

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL
CLIMATE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR
INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT

by

Tory De Shannon Lawrence

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is a school-wide initiative implemented in many schools across the United States as an approach for addressing discipline concerns and promoting a positive school climate. This study used a phenomenological design to examine the school climate perceptions of 13 staff member from three secondary schools from two school districts in the southeastern region of North Carolina that were implementing PBIS with fidelity. The transformative learning theory, which explains how knowledge may be obtained from lived experiences of individuals, guided the research study in examining three research questions: (a) How do select secondary school staff members describe the influence on school climate of implementing PBIS with fidelity? (b) What benefits, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity? (c) What barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity? Data was collected from individual open-ended interviews, a focus group, and writing prompt responses. Data analysis revealed that all participant used positive terms to describe their school's climate. Participants also experienced shared benefits and barriers to the implementation of PBIS in their school settings. The results of this study support the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools and addressed implementation barriers. The results could be used to guide the decision-making process of those responsible for the implementation of PBIS at the local school district level as well as at the individual school and classroom level.

Keywords: discipline, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), school climate, phenomenology

Dedication

To my father who gave me drive and determination and to my mother who gave me the ability to dream big. Thank you for making me who I am.

To my husband, Jason. Thank you for being by my side and supporting me every step of this journey.

Acknowledgments

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me”

- Philippians 4:13 (King James Version)

This would not have been possible without the expertise and leadership of my committee. Dr. Holubz, thank you for holding me to high expectations and pushing me to produce my best. You have taught me invaluable lessons over the course of this endeavor. I could not have made this journey without your support and guidance. Dr. Paynter and Dr. Hixon, thank you for all of your suggestions and valuable feedback. Your input not only made this dissertation possible but will have an everlasting impact on my writing.

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List of Abbreviations

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

School Evaluation Tool (SET)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Maintaining a positive school climate and effectively addressing problem student behavior is a struggle for many teachers, schools, and school districts across the nation (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Coffman, 2014). School climate is profoundly important to the social-emotional well-being of students and their overall success in school (Bradshaw, Waasdrop, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014; Peguero & Bracy, 2015). Problem student behavior, such as bullying and aggression, negatively influences school climate, and preventing such behavior requires a comprehensive approach that includes a primary focus on improving school climate (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). To provide a positive learning environment for students and staff and to maintain appropriate student behavior, many schools and school districts across the nation are implementing formal initiatives that utilize the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) framework (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how secondary school staff members perceive school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. PBIS is defined as a school-wide data-driven systematic framework that implements multiple tiers of evidence-based practices to meet the academic, social, and behavioral needs of all students within a school (Swan-Bradway, Swoszowski, Boden, & Sparague, 2013). A school is implementing PBIS with fidelity when the school meets an 80% implementation criteria on the overall scale of the School Evaluation Tool, or SET (Horner et al., 2004; Gage, Sugai, Lewis, & Brzozowy, 2015). Examining the perceptions of various secondary school staff members regarding their perspectives of school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity may provide an

understanding of the influence, if any, of the implementation of PBIS with fidelity has on school climate in secondary schools. As the researcher, I utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitative research to allow for an investigation that emphasizes the common experience of a group of individuals while also seeking to describe the essence of that experience (Creswell, 2013). I sought to describe the essence of the shared experiences of various secondary school staff members.

In this chapter, I introduced the importance of the research plan and discussed relevant information pertaining to the study. The chapter includes the background information related to the phenomenon, the researcher's situation of self in relationship to the phenomenon, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, and the research questions of this study.

Background

School officials must provide safe and supportive environments to students and staff for effective teaching and learning to take place (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). School safety has become a serious societal issue (Peguero, Connell, & Hong, 2016). Historically, many schools have relied on ineffective traditional discipline practices to address student behavior (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Thompson, 2015). Because of the ineffectiveness of traditional discipline practices, many school officials are seeking an alternative method for addressing student behavior and improving school climate (Smolkowski, Strycker, & Ward, 2016). As one such alternative, many school officials have implemented a PBIS framework to improve school climate and address student behavior (Swain-Bradway et al., 2015). Because researchers have found PBIS effective in improving school climate yet, have also suggested a lack of research available examining school climate perceptions of secondary

school staff members, a need existed for further qualitative research related to implementing PBIS in secondary schools (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). In the following sections, I discuss the historical, social, and theoretical background for the need of this research study.

Historical

Public schools across the nation have been seeking an answer for effectively managing student behavior since an array of school violence erupted in many schools across the country (Nocera, Whitbread, & Nocera, 2014). Developing from the federal government's war on drugs in the 1980s, many school systems in the early 1990s began adopting a "get tough" zero tolerance approach to school discipline by increasing the use of punitive and exclusionary discipline practices (Nocera et al., 2014; Teske, Huff, & Graves, 2013). These traditional discipline practices that included the use of exclusionary practices, such as suspension and expulsion from school, have come under fire for being ineffective discipline practices and producing negative outcomes for some students (Carrino, 2016). In the early 2000s, there was a shift in educational policy that turned the focus to identifying proactive and preventative methods of addressing discipline rather than solely relying on punitive discipline to address the behavioral needs of students (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 provided a focus on early intervention for problem student behavior and improving student behavior in the classroom by calling for teachers to provide behavioral interventions as part of classroom management efforts (NCLB, 2002). Shortly after that, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated a similar approach to addressing problem behavior of students with disabilities. IDEA (2004) placed a focus on the use of effective research-based strategies for providing positive behavioral interventions and the use of behavior management strategies that focus on the prevention of

student behavior problems. Since these federal policy trends promoting positive behavior began in the early 2000s, intervention models such as PBIS have been implemented nationwide with the intent of providing all students with evidence-based practices to prevent problem behavior and decreasing the need for special education services for behavioral concerns (Cramer & Bennett, 2015).

Social

School violence and safety concerns began in public schools across the nation decades ago and remain a serious social, cultural, policy, educational, and juvenile justice issue today (Peguero et al., 2016). Educators are challenged to meet the social and behavioral needs of students in addition to ensuring students meet academic objectives, in an environment where time and resources are already stretched to capacity (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015). Researchers have stressed the importance of educational leaders maintaining a positive school climate and safe school environment (Calaraella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, & Young, 2011; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). School climate has also become a primary target for many federal and local school improvement initiatives (Bradshaw et al., 2014). Although zero tolerance policies were first introduced to combat school violence and improve school climate, researchers have shown that traditional discipline practices are associated with negative student outcomes such as increased number of students suspended from school, decreased academic performance, increased dropout rates, and increased likelihood of student involvement with law enforcement agencies (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Evans & Lester, 2012; Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas, 2016; Hoffman, 2014; McNeill et al., 2016; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Skiba, 2014; Stewart-Kline, 2016; Thompson, 2015). The number of researchers questioning the effectiveness of traditional discipline practice provided an overwhelming amount

of support for schools to identify alternative school disciplinary practices. Although the most effective method for reducing problem behavior is prevention, educators often continue to use reactive punitive disciplinary measures as the primary method of responding to problem behavior (Fitzgerald, Geraci, & Swanson, 2014). By incorporating a school-wide initiative such as PBIS, school leaders may turn the focus to preventing inappropriate student behavior rather than relying solely on punitive discipline procedures (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016).

Theoretical

PBIS is a school-wide initiative implemented in many schools across the country. The PBIS framework is implemented in well over 20,000 schools across the United States (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2015; Childs, Kincaid, George, & Gage, 2016). Many researchers support the implementations of school-wide PBIS in elementary schools (Dutton-Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010; Klien, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). Researchers have also examined how PBIS may positively influence school environments (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Researchers have suggested that there is a lack of research regarding the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools (Calaraella et al., 2011; Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, & Fenning, 2013; Malloy et al., 2015). Since the implementation of PBIS has been effective in other school settings, and there is a lack of literature examining the school climate perceptions of secondary school staff members, there is a need for qualitative research related to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2016). Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, and Strickland-Cohen, (2015) used a phenomenological approach to discuss how typical personal and organizational experiences influence the implementation of PBIS and have issued a call for additional qualitative research.

Situation to Self

Throughout my career in education, my interest in behavioral interventions for students with at-risk behavior has developed. My educational career began as a teacher of students with behavioral and emotional disabilities in a large urban high school in a large school district in southeastern North Carolina. In this position, I developed a deep understanding of the importance of behavioral interventions and behavior modification. After four years in the classroom, I accepted a position at the district level within the same school district to work as an itinerant teacher of students with behavioral and emotional disabilities in secondary schools providing behavioral support to students in seven middle and high schools. At that time my interest in assisting general education teachers and school administrators in understanding behavior interventions began. During that time, I was trained as a coach for the PBIS initiative in the school district and began training schools in the PBIS framework. In my current position, I serve as the school district's coordinator for the PBIS initiative in 58 schools. Of these schools, 17 are secondary schools. From my experiences and perspectives, when implemented with fidelity PBIS is an effective framework for increasing positive student behavior and decreasing overall school discipline. Within the school district in which I have experience in training school staff in the PBIS framework, I have found that implementing and sustaining PBIS in elementary schools is more attainable than in secondary settings. Secondary schools that I have worked with, in general, have been more reluctant to implement PBIS and have more difficulty maintaining school staff commitment to implementing school-wide PBIS. Through the use of journaling, I set aside personal experiences with PBIS implementation and school climate to describe the experience of secondary school staff members with school climate when PBIS was implemented with fidelity.

Problem Statement

The problem was that, for years, secondary schools across the nation had implemented traditional discipline practices that are ineffective at producing positive student outcomes (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Thompson, 2015). Students receiving only one occurrence of suspension from school are twice as likely to drop out of school and eight times more likely to be incarcerated than students who are not suspended from school (Gage et al., 2016; Peguero & Bracy, 2015). High school dropouts are four times more likely to receive government assistance, twice as likely to be fired from a job more than once, three times more likely to be arrested, twice as likely to use illicit drugs, and twice as likely to be considered in poor health as individuals who graduate high school (Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2015), a high school dropout costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$250,000 over the course of his/her lifetime because of a greater reliance on government assistance programs, increased criminal activity, poorer overall health, and lower federal tax contributions. Although researchers have revealed the negative impact of traditional discipline practices by associating the practices with negative school climates, poor academic outcomes, increased dropout rates, disproportionate discipline practices, and the increased likelihood of students being incarcerated (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Evans & Lester, 2012; Heilbrun, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2015; Hoffman, 2014; McNeill, et al., 2016; Monahan et al., 2014; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba, 2014; Stewart-Kline, 2016; Teske, Huff, & Graves, 2013; Thompson, 2015), educators have continued to use traditional discipline methods for decades (Curran, 2016; Curtis, 2014; McNeill et al., 2016). As a result of the ineffectiveness of traditional discipline practices, many school officials have sought alternative methods for addressing student behavior and improving school

climate (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Because maintaining a positive school climate is important to improving student outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Peguero & Bracy, 2015), information was needed to identify the influence on school climate of alternate programs such as the implementation of PBIS. I conducted a phenomenological research study in three secondary schools in southeastern North Carolina to examine staff members' perceptions of the influence on school climate and barriers to the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. Because of the lack of qualitative research on the outcomes of discipline practices, the results provided insights regarding the lived experiences of staff members of secondary schools implementing PBIS with fidelity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover how secondary school staff members in the southeastern region of North Carolina perceived school climate when PBIS had been implemented with fidelity. PBIS was defined as a school-wide tiered implementation framework to promote positive behavioral change in students and foster a positive school climate (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The ineffectiveness of traditional discipline practices has schools seeking alternative discipline methods for addressing student behavior and improving school climate (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) guided the theoretical approach of the research study because the theory could be used to explain how learning occurs through both direct and indirect behavioral reinforcement and explains how this learning applies to the behavioral interventions implemented using PBIS (Brauer & Tittle, 2012). A second theory, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1996), also guided the study because it relates to how learning could occur from making meaning of the lived experiences of individuals (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The research study contributed to the existing body of literature regarding the implementation of PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools. Most of the current research regarding PBIS had a primary focus on either the influence of the implementation of PBIS in elementary schools (Kelm, McIntosh, & Cooley, 2014) or the influence of PBIS on student outcomes (Mitchel & Bradshaw, 2013). Research related to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools was limited (Bradshaw, Pas, Debnam, & Johnson, 2015). Many research studies related to PBIS were quantitative in nature and did not examine the experiences and perceptions of the study participants (Calaraella et al., 2011; Flannery et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2012; Lane-Garon, Yergat, & Kralowe, 2012). Many of the recent researchers of qualitative studies related to school climate presented the perspective of school leaders (Lohrmann, Martin, & Patil, 2013) or the perspectives of students (Kelm et al., 2014; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Few researchers focused on the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff members (Feuerborn, Tyre, & King, 2015; McIntosh et al., 2014; Pinkelman et al., 2015). As the researcher of this study, I sought to examine the influence the implementation of PBIS with fidelity had on school climate through the perspectives of different secondary school staff members. Therefore, with this study, I addressed the gap found in the current literature by providing qualitative data that examined the perceptions of various secondary staff members in regards to school climate when school-wide PBIS had been implemented with fidelity.

