	Grade	Race
female	7	multi
female	7	white
female	8	white
female	8	white
female	8	white
male	7	white
male	7	white
male	7	white
male	7	white
School B		
	Grade	Race
female	7	white
female	7	multi
female	8	black
female	8	white
male	7	black
male	7	multi
male	7	Hispanic
male	8	black
School C		
	Grade	Race
female	8	white
male	7	white
male	7	black
male	7	white
male	7	white
male	7	white
male	7	white

APPENDIX G: DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

End of February

Obtained IRB Approval

Parent Phone calls

Consent Forms sent and received

March

Consent Forms sent and received

12th School A focus group

15th Observations School A, A #1 interview

18th A#3 interview, A#2 interview

22 A #4 interview

27th School C focus group

28th School B focus group 4:50 PM

28th B# 1 interview, B#2 interview, C #3 interview

30th C#2 interview, C#1 interview

April

1st B #3 interviews (phone), B#4 interview (phone)

4th C#4 interview (phone)

5th Observations School B and C

22nd Observations School A

May

6th Observations School A

2nd Observations School B and C

20th Member Check School A

June

Data Analysis

3rd L Member Check School C

4th C Member Check School B

July - August

Peer Review – Behavioral Support Consultant

Manuscript Reviews by Committee and Research Consultant

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS

Focus Group Protocol: Student Experience in a PA Middle School SWPBS Environment

Time of Focus Group:

Date:

Place:

Participants:

Facilitator:

Position of participants:

Script:

“Thank you so much for meeting with me today and helping me conduct this research. I consider all of you co-researchers in this study. I am Mrs. Zack, and I am a school counselor at another middle school. I have three sons about your ages. They are 15, 13, and 10. I am also a student at Liberty University working on a doctorate degree. I am conducting research on what it is like to be a middle school student in a school that uses School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, called SWPBS. SWPBS is the way that your school teaches you the school rules and reinforces and enforces those rules. I will be asking you some questions. Please be honest about your answers. Try to really think about your experience and do not worry about what I might want to hear or that you have a different opinion than someone else. It needs to be what you think.”

“I know that all of you have signed the assent forms, but I wanted to give you the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. Also, I wanted to make sure you that you are still willing to be a part of this study. So first, do you have any questions about the study? (Answer any questions.) Is everyone still interested in being a part of this study? As it says on the assent form, if at any time you no longer wish to be a part of this study, you can let me know or ask you parents to let me know. OK, let’s get started.”

“There are no “wrong” answers. I am recording this so I can listen to it later.”
(Demonstrate how microphone and recording works. Allow students to hear their voices “If you don’t want to answer a question, you can say ‘pass.’ Also, I ask that you think about the questions a few moments before responding. If it sounds like I misunderstood what you were trying to say, please correct me. I will be trying to clarify your statements along the way (member checking). You may use any words to express yourself, but I do ask that it is a serious

response. Remember, your answers are confidential. Answers will not have your name attached to them. (Give students a card with their pseudonym on it and ask them to place it in front of them.) Please protect confidentiality of others by referring to each other by their pseudonym on the cards in front of each student and reframe from naming your school. Before I start asking questions, again do you have any questions for me?"

"Now, I'd like you to just take a moment to think about your school experience. You can close your eyes if you want to and think about how you learn the behaviors expected in the school and how the school reinforces or enforces appropriate school behavior." (Allow a few minutes of reflection as recommended by Moustakas, 1994.)

General School Experiences

1. Describe your school as if describing it to a student who has never been here.
2. What are the students like in your school?
3. What are the teachers like in your school?

Teaching of Behavior

4. Describe how you learn what is expected of you in this school.
5. Do all the students know what the teachers expect of them? Explain.

Rewards

6. Explain the procedure if you are doing the right thing (following the rules).
7. What do you think are effective rewards for appropriate behavior?

Discipline

8. Describe what happens if you do not do what is expected. Explain.
9. Do all students have the same rules? Explain.

Safety

10. Do you feel safe in the school?
 11. What would you suggest to make the school safer?
-

End of focus group script:

"That's all the questions I have for you now. Thank you again for helping me. I look forward to meeting with all of you individually to ask you some other questions about your school."

APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIBER AGREEMENT

I understand that I am transcribing for a study on students' experiences in a school-wide positive behavior and interventions and support school environment. All participant information regarding this study must be keep confidential. All documents and data are to be kept in a password-protected computer and/or in locked file cabinets. I may not release any of the participants' names or school names. The signature below means that I agree to comply with confidentiality of this research and security of the data.

Print Name

Transcriber Signature

Date

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Interview: Student Experience in a PA Middle School SWPBS Environment

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description: This interview is being used to provide data for the study students in a PA middle school SWPBS environment.

Script: “Thanks again for meeting with me. I have some more questions for the research I am doing, please answer honestly. None of your answers will affect anything at school. Once again, I am recording this so I can listen to it later. Do you have any questions before I start?”

Interview Questions

Questions

Demographics

1. What is your gender and race?
2. What grade are you in?
3. How long have you gone to this school?

Behavioral Expectations

4. Explain the school-wide behavioral expectations. If needed, prompt what they are.
5. What are your thoughts about the school-wide behavioral expectations?

Discipline

6. Have you received any discipline this year? Describe that experience.
7. Tell me about student behavior in this school.

Safety

8. Describe your feelings of safety in this school.

9. What makes you feel safe in this school?
10. Are there things that could be done to make you (or students) feel safer?

Rewards

11. Explain what happens when a teacher sees you doing something right.
12. Tell me about a time that you received any rewards/reinforcement for your appropriate behavior this year. (I will use the term the school uses.)
13. Can you tell me about another student receiving rewards for behavior? (Bandura, 2001, 1969)

Environment

14. Describe if SWPBS in this school helps you be a better student (behaviorally or academically). How?
15. Describe if there is something in this school that deters you from being a better student (behaviorally or academically).

“Thank

you for participating in this interview. Your name will be kept confidential.”

Format adapted from Creswell (2007, p. 136).

APPENDIX K: OBSERVATION FORM

Location:

Length of Activity:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Time :	
Time:	
Time:	
Time:	
Time:	

Adapted from Creswell (2007, p. 137).

Data will be collected using the observation tool above and observation protocol. Each location within the school will have a separate observation sheet. Documentation will occur at five-minute increments, notes will be taken on what is being observed

APPENDIX L: EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS PROCESS FROM SIGNIFICANT
STATEMENTS TO MEANING UNITS TO THEMES

Significant Statements	Meaning Units	Themes
<p>School A</p> <p>Interviewer: This is about the general environment at your school. Describe if school-wide positive behavior helps you be a better students – behaviorally or academically. (Addressing Environment)</p> <p>I would say it would because if you weren't positive, I would say that that would carry into your school work and your teachers could see that. And you might not do as well in school.</p> <p>Yeah, I would say so because you're more motivated to, like, do things good so you could get a reward and stuff.</p> <p>Yeah. Well, I guess it could help academically 'cause it makes the person feel good. And they have more confidence in themselves.</p> <p>They have something to work for.</p> <p>Yeah, like it shows what the teachers think</p>	<p>Not a direct relationship with academics but SWPBS helps academically via student behavior.</p> <p>Clarity of expectations, again, rewards act as a motivator.</p> <p>Following the expectations helps students "feel good"</p> <p>SWPBS acts as a motivator</p> <p>SWPBS allows a reward</p>	<p>Clarity of Expectations</p> <p>Rewards are motivating</p> <p>SWPBS helps students behave</p> <p>Helps with students confidence</p> <p>Helps with academics through behavior</p>