The significance of this study was to provide an understanding of how various secondary school staff members perceived school climate in schools implementing PBIS with fidelity. Educational leaders may find examining the perceptions of various secondary school staff

members regarding the influence, if any, of PBIS on school climate beneficial. By understanding the perceptions of various secondary school staff members, district leaders may gain knowledge about developing school support strategies for PBIS implementation in secondary schools. Secondary school principals may obtain information from the results of the study regarding how staff members perceive school climate after PBIS is implemented that may assist in resolving implementation issues that may arise. Additionally, secondary school staff members that are not yet involved in the implementation of PBIS may gain an understanding of how implementation may influence their school climate. This study also allowed for secondary school staff members' perceptions to be shared and possibly included in the decision-making process regarding the implementation of PBIS at the local school district level as well as at the individual school and classroom level.

Research Questions

As the researcher, I sought to explore how various secondary school staff members would describe school climate when a school was implementing PBIS with fidelity, if the participants experienced any benefits from the implementation of PBIS with fidelity, and if the participants experienced any barriers to the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. The research questions of the study were intended to provide an understanding of the essence of school climate through the perspectives of various secondary school staff members when PBIS had been implemented with fidelity. The only way to produce the essence of a phenomenon is through the lived experiences of individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I used three research questions to guide the focus on the essence of school climate when PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through the lived experiences of various secondary school staff members.

The first research question, “How do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity?” sought to gather the perceptions of participants. School climate has been identified as an important factor producing successful student outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Peguero & Bracy, 2015). Researchers have associated a positive school climate with less absenteeism of students and fewer incidents of problem student behavior (Elsaesser, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2013; Deepa, 2015; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Low, Van Ryzin, Brown, Smith, & Haggerty, 2014). The success of implementing a school-wide practice, such as adopting the PBIS framework, depends largely on how it is perceived by school stakeholders (Kelm et al., 2014). The first research question sought to gain information about school climate in secondary schools that had implemented PBIS with fidelity from the perceptions of school staff members who were primary stakeholders in schools.

The second research question asked, “What benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity?” Other researchers have suggested that the implementation of PBIS has a relationship with improved school climate and decreases in problem student behavior in school environments (Calaraella et al., 2011; Feuerborn et al., 2015; Klein et al., 2012). Identifying any characteristics that may be perceived to support the implementation of PBIS is essential for the sustainability of the PBIS framework (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012). The second research question sought to identify any perceived school climate benefits resulting from the implementation of PBIS with fidelity.

The third research question asked, “What barriers, if any, do participants experience in implementing PBIS with fidelity?” With the third research question, I sought to identify any perceived obstacles that may hinder the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. Flannery et al.

(2013) sought to examine the barriers to implementing PBIS in one secondary school to provide suggestions for other secondary schools implementing school-wide PBIS. Turri et al. (2016) suggested further research studies that sought to identify potential barriers to implementing school-wide practices, such as PBIS. Together, these three research questions were intended to reveal the essence of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity through the experiences of secondary school staff members.

Definitions

1. *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)*- A school-wide approach to behavioral change in students through a tiered implementation framework that includes teaching appropriate social school behaviors, implementing research-based intervention practices, and using data-based decision making (Sugai & Horner, 2002).
2. *The School Evaluation Tool (SET)* - an instrument used to measure the treatment fidelity of the implementation of school-wide PBIS (Bohanon et al., 2006).
3. *Exclusionary Discipline Practices*- Traditional discipline practices in which students who demonstrate problem behavior are excluded, or suspended, from participating in school activities (Peguero & Bracy, 2015).
4. *PBIS Implementation Fidelity* – Fidelity of implementing PBIS is reached when a SET score of at or above 80% in the teaching expectations subscale and at or above 80% on the overall implementation scale is reached by a school (Horner et al., 2004; Gage et al., 2015).
5. *Traditional Discipline* - Strict discipline policies with severe consequences for displaying disruptive behavior at school that was intended to act as a deterrent to other students that may choose to display similar disruptive behavior in school (Skiba, 2014).

Summary

Chapter one provided an introduction to the research plan. An overview of current literature supported the implementation of a school-wide PBIS and revealed a gap in the existing literature involving the implementation in secondary schools. I discussed the problem of how many schools have implemented ineffective discipline practices and the historical, social, and theoretical background need for this research study. I revealed that the purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand how secondary school staff members perceived school climate when a PBIS initiative had been implemented with fidelity. I also identified the three research questions that guided the study and provided support for each of those research questions. In chapter one, I discussed the motivation for conducting this study, the relationship to the participants, and the general plan used for conducting the study. In Chapter Two, I provide an outline of the literature review supporting the research plan.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Two is to present the theoretical framework for the research study and to review current literature related to school discipline policies, school climate, and the implementation of PBIS. This research study was grounded in Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1996) and influenced by Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). I selected transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1996) as the primary theory guiding the theoretical approach of the study and selected social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as the secondary theory that provided the foundational theoretical framework for the implementation of PBIS.

In an attempt to provide knowledge about the relationship that may exist between the implementation of PBIS with fidelity and the school climate perceptions of school staff members in secondary schools, Chapter two establishes the theoretical framework of the research study and reviews the literature related to the study. I organized the review of literature into subsections of topics related to school climate and the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools. The literature reviewed suggested a need for alternatives to zero tolerance and traditional discipline practices in schools and the potential influence the implementation of PBIS with fidelity may have on the perception of school climate in secondary schools.

Theoretical Framework

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research allowed me, as the researcher, to share the experiences and perspectives of secondary school staff members to gain an understanding of what influence PBIS implemented with fidelity had on school climate in secondary schools participating in the study. I explored two theories in order to gain an

understanding of the influence of implementing PBIS with fidelity on climate school in secondary schools. Along with the primary theory, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), that guided the theoretical approach of the research study, a secondary theory, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1996), provided the foundational framework for implementing PBIS as an influence on the theoretical foundation of the research study. The theoretical framework of social learning theory was used to explain how learning occurs through both direct and indirect behavioral reinforcement and to explain how this learning applies to the behavioral interventions implemented using PBIS (Brauer & Tittle, 2012). This theory supports the implementation of PBIS in middle and high schools as a way of improving school climate which was a primary focus of the research study. Transformative learning theory was used to describe learning as the process through which adults make meaning of their experiences (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). As the researcher, I sought to provide a voice from the study participants so that transformative learning might occur from the sharing of their lived experiences and so that understanding may be gained regarding the influence that implementing PBIS with fidelity may, or may not, have on school climate.

Transformative Learning Theory

As the researcher, I used the transformative learning theory to guide the research study in the exploration of the school climate perspectives of secondary school staff members employed in schools implementing PBIS with fidelity. Mezirow developed the transformative learning theory (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1996; Moyer & Sinclair, 2016; Taylor, 2008). Transformative learning is the process of using a prior interpretation of an experience to create a new meaning for or revise an existing meaning of an individual's lived experience in order to guide future actions (Mezirow, 1996). Mezirow (1997)

specifically described transformative learning as the process of implementing change in a frame of reference that encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two learning dimensions: habits of mind and point of view. Through this study, I sought to provide an interpretation of secondary staff members' experiences and perspectives of school climate when PBIS had been implemented with fidelity which may provide a guide for implementing a PBIS initiative to improve the school climate in other secondary school settings that may be searching for an alternative to traditional school discipline practices.

Researchers have utilized Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to guide research in various areas within the field of education. Christie et al. (2015) used Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to help educators understand how social structures and belief systems may influence student learning, that learners make meaning of their experiences in various ways which influence the sort of value systems they develop, and that disorienting dilemmas often challenge the validity of one's values and the assumptions that underpin them. Christie et al. (2015) concluded that transformative learning theory adds value to various types of organized learning experiences by assisting individuals in regularly re-assessing the validity of their learning and enabling them to apply what has been learned in unexpected situations. I sought to use the theory to provide an understanding of how the perceptions of secondary school staff members regarding school climate may be influenced by the implementation of PBIS with fidelity and to reveal the transformative learning that may be gained from exploring the staff perceptions of secondary school members. Moyer and Sinclair (2016) provided insight gained from applying transformative learning theory to the analysis of learning experiences outside that of the typical classroom setting in a discussion based on empirical qualitative research exploring how learning may emerge from the intersection of faith and the pursuit of sustainability within

faith-based organizations operating in Kenya. The empirical findings of Moyer and Sinclair (2016) highlighted gaps within the literature related to the learning domains of transformative learning theory. I also sought to add to the literature by applying the theory of transformative learning to learning that takes place outside of the classroom setting by examining the perspectives of secondary school staff members.

Additional knowledge was formed about transformative learning by researchers seeking to explain how adults experience a deep shift in perspective that leads them to more justified and more open frames of reference (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2013). Justifying the perceptions of lived experiences establishes a foundation of meaning for the experiences. Understanding the meaning of lived experiences is a defining condition of being human (Mezirow, 1997). I sought to explain how the implementation of PBIS with fidelity may influence secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate in middle and high schools where PBIS had been implemented with fidelity. The examination of the perceptions of secondary staff members may lead to a better understanding of how the implementation of PBIS with fidelity may shift their perceptions of school climate.

Transformative learning theory was appropriate for guiding the research study because of my focus as the researcher on developing meaning from the lived experiences of school staff members so that others in the field may learn through their shared experiences. Transformative learning is about educating from a particular worldview or a particular educational philosophy (Taylor, 2008). In this research study, the PBIS framework acted as the educational philosophy in which the knowledge gained from the examination of the perceptions of secondary school staff members was used to produce transformative learning. Transformation occurs by critical self-reflection of the assumptions that support the perspective in use (Kitchenham, 2008). As the

researcher, I utilized transformative learning theory as a guide to educate other professionals in the field about the implementation of PBIS through learning from the perspectives gained from secondary school staff members participating in the study. By doing so, this research study provided a focus on making meaning of lived experiences that specifically relates to transformative learning theory and may have extended the theory by producing an opportunity for adults to learn from the understanding of those experiences in a research setting rather than in a classroom setting.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is known to researchers as a general framework for understanding human behavior and how behavior is learned. Grusec (1992) credited the work of Robert Sears and Albert Bandura as advancing the understanding of how behavior is learned through social interactions with others and through experiences with the environment into what was called social learning theory. Sears (1951) established the properties of a theory of personality and social behavior which included events, changes in behavior, and the potential for behavioral actions. These three properties presented by Sears (1951) are found in social learning theory. Bandura (1977) suggested that humans act as information processors that actively think about the relationship between their own demonstration of behavior and the consequences that result from the demonstration of that behavior. Social learning theory provides a focus on how direct and indirect reinforcement promotes learning and the importance of this concept to behavioral learning (Brauer & Tittle, 2012). The theory indicates that desired behavior could be taught in the same way as undesired behavior is taught, through the use of reinforcement of a particular behavior when it is displayed by an individual (Brauer & Tittle, 2012). The theory explains the process of learned behavior through a social context and how problem behavior could be altered

through the teaching of desired behavior (Chavis, 2012). Developing an understanding of the social learning theory and how it influences behavioral practices is important for the implementation of PBIS.

Several researchers have used social learning theory to support the implementation of school-wide PBIS initiatives in their studies (Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, & Rime, 2012; Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks, 2014; Sheridan, MacDonald, Donlon, Kuhn, & McGovern, 2011). Social learning theory could be used to create a theoretical foundation for implementing PBIS to address behavioral change in a school environment (Farmer et al., 2014). Chin et al. (2012) provided support for relating principles founded on social learning theory to the reinforcement systems that are a part of school-wide PBIS initiatives. Further, the research of Sheridan et al. (2011) provided an illustration of how the social learning theory could be utilized as the foundation for behavioral change initiatives such as PBIS. These research studies provided significant support through the social learning theory for further research concerning the implementation of PBIS initiatives.

Transformative Learning and Social Learning Relationship

Researchers have utilized transformative learning theory and social learning theory as a theoretical framework to guide research in the field of education. Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been utilized by researchers to explain how adults experience a shift in perspectives (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2013). Similarly, I used the transformative learning theory as a guide to examine if the experience of implementing PBIS with fidelity influenced, or shifted, the school climate perceptions of secondary staff members that participated in the study. Though transformative learning theory guided the research study, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory also influenced the study. The social learning theory has been widely used to

support the implementation of school-wide PBIS as a researched-based initiative for addressing student behavior (Chin et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2014; Sheridan et al., 2011). Understanding that the PBIS framework is grounded in social learning theory was relevant to this research study which sought to examine what influence, if any, implementing PBIS with fidelity had on the perceptions of secondary school staff members. To determine the influence implementing PBIS with fidelity may have had on school staff members' perceptions of school climate in secondary schools, I examined the perspectives of various staff members from middle and high schools through the transformative learning theory while also considering the influence social learning theory had on the implementation of school-wide PBIS.

Related Literature

This section of the literature review examined literature related to the established need for implementing PBIS in secondary schools and the need to develop a further understanding of how the implementation of PBIS may, or may not, influence school climate perceptions of secondary school staff members. Topics of the related literature included the lack of success of zero tolerance policies in producing positive student outcomes, the discipline problems influencing many secondary schools, and the importance of maintaining a positive school climate. As the researcher, I reviewed literature related to how to implement PBIS, the influence of implementing PBIS, the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools, the importance of fidelity in the implementation of PBIS, and the barriers that may hinder the implantation of PBIS. I also examined literature that included perspectives from the field regarding the implementation of PBIS. I identified articles related to these topics through a computer-assisted search. I conducted an initial search for articles dated within the past five years using the keywords zero tolerance, secondary school discipline, school climate, and positive behavior support. After I

had selected primary sources from various scholarly journals, I conducted a secondary search using references cited in the primary sources. I selected articles for further review based on their relevance to the purpose of the research study with an intended purpose of revealing the significance of conducting the research study.

Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policies

Zero tolerance school discipline policies seemed to have emerged into many public school systems as a response to growing concerns about school violence that arose decades ago. In the 1990s, discussions related to education began to focus on the prevalence of violence that was taking place in many of the public schools across the United States (Curtis, 2014). Drawing upon the “zero tolerance” approach established during the national government launch of the “war on drugs” during the 1980s, many school systems in the early 1990s began adopting the same “get tough” approach to school discipline by increasing the use of severe disciplinary actions such as out of school suspensions and expulsions (Teske et al., 2013). For the past few decades, public fear concerning violence in the nation’s public schools has led policymakers down a zero tolerance path of increased punitive measures such as school expulsion for what is considered to be disruptive school behavior (Skiba, 20014). Zero tolerance refers to school policies that mandate certain consequences that are generally severe for specific student problem behavior (Curran, 2016; Teske et al., 2013). At the core of the zero tolerance discipline philosophy is the presumption that enforcing strong discipline policies with severe consequences for disruptive behavior, will act as a deterrent to other students that may choose to display disruptive behavior in school (Skiba, 2014). These zero tolerance policies were intended as a deterrent for and punishment of the most severe behavior demonstrated by students at school. However, instead of applying mandatory suspension from school and school expulsion to student

behavior that clearly threatens school safety, such as the possession of drugs or weapons, zero tolerance policies transformed into broadly interpreted policies that are being applied to student behavior that poses no real threat to school safety rather than being reserved for only the most severe student behavior (Evans & Lester, 2012). Losen and Martines (2013) suggested that the vast majority of suspensions from school were administered as a consequence for minor infractions of school rules such as disrupting class, tardiness, and dress code violations. These broadly interpreted discipline policies have led to the overuse of the consequences of suspension and expulsion and their application to far less threatening student behavior (Evans & Lester, 2012; Losen & Martines, 2013).

Almost since the first emergence of zero tolerance school discipline policies in public school systems across the nation, the effectiveness of zero tolerance school discipline policies have been called into question by researchers. Zero tolerance policies have dramatically increased the number of students suspended from school and may be increasing the likelihood that students will be arrested and have involvement with law enforcement agencies (Skiba, 2014; Teske et al., 2013; Thompson, 2015). The findings of Teske et al. (2013) indicated that the overuse of out-of-school suspensions and increased school arrests that were brought about by the implementation of zero tolerance that has been counter-productive in promoting school and community safety. Further, Skiba (2014) found no evidence that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions associated with zero tolerance policies actually reduced the disruptive student behavior for which they were intended nor found evidence of an improved school climate. Also calling into question the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, Thompson (2015) discussed how discipline practices that remove students from school, such as those included in zero tolerance policies, have been shown to increase the likelihood of negative student outcomes such

as dropping out of school and juvenile delinquency. These current research studies provided a sample of how researchers have continued to bring into question the effectiveness of zero tolerance school discipline policies since their formation to combat against rising concerns for school violence decades ago.

Zero tolerance policies have also received harsh criticism for contributing to the racially disproportionate discipline practices found in many schools and school systems across the nation. Curran (2016) found that zero tolerance school discipline policies do not produce equitable outcomes for all students. Bell (2015) concluded that a disproportionate representation of African Americans exists in school discipline referrals as a result of zero tolerance policies. The results of Hoffman (2014) indicated that the expansion of a zero tolerance discipline policy in one school district resulted in a substantial increase in the percentage of African American secondary students recommended for expulsion and an increase in the percentage of the number of days suspended. Heilbrun et al. (2015) found that principal endorsement of zero tolerance was moderately associated with increased suspension rates for both Caucasian and African American students in 306 Virginia high schools. Once promoted as a potential solution for increased school violence, zero tolerance policies are now cited as ineffective in addressing school violence and as a contributing factor for other discipline concerns, particularly the disproportionality of African American students receiving punitive school discipline compared to students of other ethnic backgrounds (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Heilbrun et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014).

Zero tolerance school discipline policies may have first emerged into school systems as a response to growing concerns about school violence, but such policies have resulted in several negative implications for students. Research available on zero tolerance policies has failed to

yield evidence that suspensions and expulsion from school helped to create a safer school environment (Evans & Lester, 2012). Current research studies related to zero tolerance policies have not produced any sufficient evidence that such policies reduce disruptive behavior or improve school climate (Skiba, 2014). Further, the current literature has associated zero tolerance policies with negative student outcomes and has recognized zero tolerance policies as a contributing factor in the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American students (Bell, 2015; Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). This review of literature related to the lack of effectiveness of zero tolerance policies and the negative influence of implementing such discipline policies supported the need for an alternative approach to school discipline problems.

School Discipline Problems

Over a decade prior to this study, schools across the nation experienced an increase in aggressive and delinquent student behavior that reached critical proportions (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Today, the problem continues with school violence and safety remaining a serious social, cultural, policy, educational, and juvenile justice issue in the United States (Peguero et al., 2016). These concerns have resulted in, often harsh, reactive rather than proactive school discipline procedures. Many schools use suspension from school as a reaction to or punishment for problem student behavior that disrupts the learning environment (Chin et al., 2012). The need to take school violence seriously and to treat students fairly with consistent discipline procedures are common justifications for the use of strict zero-tolerance policies and traditional discipline practices (Curtis, 2014). School administrators in support of traditional discipline practices have stated that they felt zero tolerance policies have helped maintain order in their schools (Heilbrun et al., 2015). There is a deterrence value in the use of traditional punitive discipline, such as school suspension, supported by decades of research that has suggested that when students see

others punished for misbehavior they are less likely to demonstrate the same misbehavior (Bear, 2012). For instance, the findings of Flannery, Frank, and Kato (2012) support the effectiveness of suspension from school in deterring student truancy. In their study of the students suspended once for being truant, 63% were not suspended again indicating that suspension was a deterrent of truancy for students included in the study (Flannery et al., 2012). However traditional forms of punitive discipline are not always effective in decreasing the problem behaviors that are often demonstrated by students in secondary schools and bring about concerns for school safety (Allen, Lewis, & Triplett, 2014).

The use of traditional forms of discipline, such as suspension and expulsion from school, have been associated with negative school and individual student outcomes (Gage, et al., 2016; Hoffman, 2014; Kupchick & Catlaw, 2015; Monahan et al., 2014; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Skiba, 2014; Stewart-Kline, 2016; Teske et al., 2013; Thompson, 2015; Way, 2011). The use of traditional discipline could decrease the academic outcomes of students, increase the risk of students dropping out of school, and may increase the risk of students becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. The results of Way (2011) suggested that attending schools with severe discipline practices may have the unintended consequence of generating defiant behavior in some students. Stewart-Kline (2016) found that exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension from school, are closely linked to the academic failure of students, an increased student dropout rate, and increased student involvement with the juvenile justice system. Monahan et al. (2014) examined how student absences from school as a result of suspension or expulsion is associated with an increased likelihood of a student being arrested. This study found that if a student is suspended or expelled from school, his/her likelihood of being arrested and becoming involved in the juvenile justice system increases considerably

(Monahan et al., 2014). According to Gage, et al. (2016) only 40% of students that receive 10 or more disciplinary actions graduate from high school, and they are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than students who do not receive disciplinary action. Peguero and Bracy (2015) hypothesized that students who experience exclusionary school discipline are more likely to drop out of school than students who do not experience exclusionary school discipline. In their study, Peguero and Bracy (2015) found that students who have experienced at least one occurrence of suspension from school are two times more likely to drop out of school than students who have not experienced suspension from school. Noltemeyer et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the relationship between school suspension and student outcomes. The results revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between suspension and the academic outcomes of students (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). These research studies revealed the association between traditional school discipline and low academic outcomes, increased dropout rates, and increased involvement in law enforcement for students that experience them. Kupchik and Catlaw (2015) conducted a study to evaluate the long-term influence of school discipline and security on political and civic participation. The results of the study indicated that young adults with a history of school suspension are less likely than others to vote and volunteer in civic activities years later (Kupchick & Catlaw, 2015). Although these are correlations, not causations, these findings suggested that traditional discipline practices not only impact the individual students involved but also had a long reaching impact on society as a whole.

Schools and school systems across the nation may need to move away from the sole use of traditional exclusionary discipline practices and adopt additional proactive approaches for addressing the problem behavior demonstrated by students (Bear, 2012). The exclusionary discipline practices in place in many of the nation's secondary schools have been associated with

negative outcomes. Exclusionary discipline practices have been associated with negative school climates, academic failure, increased dropout rates, increased student involvement with the juvenile justice system, and disproportionate discipline practices in many secondary schools (Gage et al., 2016; McNeill et al., 2016; Monahan et al., 2014; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Stewart-Kline, 2016). Traditional school discipline practices with a punitive only aspect to addressing student behavior have demonstrated little effect on decreasing problem behavior demonstrated in many secondary schools. Using traditional exclusionary discipline practices, students are suspended from school and miss out on learning opportunities resulting in them falling behind academically which may lead to feelings of frustration and reoccurring problem behaviors, ultimately resulting in a continuing cycle of exclusionary discipline for the student (Stewart-Kline, 2016). This cycle in traditional exclusionary discipline practices seldom addresses the actual problem behavior effectively.

School Climate

School climate refers to the quality and character of the social interactions within a particular school setting (Klein et al., 2012). A school's positive climate, or lack thereof, is the product of the cumulative interactions among all students and all school staff members along with their shared beliefs, values, and attitudes setting the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the whole school environment (Bradshaw et al., 2014). School climate reflects stakeholders' experiences of school life socially, emotionally, civically, and ethically as well as academically (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins- D' Alessandro, 2013). The interactions between and the relationships established among school staff members and students influence the overall school learning environment and climate of a school (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Klein et al., 2012).

School climate is a critically important factor in establishing effective schools and learning environments (Calaraella et al., 2011). There is a growing amount of literature that identifies school climate as a foundational component of creating a positive school and learning environment (Bosworth et al., 2011; Thapa et al., 2013). Also, school climate is recognized as having an important influence on individual student outcomes within a school (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Klein et al., 2012; Shukla, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Wang & Degol, 2016). A positive school climate may promote academic achievement in students while a negative school climate may limit the academic achievement of students (Sulak et al., 2016). Lindstrom, Pas, and Bradshaw (2016) suggested that school climate may potentially influence adolescents' future orientation and therefore may be positively related to students' thoughts and plans for the future. Deepa (2015) found that high school student absenteeism is related to school climate suggesting that high schools with poor school climates would have higher rates of student absenteeism. In a similar study, Hendron and Kearney (2016) also examined the relationship between school climate and student absenteeism and found that school climate subscales related inversely to absenteeism severity. Further, researchers have examined students' perceptions of a positive school climate and have identified a relationship between a positive school climate and increased student life satisfaction (Suldo, Thalji-Raitano, Hasemeyer, Gelley, & Hoy, 2013), less acts of aggressive behavior (Elsaesser et al., 2013) and less incidents of bullying behavior (Low et al., 2014).