<p>of you- what they expect of you and what you should try to do. And it shows that if you do what you're supposed to do you can get rewarded.</p> <p>Yeah, definitely because they know that they'll get rewarded if they do behave well. And if they don't they'll get reprimanded.</p> <p>Um, I think for a lot of students, it does [help]. For me, it probably would have anyways because I have a lot of encouragement from my parents about that.</p> <p>Ah, it's just really encouraging. Letting me know what the right and wrong things are, also. It's very specific about that.</p> <p>School B</p> <p>Interviewer: This is about the general environment at your school. Describe if school-wide positive behavior helps you be a better students – behaviorally or academically. (Addressing Environment)</p> <p>Yes, because it teaches me, like, a lot of the stuff that I'll need to know when I go to the high school, so I won't be some mean person going there with a bad attention. Like, um, knowing policies and good effort is really good.</p>	<p>system which helps students' behaviors.</p> <p>Rewards are motivating to behave, reprimands are deterrents</p> <p>Could help academically – not as strong of a statement for academics</p> <p>Clarify (specific) Seems like she likes to clearly know what the right and wrong behaviors are</p> <p>Teaches this student what to do and the student perceives that that can help this student in the future</p>	<p>Learning appropriate behavior can help student in the future</p> <p>clarity</p>
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<p>Um, well our environment is very good because all of our teachers are willing to help anybody who is struggling in their classes to help them get back on track. And we have after school programs that are like a tutoring program for children who need help.</p>	<p>Student perceives a supportive academic environment</p>	<p>Rewards are motivating (act as an incentive)</p>
<p>Um, I think it does because to the 200 Club part and the discipline.</p>	<p>The 200 Club is an incentive for students to follow the behavior expectations – it is valuable to them.</p>	<p>Academic connection not as strong as behavior connection</p>
<p>[Help academically] Um, I don't know if it would, but I guess it helps you be present in the classroom and get your work done</p>	<p>Again, the academic connection is there but not as strongly stated as the behavior connection.</p>	<p>Student connect appropriate behavior to assisting with academics</p>
<p>It helps me be a better student because it makes me know my responsibilities and be respectful to everyone.</p>	<p>Student makes the connection between behavior and academics.</p>	<p></p>
<p>Yes, because you want to act to get rewards. So if you follow the four simple rules, you get rewards. And it could be like half a day off of school, open gym, or play on your iPod, on your computer.</p>	<p>I like how this student said four “simple rules” – he finds the rewards motivating. clarity</p>	<p></p>
<p>[Academically] Not really, but it kind of does. Because if you don't follow, you will sit in a class room and not go to the dances and stuff.</p>	<p>Very specific about the types of rewards</p>	<p></p>
<p>Ah, yes, because you want to get a ticket so you can go on a trip so you want to be nice to everyone so you have to be good in</p>	<p>Academics is “kind of” effected, only from staying in class and getting your work done instead of the activities</p>	<p></p>

<p>class.</p> <p>It does because if you want to be good, you'll get your work in. And you're grades will come up if you weren't doing well.</p> <p>School C</p> <p>Interviewer: This is about the general environment at your school. Describe if school-wide positive behavior helps you be a better students – behaviorally or academically. (Addressing Environment)</p> <p>Yeah, since you got to be in class on time.</p> <p>They teach you to do those things and if you do, you get rewarded. Like some days you get a ticket for just being good in class, like, if they have extras. You do better in school when you follow them</p> <p>Mmhmm. I think it does because when you don't have to worry about finding a pencil or your binder, it helps you stay focused in class and stuff.</p> <p>The school-wide behavior teaches kids that they need to be the person they want to grow up to be like, you know? So it helps them, I guess. And so when the kids learn that, they are more focused on school and more focused on what they need to do to</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Expectations help academically</p> <p>Being on time (in class) helps academically</p> <p>“Do better” due to SWPBS – following expectations helps academics</p> <p>Being prepared helps student academically – with focus</p> <p>Helps – students need to think about what they want to be like in the future, reaching goals</p>	<p>Students perceive that SWPBS helps behaviorally and academically</p> <p>SWPBS expectations will help students in the future</p> <p>Just knowing the expectations, helps motivate students to behave appropriately</p>
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<p>reach their goals.</p> <p>I think it teaches kids that if they respect the rules and do [them], they'll [gonna] go farther in life than kids that aren't, you know? I think if a kids, like, smart, but [doesn't] respect anything, then he's not going to go as far as anybody else.</p> <p>Because, being present, even if you are a little sick, they always want you in school. They don't want you missing days.</p> <p>'Cause then you get used to, like, when you have to be in school every day and then you get used to having to do something every day. So then when you get older, you can get a job.</p>	<p>Following the expectations will help students in the future. If you don't follow the expectations you will not go as far, even if you are smart.</p> <p>The expectation of "present" helps motivate students to be in school.</p> <p>Following SWPBS expectations helps prepare you for a better future</p>	
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APPENDIX M: EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION DATA, REFLECTION, AND CODING

Coding is written in all capital letters in the reflective notes column.