There is an interest in the relationship between establishing a positive school climate and the implementation of school-wide PBIS. The PBIS framework is intended to improve school climate and address student behavior throughout the school environment (Smolkowski et al., 2016). School-wide PBIS initiatives are designed to build a positive school climate by following

a foundational framework for the defining of behavioral expectations and consistent reinforcement of positive behavioral norms (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). In a quantitative study of school climate, Calaraella et al. (2011) hypothesized that school climate would show improvements over a period of four years in which PBIS was implemented in one middle school. The results of this study suggested that a relationship exists between the implementation of PBIS and improvement in the school climate of a secondary school (Calaraella et al., 2011). Additionally, Calaraella et al. (2011) called for further investigation into the relationship between the fidelity of PBIS implementation and the impact PBIS has on school climate and student outcomes. In another study, Bradshaw et al. (2009) examined the influence of PBIS training of staff members on school climate. Bradshaw et al. (2009) found that the implementation of PBIS contributed to an improvement in overall school climate. Bosworth and Judkins (2014) found that the implementation of school-wide PBIS decreases incidents of bullying behavior that have a negative influence on school climate in middle schools. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) examined the role of classroom discipline strategies on the influence of student perceptions of school climate. The results of this study revealed, from the perspectives of students, that the implementation of a school-wide initiative such as PBIS rather than the use of exclusionary discipline promoted a positive school climate (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). These research studies supported further inquiry into the influence of PBIS on school climate in middle and high school settings yet provided very little insight on the collective perceptions of various school stakeholders such as school administrators, classroom teachers, and teacher assistants. This research study sought to fill the gap in the literature associated with the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools and the relationship PBIS may have or not have with school climate through collectively examining the perceptions of various secondary school staff members.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support

Originally referred to as Positive Behavior Support (PBS), PBIS has expanded from an initial intervention approach for students with severe behavioral disabilities to the school-wide framework that it is known as today (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Initially developed within the field of special education for use with students with behavioral disabilities, PBIS is an applied science that incorporates educational and environmental systems change methods to enhance the quality of school environments and minimize problem student behavior (Carr et al., 2002). The implementation of PBIS has evolved from its original application into a broad range of systematic and individualized strategies appropriate for addressing the behavioral needs of all students within a school setting (Sugai & Horner, 2002). To generate an understanding of how the implementation of PBIS has developed, I reviewed the literature on the implementation of PBIS, the influence of PBIS, the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools, measuring PBIS with fidelity, and barriers to implementing school-wide PBIS.

Implementation. According to the research of Sugai and Horner (2002), PBIS is an evidence-based school-wide approach for managing problem student behavior while also fostering a positive school through the promotion of prosocial student behavior. PBIS has recently been identified as an evidence-based practice to be used in public schools by school staff to decrease problem student behavior and to promote the prosocial behavior of students (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). The framework and critical elements of PBIS are often described simply as a school-wide approach to decreasing problem student behavior through the promotion of positive behavior (Soloman, Klien, Hintze, Peller, 2012). To target problem student behavior, the PBIS framework assists schools in reshaping traditional discipline practices (Safran & Oswald, 2003). Although defined simplistically as an approach for increasing positive

behavior of students, this school-wide positive approach to behavioral change in students includes several critical elements interwoven within the foundational framework of implementation. Established in research, these critical elements of the PBIS framework include a continuum of support that is prevention focused, instructional approaches for teaching appropriate social school behaviors, research-based intervention practices, systems change to support effective practices, and the use of data-based decision making (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Horner et al. (2010) further described PBIS as having three levels of implementation: primary preventions, secondary intervention, and tertiary intervention. These levels, or tiers, form the current framework for implementing school-wide PBIS.

The PBIS foundational framework was established for the implementation of school-wide PBIS to act as a guide for an implementing school to follow (Horner et al., 2010). The implementation of the school-wide PBIS framework is completed in three tiers that are tailored to meet the individual needs of school staff members and students within one particular school environment (Horner et al., 2004). This tiered system of support includes universal intervention supports intended to promote the positive behavior of all students, secondary interventions of support intended for a targeted group of students who demonstrate needs beyond universal support practices, and tertiary level of support with individualized intervention practices intended for students demonstrating behavioral needs after secondary interventions have been implemented but proven to be ineffective (Farkas, Simonson, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012). Each of these tiered levels of implementing PBIS include specific systems and practices for schools to put into place. Tier one establishes systems and practices to create a school-wide positive social culture, tier two establishes systems and practices that provide moderate support to students that continue to exhibit problem behavior, and tier three establishes

systems and practices to provide individualized support for students demonstrating chronic problem behavior (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

A school team is first formally trained in the implementation of the three tiers of PBIS and then develops a plan for implementing PBIS that is specific to the particular needs of the school identified from data collection (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Ennis and Swoszowski (2011) suggested that this decision-making team should be representative of the school by including representatives from each grade level or curriculum, counselors, administrators, special education teachers, and other student support staff. Although particular aspects of implementing PBIS may vary from school to school, key features of implementation may be observed in most schools implementing the school-wide initiative. These key features include defining and teaching a small number of positively stated school-wide expectations, acknowledging the prosocial behavior of all students, and establishing a continuum of consequences so that discipline is consistent and replacement behaviors are taught (Kelm et al., 2014). These features of PBIS are consistently implemented across all school settings with all students (Kelm et al., 2014). The framework of PBIS has been taught to staff members and implemented in various school settings with diverse student populations across the nation (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012).

Influence. The literature related to the implementation of PBIS indicated that implementing a school-wide PBIS initiative may have a positive influence on school discipline, school climate, and overall student outcomes. In a review of experimental and quasi-experimental studies related to PBIS, Ogulmus and Vuran (2016) found that implementing PBIS had a significant effect on improving problem student behavior, school climate, and student outcomes in elementary schools. The results of Chin et al. (2012) revealed a marked decrease in

school suspension in an elementary school over the course of the five years that school-wide PBIS was implemented. In another study conducted in an elementary school setting, Kelm et al. (2014) found a reduction in student office discipline referrals for problem behavior and an increase in student academic achievement after the implementation of PBIS. Similar to how I as the researcher sought to examine the school climate perceptions of secondary school staff members, Bradshaw et al. (2009) examined the influence of PBIS on the perception of school climate of staff members in 37 elementary schools and concluded that staff perceptions reveal a positive climate change after the implementation of PBIS. In another research study, the implementation of school-wide PBIS along with conflict resolution education contributed to a climate of safety in an elementary school setting (Lane-Garon et al., 2012). Much of the current research available regarding the implementation of school-wide PBIS had a focus on the influence of PBIS implementation in elementary school settings (Dutton-Tillery et al., 2010; Kelm et al., 2014; Klien et al., 2012).

Secondary Schools. Although many of the studies regarding the implementation of PBIS have occurred in the elementary school setting, there appears to be a significant gap in the number of studies examining the implementation of PBIS in middle and high school settings; a few studies examined the implementation of PBIS in secondary school settings. Madigan, Cross, Smolkowski, and Strycker (2016) conducted a quantitative study using data from both elementary and secondary schools to examine the association between PBIS and academic achievement. The results of the study revealed that PBIS was significantly associated with increased student academic achievement (Madigan et al., 2016). In another quantitative study, Childs et al. (2016) used data from 1,122 elementary and secondary schools to examine the association between PBIS and student discipline outcomes. Results of this study found a

decreasing trend in office discipline referrals and suspension rates in schools implementing PBIS with fidelity (Childs et al., 2016). Although these studies included middle and high schools, results were not exclusively indicative of secondary schools. Two research studies examined how the implementation of PBIS had a relationship with positive school climates in secondary schools. Calaraella et al. (2012) studied the implementation of PBIS in a middle school over a period of four years in order to determine if PBIS improved school climate and student outcomes. Bosworth and Judkins (2014) examined the prevention of bullying in a middle school implementing PBIS. Each of these researchers identified a positive relationship between the implantation of PBIS and positive school climates in secondary schools. Additionally, Freeman et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study to measure the effects of PBIS in a high school setting. Findings of this study supported the idea that PBIS may have positive results when implemented in secondary schools. However, implementing PBIS in secondary schools may be viewed as more difficult than in elementary school settings. Vancel, Missall, and Bruhnstudy (2016) conducted a study to determine the extent to which PBIS social validity ratings varied among teachers of different school levels. The results of the study revealed that high school teacher ratings of SWPBIS were significantly lower than those of elementary and middle school teachers (Vancel et al., 2016). Utilizing a sample of eight high schools, Flannery et al. (2013) determined that when provided with additional support, high schools could successfully implement a school-wide PBIS initiative. Each of these studies provided significant support for conducting additional research regarding the implementation of school-wide PBIS in secondary schools. However, I found no qualitative studies that explored the collective perceptions of school staff in both middle and high school settings. This research study was unique in its focus

to collectively examine the school climate perceptions of staff members from both middle and high schools implementing PBIS with fidelity.

There is a need for examination of the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools (Calaraella et al., 2011; Flannery et al., 2013; Malloy et al., 2015). Further research may uncover additional barriers to implementing PBIS in secondary school and provide suggestions for schools currently implementing or schools new to implementing PBIS (Flannery et al., 2013). Calaraella et al. (2011) suggested further research that contains a consistent measurement of implementation fidelity of PBIS in secondary schools, providing additional support for conducting further research related to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools. Dutton-Tillery et al. (2010) suggested further exploration of the perceptions of behavior and the implementation of PBIS in other school districts and grade levels including secondary schools. Malloy et al. (2015) also called for further research which explores the implementation fidelity of PBIS in secondary school settings. These research studies supported the use of both middle and high school settings in this research study in order to collectively consider the influence PBIS may have in secondary schools.

Fidelity. The fidelity in which a school implements school-wide PBIS is an important consideration. Schools implementing school-wide PBIS with fidelity reported decreased problem student behavior, increased engagement in academics, and improved perceptions of school safety (Swan-Bradway et al., 2013). Current research suggested that schools implementing PBIS with fidelity have increased positive outcomes related to implementation and that measuring fidelity is a critical component of successful school-wide PBIS practices (Farkas et al., 2012). When implementing PBIS, the fidelity of implementation should be evaluated to ensure the best possible outcomes (Farkas et al., 2012; Swan-Bradway et al., 2013).

The School Evaluation Tool (SET) is an instrument used to measure the treatment fidelity of the implementation of school-wide PBIS (Bohanon et al., 2006). The SET procedures require a review of permanent products, an observation of the school, brief interviews with students and staff, and an extended interview with the school administrator (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017). The SET is a multi-component assessment that includes interviewing administrators, teachers, and students and then evaluating student referral data, school improvement plans, and discipline data (Flannery et al., 2013). The SET is performed by a trained external evaluator using observational data and interviews to assess the extent of PBIS implantation by the school (Kelm et al., 2014). The SET provides schools with a fidelity of implementation score. A school is considered to be implementing PBIS with fidelity with a SET score of at or of above 80% in the teaching expectations subscale and at or above 80% on the overall implementation scale (Gage et al., 2015; Horner et al., 2004). Utilizing the SET provides schools with an evaluation of how PBIS has been implemented with or without fidelity (Flannery et al., 2013; Gage et al., 2015; Horner et al., 2004; Kelm et al., 2014).

The SET has been widely used in a broad range of research studies to determine the fidelity of school-wide PBIS implementation. Farkas et al. (2012) suggested that the SET is the most researched and widely used measurement of the fidelity of PBIS implementation. Bohanon et al. (2006) utilized the SET to measure the overall influence of the implementation of PBIS in an urban high school. Bradshaw et al. (2009) used the SET to assess the quality of the implementation of school-wide PBIS in 37 elementary schools. Farkas et al. (2012) used the SET to evaluate the fidelity of the implementation of PBIS in an alternative school setting. Flannery et al. (2013) incorporated the SET to assess the implementation fidelity of PBIS in high schools included in their study. Kelm et al. (2014) utilized the SET to measure the fidelity of the

implementation of PBIS in a Canadian elementary school. Each of these research studies report that the SET is a valid assessment tool for assessing the fidelity of the implementation of PBIS.

The ability to assess and measure the fidelity of the implementation of PBIS is important when considering the influence PBIS has on the perceptions of school staff members. Malloy et al. (2015) considered fidelity of implementation of social-emotional programs, like PBIS, when assessing teachers' perceptions of school climate. In a qualitative analysis of middle and high school teacher perceptions of PBIS, Feuerborn, Wallace, and Tyre (2016) utilized the SET to group schools participating in their study as implementing PBIS or not implementing PBIS. Lohrmann et al. (2013) incorporated the use of the SET to ensure participants of their study were employed in a school implementing PBIS with fidelity. Similarly, Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) utilized the SET to assess the level of implementation fidelity in schools participating in their study that explored concerns of staff members reporting opposition to implementing PBIS. This research study also considered the fidelity of implementing PBIS when examining the influence PBIS may have on the school climate perceptions of secondary school staff members.

Researchers have established the importance of the measurement of fidelity in the implementation of school-wide PBIS (Farkas et al., 2012). Freeman et al. (2016) indicated that the implementation fidelity of PBIS had a significantly positive effect on student attendance and significant relationship with decreases in student office discipline referrals. Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) noted that 40% staff members of elementary and secondary schools found to be non-supportive of implementing PBIS were from schools identified by the SET as having low implementation fidelity. Elementary schools have a higher likelihood of implementing PBIS with fidelity than both middle and high schools (McIntosh, Mercer, Nese, Strickland-Cohen, & Hoselton, 2016). Therefore, it was important to utilize the SET in this research study to

determine that participants were from secondary schools implementing PBIS with fidelity. By considering the fidelity measurement of implementing PBIS, this research study added to the research available that incorporates the use of the SET as the measurement of fidelity of the school-wide implementation of PBIS.

Barriers. Researchers have identified some potential barriers to the implementation of school-wide PBIS with fidelity. According to research, barriers to the sustainability of any school-based practice are essentially inevitable and often arise from the structure or dynamics of school resources, staff capacity, and school district policy (Turri et al., 2016). The results of Turri et al. (2016) provided empirical evidence that supported the idea that the presence of implementation barriers are related to implementation fidelity. Just as a relationship has been established between barriers and implantation fidelity, Feuerborn et al. (2016) also identified a relationship between school climate and barriers to the implementation of PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools. Feuerborn et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study seeking to gain a better understanding of middle and high school teachers' concerns and needs related to the implementation of PBIS in their schools and identified school climate as a common concern related to the implementation of PBIS. Both Turri et al. (2016) and Feuerborn et al. (2016) suggested future research that seeks to identify specific barriers that may influence the implementation of school-wide practices, such as PBIS. This research study sought to identify any perceived barriers to implementing PBIS by exploring the perceptions of secondary school staff members.

Obtaining and maintaining the buy-in of school staff is commonly identified as a potential barrier to the implementation of many school-wide PBIS initiatives. In a quantitative study that included elementary and secondary schools, Pinkelman et al. (2015) sought to identify

enablers and barriers related to the sustainability of the implementation of school-wide PBIS. The results of Pinkelman et al. (2015) revealed staff buy-in to be the most frequently identified barrier to sustaining the implementation of school-wide PBIS. Coffey and Horner (2012) also identified staff buy-in as relevant while examining facilitators and barriers to the implementation and sustainability of school-wide PBIS. In another study, Lohrmann et al. (2016) investigated how problems with staff and administrator buy-in of PBIS develop and are resolved from the perspectives of internal and external coaches. Results of the research study indicated that the fidelity and sustained implementation of PBIS might be threatened if staff members perceive that the intervention is not producing important outcomes or worth the effort of implementation (Lohrmann et al., 2013). McDaniel, Jolivette, and Ennis (2014) also identified staff buy-in as a barrier to the implementation of PBIS in their study of the implementation of PBIS in alternative education settings. In this research study, I intended to examine the impact, if any, of the implementation of PBIS with fidelity in middle and high schools on school climate through the perceptions of secondary school staff members which may further explain the already identified barriers to the implementation of PBIS or perhaps uncover additional barriers.

The review of literature related to barriers to implementing PBIS in secondary schools suggested that additional research is needed in middle and high school settings. Feuerborn et al. (2016) suggested that further research should be conducted to identify barriers by exploring the concerns of various school staff members. Pinkelman et al. (2015) suggested continued research to further support factors identified in their study as barriers to the implementation of PBIS. Further, Lohrmann et al. (2013) called for additional research that through the perception of school staff members, examines the school climate conditions of schools that either successfully or unsuccessfully implement school-wide PBIS. If the school staff members of secondary

schools do not perceive a positive change in school climate when implementing PBIS with fidelity, this perception may become a barrier to future implementation and sustainability of PBIS in secondary schools and thus is worth further examination.

Perspectives from the Field

A review of the literature related to the perspectives of PBIS from those in the educational field produced some research studies that sought to gain a perspective of PBIS from those implementing the initiative. In one Tennessee study, administrators reported that school-wide PBIS was more fully implemented in elementary schools than in middle and high schools and identified differences between elementary and secondary schools in the monitoring and data-informed decision-making aspects of the PBIS framework (Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer, 2015). Although this study provided insight on the thoughts of professionals implementing PBIS, little insight was included in study participants' individual experiences with the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. Houchens et al. (2017) analyzed teacher perceptions of their working conditions in schools implementing PBIS and schools not implementing PBIS. Teachers in schools implementing PBIS reported higher levels of student and faculty understanding of behavioral expectations and a stronger atmosphere of professional trust and respect (Houchens et al., 2017). This study also provided insight into the thoughts of professionals implementing PBIS yet provided little insight into participants' individual experiences with the implementation of PBIS. In another study, Feuerborn et al. (2016) used thematic analysis to analyze open-ended statements of concerns and needs related to implementing school-wide PBIS completed by teachers working in middle and high schools settings. Although this study provided a deeper insight into the understanding of teacher perceptions of school-wide PBIS in secondary schools, the study did not consider the perceptions

of other school staff members. As the researcher of this research study, I sought to examine the influence the implementation of PBIS with fidelity may have on school climate through the perceptions of different secondary school staff members to identify any potential consistencies in the perceptions of those staff members. In this unique way, this research study expanded on current literature.

Examining school staff members' perceptions of the implementation of PBIS has provided important information for improving the school-wide implementation of PBIS in secondary schools. Swan-Bradway et al. (2013) provided insight on how the perceptions of stakeholders were relevant for expanding the implementation of PBIS. In Lohrmann et al. (2013), school administrators and staff largely responded to an open-ended question that the universal implantation of PBIS was not worth the effort and identified a lack of understanding of PBIS implementation practices as one of the potential causes of this perception. Fallon, McCarthy, Scott, and Sanetti (2014) surveyed classroom staff and found that although PBIS practices were implemented very consistently within the classroom setting by the majority of respondents, certain practices of PBIS were somewhat challenging to implement. Consequently, Kelm et al. (2014) gathered descriptive feedback provided by school stakeholders that revealed positive perceptions of the implementation of school-wide PBIS. Dutton-Tillery et al. (2010) found that lack of training in behavior management influenced teacher perceptions of PBIS practices. Recently, Swan-Bradway et al. (2013) revealed that teachers overwhelmingly reported the need for ongoing support for teachers and school staff in order to improve the implementation of PBIS. Additionally, results of Lormann et al. (2015) suggested that building a positive climate among school staff could increase the effectiveness of the implementation of PBIS. Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) analyzed the perceptions of school staff opposed to

implementing PBIS and found that many staff not supportive of PBIS were concerned for the commitment and participation of all stakeholders and either misunderstood the PBIS framework or philosophically disagreed with the PBIS framework.

Although results of these studies provided a strong link between understanding the perceptions of school staff and improving the implementation of PBIS, there was support for the continued examination of how school staff members perceive the implantation of PBIS. Fallon et al. (2014) called for additional research that investigates the perceptions of classroom-based personnel implementing PBIS practices related to implementation consistency and challenges that classroom-based personnel perceive when utilizing School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) practices. This research study supported the need for further research that examines the perceptions of school staff members in the classroom setting. Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) suggested further research related to the understanding of the concerns and needs of all staff who work with students. This research supported examining the perceptions of other staff members in schools implementing PBIS. As the researcher of this research study, I sought to provide a further examination of the perceptions of classroom-based personnel as well as other staff responsible for the school-wide implementation of PBIS. Feuerborn et al. (2015) suggested further research was needed that is related to how staff perceptions may change over the course of the implementation of PBIS. This research study supported the need for additional research related to how school staff members perceive school climate before and during the implementation of PBIS. This research study addressed the gap identified in literature related to how staff perceptions may change over the implementation of PBIS by examining the perceptions of school climate after PBIS was implemented with fidelity within the selected secondary school settings.

The literature related to the perceptions of those in the field responsible for implementing PBIS supported the significance of the first research question of this research study which asked, “How do select secondary school staff members describe school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity?” Researchers have provided insight on how the perceptions of stakeholders, such as school administrators, teachers, and PBIS coaches, are relevant for expanding the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools (Fallon et al., 2014; Lohrmann et al., 2013; Swan-Bradway et al., 2013). However, little literature was available that examined the perceptions of various school staff members collectively. By considering the school climate perceptions of various school staff members involved in the implementation of PBIS, such as administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants collectively, this study provided a more universal perception of school climate after the implementation of PBIS with fidelity.

Summary

The literature reviewed supported my interests as the researcher’s in understanding secondary school staff members’ perceptions of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. I sought to gain an understanding of the influence, if any, the implementation of school-wide PBIS with fidelity had on the school climate perceptions of secondary school staff members. The purpose of Chapter Two of this study was twofold; to first identify the theoretical framework that was used as a guide for the study and then to present the literature that I identified as relevant to the study and that supported the research questions. The literature reviewed was used to establish what contribution the results of this research study provided.

As the literature indicated, many research studies supported the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide approach to improving school climate and reducing discipline concerns. Although the implementation of PBIS was widely studied, additional research related to certain

aspects of PBIS was required to understand further the potential of implementing PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools as an approach for improving school climate. Additional information was also needed to identify any potential barriers to implementing PBIS in secondary schools. Finally, there was a lack of research that explored the perception of school climate through the experience of various secondary school staff members in secondary schools that have implemented PBIS with fidelity. The deep rich descriptions of various secondary school staff members would be a valuable addition to the literature and meet the need for additional research related to implementing school-wide PBIS in secondary schools.

In Chapter Two, I provided a review of literature related to school discipline issues and the implementation of PBIS. The literature reviewed supported the need for this research study. Chapter Three introduces the research design, methods of data collection, and data analysis procedures of this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter three begins with a discussion of the design used for this research study followed by a description of the setting and participants of the study. Following this discussion, I include an examination of the procedures, my role as the researcher, the data collection process, and the data analysis that was used to establish an understanding of secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. Chapter three closes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations of the research study.

Design

As the researcher, I utilized a qualitative research design for this research study. The focus of the study was to understand the phenomenon of the implementation of school-wide PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools by investigating the participants' perspectives of their school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity at their schools. I chose a qualitative research design to examine how the participants constructed meaning of their experiences (Patton, 2015). Because many research studies related to PBIS are quantitative in design and do not examine the experiences and perceptions of participants (Calaraella et al., 2011; Flannery et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2012; Lane-Garon, Yergat, & Kralowe, 2012), a qualitative research design was more appropriate for this research study. Selecting a qualitative research design allowed me to conduct a deep examination of how the various secondary staff members that participated in this study perceived their school climate after their schools had implemented PBIS with fidelity. In phenomenological research, a relationship exists between the external perception of a natural object and the internal

perceptions, memories, and judgments of the experience of that object (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological researchers seek to identify and describe the subjective experiences of participants (Schwandt, 2015). Examination of the lived experiences of individuals provide prevailing descriptions and are the only way to produce the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher uses the phenomenological approach to emphasize the common experience of a group of participants with a particular phenomenon while the researcher looks to describe the essence of that experience (Creswell, 2013). Simply stated, phenomenology seeks to describe the essential essence of a shared experience (Fraenkel et al., 2012). As the researcher of this study, I utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitative research to capture the essence of the perceptions secondary school staff members have toward school climate when the school is implementing PBIS with fidelity through a deep examination of their shared experiences with the phenomenon.

Research Questions

1. How do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity?
2. What benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity?
3. What barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity?

Setting

The setting of the study was the southeastern region of North Carolina. This region included multiple counties and public school districts. As the researcher, I chose this region of North Carolina due to its convenient location and because each district in the region had more

than one school currently implementing PBIS. I selected the study participants from multiple school districts within the region. I first obtained a list of current SET scores from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Behavior Support Division of school districts in the region currently implementing PBIS. I then contacted the six districts in the region with secondary schools with a SET score above 80 from each district. Two of the six school districts answered the request to participate in the study. The two school districts were located in a range of rural to urban geographic locations. In the larger of the two school districts, the average daily enrollment of students was 50,485 with 45% of students being African American, 31% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, and 12% other races, while 64.3% of the students received free or reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2016). The smaller school district had an average daily enrollment of 4,571 students with 38% of students being African American, 39% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic, and 8% other races, with 59.5% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2016). Each of the participants were all staff members from three public secondary schools selected from the two school districts that reported a SET scores of 80 or higher indicating that the school was implementing PBIS with fidelity.