Location: Cafeteria		Length of Activity: 30 minutes	
Descriptive Notes		Reflective Notes	
<p>Time :11:30</p> <p>Student came is and sat down at tables, aid waved arm to signal the next group to get in line for lunch, other students that packed got a tray and sat at tables throughout the cafeteria. This entrance activity continued for several minutes.</p>		<p>Systems in place for entering the cafeteria in an orderly fashion</p> <p>ORDER</p> <p>CLARITY</p> <p>No racing for lunch line – students know the procedures</p>	
<p>Time: 11:35</p> <p>Students waiting in line, chatting with other students</p> <p>Three aids – on in the front and two standing together in the back</p> <p>SPARRR expectations were posted in the front of the cafeteria by lunch line and in the back</p> <p>Wooden passes were available for students to go to other locations such as office, bathroom, library...</p>		<p>Supervision</p> <p>Clear expectations – notices everywhere – the SPARRR expectations</p> <p>CLARITY</p> <p>Systems in place</p> <p>SAFETY</p>	
<p>Time: 11:40</p> <p>Another aid (fourth aid) came into join the other 2 aids in the back – making 3 aids on the back and 1 in the front</p> <p>Another SPARRR expectation poster is notices shaped like a dragon in the back of the cafeteria</p> <p>Students move to lunch line in an</p>		<p>Sufficient supervision, adults</p> <p>SAFETY</p> <p>CLARITY</p> <p>Adult and students relationships seem to be courteous</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	

<p>orderly fashion</p> <p>Time: 11:44</p> <p>Inside, in the food distribution area students move through in an orderly fashion using “inside voices”</p> <p>Not any discussion or verbal interaction with cafeteria workers, cafeteria workers are busy distributing food</p> <p>Aid – smiling and interacting with students – standing just before food distribution area.</p>	<p>ENVIRONMENT, RELATIONSHIPS</p>
<p>Time: 11:49</p> <p>Two student morals are displayed in the cafeteria,</p> <p>Students primarily staying in seats and eating lunch, using appropriate voice tone</p> <p>No students observed sitting alone,</p> <p>Now 4 aids in the back</p> <p>1 aid now moving about making small talk with students</p> <p>Small group of students started to sing “Happy Birthday” but stopped quickly.</p>	<p>Safety – students staying in seats</p> <p>RECOGNITION - ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>Student recognition in place with student morals</p> <p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT</p>
<p>Time: 11:54</p> <p>Students moving towards cafeteria exit and walk through hall to go outside</p> <p>Students in line to put trays away,</p> <p>Two aids interacting with students</p> <p>Only two aids left in the cafeteria –</p>	<p>One unsafe situation observed – trying to trip</p> <p>SAFETY</p> <p>Activity increases as students finish eating.</p> <p>Aids clump together but interactions that did occur seemed to be</p>

<p>assuming the others took the other students outside for recess</p> <p>Time:</p> <p>Students up and down from seats more</p> <p>Applause breaks out from about 10 students with one female student taking a bow</p> <p>Line up of about 20 students with trays</p> <p>A few students using a voice that is too loud for indoors</p> <p>Almost all students left, about 2/3, have finished lunch and have already put their trays away. They are sitting and talking.</p> <p>Bell rings and students exit the cafeteria within seconds except for the few left in the line with their trays. One student observed trying to trip another, both students laugh.</p> <p>Dismissal: 11:57</p>	<p>positive.</p> <p>Plenty of supervision –SAFETY</p> <p>Appears to be a positive climate with students enjoying themselves.- CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>Students have options of what to do after finishing lunch such as going outside</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>SAFETY</p>
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Adapted from Creswell (2007, p. 137).