Participants

This study included a small sample of secondary school staff members from three different school locations. Qualitative inquiry typically provides an in-depth focus on a small sample of participants selected for a specific purpose (Patton, 2015). A phenomenological approach to qualitative research involves collecting data from a number of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I chose to have a purposeful sample of 12-15 participants. The aim of purposeful sampling is to obtain participants with

insight into the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I obtained a purposeful sample by selecting current staff members from multiple secondary schools implementing PBIS in public school districts located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. I only invited staff members employed by the school before the implementation of PBIS to participate in the study. I initially invited all administrators, teachers, assistant teachers, and counselors of a school meeting requirements to participate in the study. I asked the potential participants if they were employed at the school before the school implementing PBIS when they are initially approached to participate in the study. Only those responding that they had been employed before the school implemented PBIS was selected to participate. Only 12 participants agreed to participate in the study. The participants included two principals, one assistant principal, two teacher assistants, and seven teachers from two middle schools and one high school. As the researcher, I desired a maximum variance of diversity among general and specific characteristics of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In this research study, I increased maximum variation through a sampling of various schools within different districts and by inviting administrators, teachers, and teachers' assistants to be participants in the study, and by including both male and female participants.

Procedures

As the researcher of this study, my first step was obtaining the necessary approval for conducting the research study. I submitted the study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Liberty University for approval. After receiving approval, I contacted the NCDPI's Behavior Support Division via email to obtain a list of secondary schools in districts located in the southeastern region of North Carolina with a current SET score of 80 or higher. After selecting all secondary schools meeting criteria, I emailed the school district in which the schools were

located requesting permission to conduct research within their school district and included information on how the potential schools were identified for participation using the school's current SET score. Only two of the six districts that were contacted agreed to participate in the study. I then emailed the principals of four schools meeting the SET score requirement to request permission to seek study participants from their school. Three of the principals responded agreeing that I could reach out to their staff for potential participants. This email also included the information about how I used current SET scores to identify potential schools to participate.

I used purposeful sampling to ensure participants had experienced the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling allows for selection of participants based on their relevance to the research question (Schwandt, 2015). I initially invited via email all administrators, teachers, assistant teachers, and counselors of the secondary schools meeting the SET criteria to participate in the study. In the invitation to participate, I asked if the participant was employed by the school before the school had implemented PBIS. I only selected participants employed at the school before and after the implementation of PBIS reached fidelity to participate in the study. I reviewed the most current School Evaluation Tool (SET) scores to ensure participants are from schools currently implementing PBIS with fidelity. Researchers created the SET to provide a measurement of the fidelity of primary PBIS practices implemented with a school (Horner et al., 2004). The SET is administered to schools implementing PBIS annually by trained district personnel and scores are reported to NCDPI. I selected only participants from schools that earned a SET score of 80% or higher. After I had selected schools meeting requirements, I contacted the potential participants via email. I emailed the informed consent document along with the invitation to participate in the study. When an individual responded that he or she was

willing to participate in the study, I requested for that person to scan and email the signed consent document back. After I received completed consent forms from 12 participants, I scheduled individual interviews with the participants and data collection began.

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research involves collecting data from a number of participants who have experienced the same phenomenon, analyzing the data collected, sorting the data into themes, and then developing a description that reflects the overall participant experience after bracketing out the researcher's perspective (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I gathered data for the research study through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant responses to a writing prompt. Following the ideas of Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013), I analyzed the data by describing the participants' personal experiences with the phenomenon; developing a list of specific statements from the participant; organizing the statements into themes, and describing what the participants experienced, how the experience happened, and the essence of the experience incorporating textual and structural descriptions.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher plays a critical role. The researcher is the human instrument as the person-to-person data collection tool (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of qualitative methods depends upon the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher (Patton, 2015). Throughout conducting the research study, I continuously reflected upon research practices and skills to ensure the credibility of the qualitative study. The researcher's experience with the phenomenon of a study must be set aside through the use of bracketing in order to bring focus on the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013). To reflect upon personal experiences with the implementation of PBIS and to set aside personal bias, I recorded journal entries about my experiences and bias during each phase of the research study. I incorporated

bracketing to set aside my personal experiences with PBIS implementation and school climate so that I could solely describe the experience of secondary school staff members with school climate when PBIS is implemented school-wide with fidelity. To further remove any potential bias, I ensured participants had no previous or existing relationship with myself by excluding participants from the school district within which I was employed.

Data Collection

Data collection for this research study consisted of semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and writing prompt responses. These methods of data collection focused on providing data that would produce answers to the research questions. By utilizing multiple sources and methods of data collection, I ensured triangulation and further validated data (Creswell, 2013). The research study included three methods of data collection to achieve triangulation. I followed a sequence of data collection so that each component of data gathered built upon the other and enhanced the voice of the participants. I used semi-structured interviews as the first method of data collection. Through interviews, the researcher may understand experiences and reconstruct events experienced by the study participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The purpose of conducting the individual interviews first was to allow the participants an opportunity to develop a sense of comfort in talking about their experiences before sharing their experiences with a group of individuals (Creswell, 2013). After I conducted and transcribed the interviews, a focus group was formed using the interview participants. Focus groups are ideal for exploring the participants' experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns (Kitzinger, 1998). The final method of data collection I used was written responses to a writing prompt that I provided to participants after conducting the focus group. Responses to open-ended writing prompts can be a rich source of qualitative data (Patton, 2015).

Interviews

As the first source of data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the study participants. Phenomenological studies focus on descriptions of experiences and typically conducting long interviews with participants will provide deep descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews allow for the collection of direct quotations from participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Researchers have used interviews to provide valuable insights on the perceptions of various stakeholders in the implementation of school-wide PBIS in other studies (Kelm et al., 2014; Lohrmann et al., 2013; McIntosh et al., 2015; Swan-Bradway, 2013). I conducted the interviews individually with each participant face-to-face. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant and were approximately 30 minutes in length. Semi-structured interviews take an unstructured, open-ended response approach but incorporate an organized method such as the use of an interview guide (Schwandt, 2015). I used an interview guide to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each interviewee (Patton, 2015). Lohrmann et al. (2013) utilized a semi-structured interview guide to gain an understanding of the perceptions of district and school level PBIS coaches. Before interviewing the participants, I developed and field tested the interview guide. I field tested the interview guide by conducting a mock interview individually with two peers from the field to ensure the appropriateness of the questions and their ability to generate discussions that would provide data toward answering the research questions. I audio recorded and transcribed verbatim each interview session. I transferred the audio recordings to a secure password protected laptop. I stored the transcriptions digitally on the same password-protected laptop and stored hard copies in a locked file cabinet (Patton, 2015).

I began each interview with a set of icebreaker questions intended to foster a positive interview environment where the participant feels comfortable opening up and sharing his/her experiences. Creswell (2013) suggested that interviews begin with questions that invite the individual being interviewed to open-up to talk with the interviewer. I followed the icebreaker questions with the interview questions directly related to the research questions and potential probing questions. I maintained the focus on the central phenomenon of the study by relating the interview question directly to the research questions. I used probing questions when needed to allow participants to elaborate on their responses. By incorporating probing questions, I increased the richness and depth of the responses provided by the participants (Patton, 2015). I concluded the interviews with questions seeking any additional information or knowledge the participant may have about the phenomenon that was not already shared during the interview. Creswell (2013) suggested the use of concluding interview questions. The interview guide included the following questions:

1. Why did you become involved in education?
2. How long have you been in education?
3. What is your favorite part of your job?
4. Describe the current climate of your school?
5. How would you describe the climate of your school prior to your school implementing PBIS? Probes- Describe any significant difference in the school climate. What changes in school climate have you experienced?
6. How has the implementation of PBIS influenced the school climate in your school?
Probes- Describe any changes in school climate that may have occurred and the length of time that the change became evident after the implementation of PBIS.

7. Describe a personal experience with the change in school climate in your school. Probe- Describe any influence PBIS has had on school climate that you have experienced personally/professionally?
8. How do you think the school community (faculty, students, families, and community members) perceives the school's climate since the implementation of PBIS? Probe- How about before? Describe indications/observations that lead to your conclusions.
9. What aspect of PBIS do you feel has influenced your school's climate?
10. What barriers, if any, did the school experience in implementing PBIS with fidelity?
11. What barriers, if any, did you experience in implementing PBIS with fidelity?
12. What additional resources would have been helpful in overcoming any barriers?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with implementing PBIS with fidelity in a secondary school? Probe- any advice for others?

The focus of the study was to determine the essence of the experience of secondary school staff members have with school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. Questions one through three are ice-breaker questions intended to open the participants up to talking about their experiences as suggested by Creswell, (2013). Questions four through 12 are intended to generate responses from the participants that will answer the research questions of the study. These interview questions are directly related to the central phenomenon of the experience of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. School climate has been established as an important factor in effective schools (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011; Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Klein et al., 2012). The fidelity of the implementation of PBIS plays a critical role in how school staff perceives the influence of school-wide programs (Malloy et al., 2015). These interview questions were intended to gather information that would answer the

research questions and provide the essence of the central phenomenon of the study. Interview Question 13 was intended to conclude the interview and to gather any last thoughts or ideas of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This question was intended to gather any additional information from the participants that could be used to provide suggestions for other secondary schools implementing PBIS. Dutton-Tillery et al. (2010) and Swan-Bradway et al. (2013) similarly used perceptions of their study participants to provide suggestions for improving the implementation of school-wide PBIS.

Focus Group

I used a focus group as the second source of data collection. Conducting a focus group put control of the interaction into the hands of the participants rather than the researcher (Liamputtong, 2011). Bringing participants together in a focus group setting allowed them to interact with others through shared experiences. Through conducting a focus group, I was able to examine the participants' different perspectives as they operated within a social network during the focus group session (Kitzinger, 1998). Interactions that occur among participants will enhance data quality (Patton, 2015). Two weeks after completing all interviews and coding the data, I conducted the focus group to clarify data from the interviews further and to ask related questions. I conducted the focus group in an online forum that lasted approximately one hour. I selected a synchronous online format which was more reflective of a traditional face-to-face focus group (Gaiser & Schreiner, 2009). I invited all interview participants to attend the focus group session. As the researcher, I acted as the moderator of the focus group by introducing the topic, encouraging interaction among participants, and guiding the conversation around the topic (Liamputtong, 2011). I used predetermined open-ended questions to lead the initial focus group in discussions that provided information toward answering the research questions. McIntosh et

al. (2014) used open-ended questions to allow participants to indicate what procedures they perceived to be most vital to the implementation of PBIS. Using a synchronous online focus group format captures data easily for analysis (Gaiser & Schreiner, 2009). I downloaded the focus group data and digitally transfer the data to a secure personal laptop that will be password protected (Patton, 2015).

The following eight open-ended question were questions on the focus group question guide:

1. Describe your school in three words.
2. Explain why you choose those words.
3. Describe your experience with the implementation of PBIS
4. What aspects of implementing PBIS has had the most positive or negative impact on your school's climate?
5. What particular PBIS practice has had the most influence on your school climate?
6. What are some obstacles to implementing PBIS with fidelity that you may have experienced or seen others experience?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about your school's climate and the implementation of PBIS?

The purpose of conducting the focus group was to expand and enhance the data already collected by allowing participants of the study to hear one another's responses to questions and make comments beyond their own original answers (Patton, 2015). For participants of the focus group to feel comfortable in participating, I asked opening icebreaker questions to begin the focus group (Creswell, 2013). Questions one and two were ice-breaker questions. Focus group questions three, four, and five were intended to provide answers to research questions one and

two. The first research question sought to gather perceptions and research question two sought to understand those perceptions. Questions six and seven were intended to provide answers to research question three which sought to identify any obstacles that may hinder the implementation of PBIS and to identify any suggestions for addressing any obstacles identified.

Writing Prompt Responses

As a third method of collecting data, I used writing prompt responses that were completed by the participants. Open-ended written responses are a rich source of qualitative data (Patton, 2015). Pinkelman et al. (2015) utilized written responses to open-ended questions to examine the presence of variables related to the implementation and sustainability of school-wide PBIS. Using an online blog, I gathered written responses one week after the focus group session had taken place. In the blog, I gave the study participants a prompt to describe their school climate since the implementation of school-wide PBIS in their school in one sentence. Participants were asked to respond to the blog within two weeks. The writing prompt limited participants' overall descriptions of their school climate since the implementation of PBIS to one sentence with the intent to narrow down what participants perceived as most important in their experience of school climate when PBIS was implemented with fidelity. I downloaded the participants' responses from the blog site and digitally stored the data on a password-protected laptop, and hard copies of participant responses were kept in a locked file cabinet (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Data collection for the research study was in the form of individual participant semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and participants' responses to a writing prompt. As preparation for data analysis, I transcribed verbatim each participant's interview session audio recording and the data from the focus group. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with the

data collection. Using phenomenological data analysis procedures identified by Moustakas (1994) and supported by Creswell (2013), the data analysis of the research study included the bracketing out of my assumptions regarding school climate and the implementation of PBIS, horizontalizing statements that were relevant to the phenomenon from the data collected from participants, identifying meaning from the statements and coding them into common themes, further developing the themes into textural and structural descriptions of the experience of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity, and then forming the essence of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity as perceived by secondary staff members.

Epoche

The process of epoche as described by Moustakas (1994) is a systematic approach to acknowledging preconceptions and ideas a researcher may have about the phenomenon and making every effort to set them aside before and during the data collection process. Epoche allows the researcher to continuously set aside any pre-judgments in order to allow the experiences of the study participants to be the focus (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher of this study, I accomplished epoche through bracketing out my own experiences and preconceptions about school climate and the implementations of PBIS in secondary schools through the journaling about my experiences and preconceptions.

Phenomenological Reduction

Conducting qualitative research produces large quantities of data that must be organized by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological reduction is the reduction of the large amounts of qualitative data into a smaller more manageable amount (Patton, 2015). This process of qualitative data analysis includes first horizontalizing statements that are relevant to the phenomenon from the data collected, then identifying meanings from the statements that can be

coded into common themes and then further developing them into textural and structural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). This process assisted me in determining individual and composite textural descriptions that emerged from the provided data (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalizing the statements and coding them into themes allowed me to identify common experiences in the perceptions of participants toward school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity in secondary schools and also identified common themes of benefits or barriers to the implementation of PBIS that emerged from the data.

Descriptions and Essence

As the final component of data analysis, I developed the description of the phenomenon and formed of the essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I used the themes that were identified through phenomenological reduction to create a description of what the participants experienced and a description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I began by taking the individual experience of each participant and combining them with the experiences of the group of secondary school staff members. This process provided me with the information to articulate a composite textural and structural description and produce the final description of the shared experience (Moustakas, 1994). Once descriptions of the experiences of the participants were constructed, I formed the essence of how secondary school staff members perceived school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the quality of the research investigation and the quality of results of the investigation that makes it important to the researcher's intended audience (Schwandt, 2015). As the researcher of this study, I included measures of credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability to provide a trustworthy investigation into the shared school climate experiences of secondary school staff members employed in various middle and high schools implementing PBIS with fidelity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized triangulation, member checking, peer review, rich thick descriptions, and clarification of researcher bias to further strengthen the trustworthiness of the research study (Creswell, 2013). By addressing these elements while conducting the research study, I increased the trustworthiness of the results produced by the research study.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability for the results of a research study to be applied to other populations or areas (Creswell, 2013). I included both male and female participants from various ethnic backgrounds and from diverse educational roles (teachers, teacher assistants, administrators) which increased the transferability to other populations. I also selected participants from both middle and high schools located in different public school districts within the southeastern region of North Carolina in order to increase the transferability to other areas. A key component of a phenomenological study is conveying the essence of a lived experience shared by a group of people with thick descriptive data (Moustakas, 1994). Providing thick, rich descriptions of the participants and setting will enable readers to determine transferability of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

Credibility is the process of assuring that the results of the research study are transferable and dependable (Creswell, 2013). To increase the credibility of the research study, I included triangulation and member checking. Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences made from the data collected from multiple sources (Schwandt, 2015). Triangulation

involves identifying evidence from different methods of data collection to develop or shed light on a theme (Creswell, 2013). The researcher achieves triangulation by comparing and cross-checking the consistency of the information collected from different sources of qualitative data (Patton, 2015). To achieve triangulation, I compared the information from the semi-structured interviews with the information obtained from the focus group session and writing prompt responses to identify consistency in the data collected from study participants over time and in different settings. I incorporated member checking by allowing participants to review interview and focus group transcriptions. Member checking is important because it allowed me, as the researcher, to check the accuracy and credibility of the description of the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013). I provided study participants with a copy of the written transcriptions of their interview session to ensure what was written accurately portrayed their perceptions. I provided each participant the opportunity to offer feedback.

Dependability

Disclosing the researcher's personal experiences related to the phenomenon being studied is important so that readers understand any potential bias of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) provided a description of removing potential bias as the researcher as taking a moment and bracketing out personal experiences and setting them aside in an attempt to be as objective as possible. Bracketing out personal experiences allowed me to maintain a more open mind, minimize my bias as the researcher, and provided a greater level of dependability for the research study (Moustakas, 1994). To clarify researcher bias and strengthen the dependability of the study, I disclosed personal experiences related to school climate and the implementation of PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools through journaling.

Confirmability

To increase the dependability of the study, I requested a peer to review data collection and analysis procedures. The peer that I selected to review the data collection and analysis procedures had a conferred doctorate, worked in the same field of education as myself, and had conducted a qualitative research study for their dissertation. A peer review increases the reliability of the study by incorporating an external review of the research study with the purpose of questioning the procedures conducted by the researcher and evaluating for unreported bias (Creswell, 2013). I requested the peer reviewer to also compare the transcribed interviews to the interview audio recording to ensure that what was said during the interview and what was transcribed was accurately recorded.

Ethical Considerations

Since this qualitative research study sought to understand the perceptions of secondary school staff members through the use of human subjects as participants, there were ethical considerations I had to make (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I provided informed consent forms to the participants to be reviewed and signed before data collection began. Before each interview session, I further explained the consent form and reminded participants that they may opt out of the research study at any time. I used pseudonyms for participants and school locations to minimize the risk of potential negative results influencing the schools and the selected participants of the study. To further ensure confidentiality of the participants, I have ensured that all physical and digital data gathered have been kept secure at all times.

Summary

As the researcher, I identified a phenomenological approach to qualitative research as the research design of the research study. I provided the rationale and justification for using a

phenomenological research design to conduct this study. I identified the site and participants of the research study and provided an explanation of how the site and participants were selected. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and from responses to a writing prompt. I discussed data analysis procedures for the data collected. During data analysis, I bracketed out my assumptions, horizontalized statements relevant to the phenomenon from the data collected from participants, identified the meaning from the statements, coded the statements into common themes, developed the themes into textural and structural descriptions of the experience, and then formed the essence of the experience of study participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). I concluded the chapter by outlining the procedures for strengthening trustworthiness and the identification of ethical considerations of the research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to discover how secondary school staff members in the southeastern region of North Carolina perceived school climate after PBIS was implemented with fidelity. The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the data analysis. I provide a brief introduction to each participant followed by the findings of the study. This chapter outlines how horizontalizing statements relevant to the phenomenon were formed and coded into common themes. The themes were then further developed into descriptions of the experience of school climate after PBIS was implemented with fidelity and formed the essence of school climate after PBIS was implemented with fidelity as perceived by secondary staff members. The results are discussed in a narrative form organized by theme and then presented as answers to the study's research questions.

Participants

Six school districts in the southeastern region of North Carolina were initially invited to participate in the study. Of the invited school districts, two school districts agreed to participate in the study. The school districts and schools are described using pseudonyms. Coastal School District had one secondary school, Holly Middle School, meeting the inclusion criteria of a SET score of 80 or above. Of the 37 faculty members at Holly Middle School initially invited to participate in the study, four individuals agreed to participate and also met the participation requirement of being employed at the school before the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. Riverside School District had two secondary schools, Westgate High School and Clover Middle School, meeting the inclusion criteria of a SET score of 80 or above. Of the 49 faculty members at Westgate High School initially invited to participate in the study, two individuals agreed to

participate in the study and also met the participation requirement of being employed at the school before the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. Of the 31 faculty members at Clover Middle School that I initially invited to participate in the study, six individuals agreed to participate and also met the participant requirement of being employed at the school before the implementation of PBIS with fidelity.

Table 1

Participant Description by School Site

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Staff Position	Years in the Field	District Pseudonym	School Pseudonym
Allen	Male	African American	Assistant Principal	13	Coastal School District	Holly Middle School
Kim	Female	White	Teacher	10	Coastal School District	Holly Middle School
Myra	Female	African American	Teacher	28	Coastal School District	Holly Middle School
Rose	Female	African American	Teacher Assistant	7	Coastal School District	Holly Middle School
Brent	Male	White	Principal	19	Riverside School District	Westgate High School
Linda	Female	African American	Teacher	4	Riverside School District	Westgate High School
Todd	Male	White	Teacher	7	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School
Tammy	Female	White	Teacher	10	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School
Christy	Female	White	Principal	19	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School

Jan	Female	White	Teacher	12	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School
Ben	Male	African American	Teacher	3	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School
Kay	Female	African American	Teacher Assistant	22	Riverside School District	Clover Middle School

The 12 participants were from different professional backgrounds and shared their experiences with the phenomenon through their unique individual lenses. In addition to coming from different schools and school districts, the participants also varied in their roles as staff members. The staff member roles of the participants included principal, assistant principal, general education teacher, special education teacher, and teacher assistant. The experience level of the 12 participants ranged from three to 28 years of experience in the field of education. Participants are described in greater detail below using pseudonyms.

Allan

In his reply to the study invitation, Allen identified himself as the assistant principal of Holly Middle School. Allen disclosed that he had 13 years of experience in the field of education during the icebreaker portion of his interview. Allen imparted his experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through his lens as an assistant principal leading the implementation efforts. During my interview with Allan, he expressed the uniqueness of the positive climate that existed at Holly Middle School. He mentioned that the teacher turnover rate was one of the lowest in the district. He also bragged about the overall culture of the school that draws teachers from other schools. “They want to be part of that [the culture]. Kids are awesome. Parents are accustomed to the way we do business and are supportive” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017).

Kim

Kim identified herself as a general education teacher at Holly Middle School in her response to the invitation to participate in the study. During the icebreaker portion of her interview, Kim shared that she had 10 years of experience in the field of education. Kim communicated her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a general education teacher implementing PBIS in the classroom setting. During my interview with Kim, she explained that before the school began implementing PBIS staff members were not consistent in how they acknowledged the positive behavior of students. “Kids would get rewarded for their behavior, but there was no consistency” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017). Kim excitedly reported how PBIS changed the school culture by improving their consistency in rewarding the positive behavior of students. “They [kids] expect a reward and that, accompanied with consistent expectations, really allowed us to change that school culture” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017).

Myra

Myra stated that she was a general education teacher at Holly Middle School in her reply to the invitation to participate in the study. Myra revealed that she had 28 years of experience in the field of education during the icebreaker portion of the interview. Of the participants, she has the most experience in the field of education. Myra conveyed her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a founding member of the PBIS team and as an experienced general education teacher implementing PBIS in the classroom setting. During my interview with Myra, she excitedly boasted how Holly Middle School had an “awesome” school climate. She quickly added “there was a day when it wasn’t awesome”

(Individual interview, November 6, 2017). Myra credited her current principal for pulling the school together.

Rose

Rose shared during the icebreaker portion of the interview that she was a teacher assistant at Holly Middle School and had seven years of experience in the field of education. Rose revealed her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a teacher assistant implementing PBIS in the classroom setting. In my interview with Rose, she boasted about how the school staff at Holly Middle School goes out of their way to be welcoming and provided various activities to involve all stakeholders. “We strive to have a campus that is warm, where students want to be. We always have a wide variety of activities that are going on” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017).

Brent

In his reply to the study invitation, Brent identified himself as the principal of Westgate High School. Brent disclosed that he had 19 years of experience in the field of education. Brent communicated his experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through his lens as the school principal responsible for the implementation of PBIS. During my interview with Brent, he explained how the climate at Westgate High School has changed and has continued to evolve. He enthusiastically described how the school desires to produce the best possible learning environment for students. “We have turned a corner in improving our learning environment from previous years. And, what we want to continue to do is to produce a more positive learning environment” (Individual interview, November 27, 2018).

Linda

Linda identified herself as a special education teacher with four years of experience at Westgate High School during the icebreaker portion of her interview. Linda conveyed her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a high school special education teacher implementing PBIS in the special education classroom setting. During my interview with Linda, she reflected on the challenging behaviors often demonstrated by the students in her special education classroom at Westgate High School. She candidly admitted that she would become overwhelmed with the behavior of her students and how she had difficulty finding situations in which she could reward them when the school first began implementing PBIS:

“Knowing how to reward them was difficult. But, I’ve seen a change in my students wanting to get their points. They are trying more and know what to do to get their points, and I’m more motivated to reward them when I see their good behavior.” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017)

Todd

In his response to participate in the study, Todd identified himself as a general education teacher at Clover Middle School. Todd reported that he had nine years of experience in the field of education during the icebreaker portion of the interview. Todd revealed his experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through his lens as a middle school general education teacher responsible for the implementation of PBIS in his classroom. Todd was the only participant to admit during his interview to not initially committing to the implementation of PBIS. During my interview with Todd, he mentioned how he was inconsistent in following the acknowledgment and consequence practices of PBIS. He conveyed

how he felt that resulted in an unsuccessful school year for him. “That year was, it wasn’t a very good year for me. It was a bad year. There were a lot of classroom management issues”

(Individual interview, December 7, 2017). Todd also gratifyingly reflected upon how he became more consistent in implementing PBIS:

“That next year I decided I was going to do exactly what was in this [PBIS] plan and since that point, I haven’t had to worry about classroom management. Each year my growth scores have personally gone up, and I am having to worry less about managing behaviors.” (Individual interview, December 7, 2017)

Tammy

Tammy corresponded in her response to the invitation to participate in the study that she was is a general education teacher at Clover Middle School. During the icebreaker portion of her interview, Tammy shared that she had nine years of experience in the field of education. Tammy communicated her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as the chair of the school’s PBIS team and as a general education teacher implementing PBIS in the classroom setting. During my interview with Tammy, her enthusiasm for being a part of the implementation of PBIS at Clover Middle School was evident. She proudly communicated that the school had a positive school climate and offered evidence of the impact she felt that PBIS had on the climate of the school. “I feel that we have a positive climate, especially when we look at our behavioral data. I’ve seen that go exactly where it needs to which is down, umm, over the last several years” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017).

Christy

Christy identified herself as the principal of Clover Middle School in her response to the invitation to participate in the study. During the icebreaker portion of the interview, Christy

shared that she had 19 years of experience in the field of education. Christy imparted her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a middle school principal who supported the implementation of PBIS. During my interview with Christy, she was very forthcoming and eager to discuss the positive climate of Clover Middle School. She talked about how many students came from difficult environments but enjoyed attending the school and how the teachers give their time to offer after-school activities. She explained how the relationship among the staff members impacted the positive climate of the school. “The staff likes to be here. We all get along. We do things outside of school as a staff, and we do things as a school” (Individual interview, December 7, 2018).

Jan

During the icebreaker portion of her interview, Jan shared that she was a general education teacher at Clover Middle School and that she had 12 years of experience in the field of education. Jan conveyed her experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a member of the school’s PBIS team and as a general education teacher implementing PBIS in the classroom setting. During my interview with Jan, she expressed concern for the socioeconomic challenges her students faced. She warmly described how the staff of Clover Middle School faced the challenge of assisting students in overcoming their challenges. “We are constantly trying new approaches and techniques to challenge, excite, and inspire our students. There’s never a dull moment! Both students and staff are constantly learning and growing” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017).

Ben

In his response to the invitation to participate in the study, Ben identified himself as a general education teacher at Clover Middle School. Ben acknowledged in the icebreaker portion

of his interview that he was a novice teacher with three years of experience in the field of education. Of the participants, he had the least amount of experience in the field of education. Ben shared his experience of school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity through his lens as a middle school general education teacher. During my interview with Ben, he openly shared how the climate of Clover Middle School had changed since he first started teaching at the school. He mentioned that he lived the community near the school.

“It [climate] was much better than I expected when I arrived due, to my knowledge of the community, and is much better now. PBIS was starting to be implemented the first year I came, but we didn’t hit fidelity until last year, that’s when it started getting even better.” (Individual interview, December 7, 2018)

Ben also shared what he felt was the contributing factors behind the school’s positive climate. “It is a combination of staff, the climate I mean is a combination of the staff all getting along and students doing what they need to do” (Individual interview, December 7, 2018).

Kay

Kay identified herself as a teacher assistant in a special education classroom at Clover Middle School and proudly disclosed she had 17 years of experience in the field of education during the icebreaker portion of her interview. Kay shared her experience of school climate after PBIS has been implemented with fidelity through her lens as a middle school teacher’s assistant implementing PBIS in a special education classroom setting. As the only teacher assistant participating in the study, Kay provided a unique perspective on the experience of school climate in a secondary school implementing PBIS. During my interview with Kay, she humbly described how she enjoyed working at Clover Middle school and the happy climate of the school. “I think students and staff are happy to be here. I see everyone working together. It’s a

welcoming place to be, as a staff member and a student” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017).

Results

As the researcher, I explored how secondary school staff members in the southeastern region of North Carolina perceived school climate when PBIS was implemented with fidelity. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to understand the phenomenon of the implementation of school-wide PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools by investigating the participants’ perceptions of the school climate in secondary schools where PBIS was implemented with fidelity. Data were gathered and then analyzed using phenomenological data analysis procedures identified by Moustakas (1994) and supported by Creswell (2013). Meaning from statements was coded and established into themes and then aligned with the study’s research questions. This section presents the findings gathered from the data, including the own words of study participants, to describe the essence of the experience studied and to answer the research questions.

Theme Development

I made meaning of the data by identifying 10 open-codes from individual interviews, focus group discussions, and written responses and used them to support the development of thematic categories with textural and structural descriptions. Following the data analysis procedures of Moustakas (1994), I formed preliminary groupings by identifying each non-repetitive statement. Repetitive statements were then coded and categorized. I eliminated codes with a frequency of fewer than five occurrences leaving ten open-codes. Further analysis and clustering of the 10 open-codes yielded four central themes:

1. Experienced a positive school climate

2. Experienced improved school practices after implementing PBIS with fidelity
3. Experienced difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity
4. Experienced difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in

Table 2 illustrates the horizons of open-codes, their relative frequencies across data sets, and the classification process that was used to establish themes. Open codes occurring at the frequency of at least five occurrences across the three data sets were used to establish themes.

Table 2

Identified Themes and Open-Code Frequency

Developed Theme	Open-Code	Frequency of open code across data sets
Experienced a positive school climate	Described current school climate as positive	8
	Described current school climate as friendly/welcoming	5
	Described current climate as motivating	5
Experienced improved school practices after implementing PBIS with fidelity	Improvement in ineffective and inconsistent discipline practices	12
	Improved practices for acknowledging positive student behavior	8
Experienced difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity	Identified maintaining effective/relevant reward system as a barrier	5
	Identified financial resources as a need for maintaining PBIS	5
	Identified monitoring fidelity of implementation as a barrier	5
Experienced difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in	Identified establishing buy-in of teachers as a barrier	7
	Identified maintaining teacher buy-in as a barrier	5

Research Question Responses

Three research questions guided this study and the analysis of the data collected. By examining and categorizing statements into codes and themes described in the previous section, I was able to formulate answers to the research questions. The chart below displays the research questions and the themes identified to answer the research question.

Table 3

Research Question and Identified Themes

Research Question	Theme
How do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity?	Current experience of having a positive school climate
What benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity?	Experienced improved school practices after implementing PBIS with fidelity
What barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity?	Experienced monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity as barriers to implementing PBIS Experienced difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in as barriers to implementing PBIS with fidelity

Research Question One. Theme one emerged from the data and formed the answer to the first research question: how do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity? Theme one represents how participants experienced a positive climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity at their school. The three open codes that were used to formulate theme one described the climate of the schools at the time of the study as positive, friendly and welcoming, and as motivating. When analyzed, these three open-codes with high reoccurring frequencies depicted a common

experience related to a positive school climate after PBIS was implemented with fidelity. These three frequently reoccurring codes were: (a) Described current school climate as positive; (b) Described current school climate as friendly or welcoming; (c) Described current climate as motivating.

Described current school climate as positive. This code first emerged when the individual interview transcriptions were analyzed and then reappeared when the writing prompt responses were coded. During individual interviews, seven participants described their current school climate as positive, and the others responded using terms reflective of a positive climate. These perceptions of a positive school climate developed when participants responded to question four from the interview guide. Kim responded, “The climate is positive, positive for both the students and staff” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017). After sharing that she perceived her school climate as positive, Christie explained, “For the most part, our kids are happy to be here even though they come from difficult backgrounds, that is usually hard for them, but they enjoy being here” (Individual interview, December 7, 2017). Offering support for her perception, Tammy stated, “I feel that we have a positive climate, especially when we look at our behavioral data” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017). Allen, Rose, and Kay also initially responded to the question by directly stating their school had a positive climate before providing further elaboration as to why they perceived the school climate as positive. Similarly, but not leading with a positive phrase, Jan responded to the question by stating, “We have our problems, but overall it's a pretty consistent positive climate” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017). Myra responded to the question a little differently but still reflective of current positive school climate by stating, “Well, today, awesome. Because, just being realistic, there was a day when it wasn't awesome” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017). While all 12 participants

responded to the written response prompt by describing their school's current climate in positive terms, only Todd and Tammy specifically referred to their current school climate as positive.

Todd wrote, "The school climate at my school since the implementation of PBIS has been positive among students and staff for the most part, and the overall goal of reducing office discipline referrals has gone down as well" (Written response, December 10, 2017). Reiterating the perception, she shared during the individual interview, Tammy stated in her response, "Since implementing PBIS, my school's climate has become more positive and negative student behaviors have decreased" (Written response, December 11, 2017).

Described current school climate as friendly/welcoming. This code surfaced when the focus group transcriptions were analyzed, and then they reappeared in the analysis of the writing prompt responses. Three participants used the term *friendly* or *welcoming* when responding to the first discussion question posed to the focus group. Tammy used the term *friendly* to describe her school. She explained that she chose this word because, "this is how the majority of the staff including administration makes me feel upon coming to work each and every day of the week" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Allen chose the term *welcoming* and elaborated that his school is "a place where the environment has clear procedures and policies that welcomes students, parents, and guest" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Relating to Alan's comment, Rose shared that her school is "always looking for ways to involve our parents both during school and after-school activities" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Kim elaborated that she felt that at her school "staff go out of their way to make all of our students and visitors feel welcome" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). In her writing prompt response, Linda expressed that her current school-wide climate was "welcoming and making positive progress since the implementation of PBIS" (Written response, January 8, 2018). Brent

similarly expressed that his school's climate was "a work in progress but a climate where everyone is welcome" (Writing response prompt, December 12, 2017).

Described current climate as motivating. This code emerged when statements from interviews and the focus group session that did not directly describe school climate as positive were categorized as responses that still reflected a positive school climate experience. Brent stated during the interview, "I see that our kids are motivated. Motivated to seek praise and do well" (Individual interview, November 27, 2017) when questioned about his current school climate. Ben, during his interview, described his current school climate as "a combination of the staff all getting along and motivating students to do what they need to do" (Individual interview, December 7, 2017). When asked if there were anything else they would like to share anything else about the implementation of PBIS at the conclusion of the focus group, three participants commented about their school climate being more motivating since the implementation of PBIS. Jan first commented, "[PBIS] is great for getting everyone on the same page and motivating students to show good behavior" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Two others, Ben and Linda, agreed with Jan. Linda elaborated that "my special education students are more motivated to engage in instructional activities" (Focus group post, December 7, 2017).

Research Question Two. Theme two emerged from the data to form the answer to the second research question: what benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity? Theme two describes how secondary school staff members experienced the benefit of improved school practices after implementing PBIS with fidelity. This theme emerged from two open-codes with high reoccurring frequencies that, when analyzed, illustrated a common experience of improved school practices as a result of implementing PBIS. With 20 occurrences, this theme had a higher number of reoccurring open

codes than the other three themes that emerged. The two frequently reoccurring codes were: (a) Improvement in ineffective and inconsistent discipline practices and (b) Improved practices for acknowledging positive student behavior.

Improvement in ineffective and inconsistent discipline practices. This code appeared in the transcriptions of the individual interviews and surfaced again in the participant responses to the writing prompt. Through the lens of a middle school assistant principal, Allen revealed during his interview that Holly Middle School “had a reputation for discipline issues” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017) before the school implemented PBIS. During my interview with Kim, she rendered a similar perception of climate at Holly Middle School before the school implemented PBIS. “We had a lot of write-ups. A lot of suspensions” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017). Christy depicted a similar perception of the school climate at Clover Middle School when she took over as the principal. She reflected in her interview, “When I arrived the discipline climate was bad. There were a lot of fights. They were a lot of kids skipping class. A lot of disruptive behavior” (Individual Interview, December 7, 2017). Tammy and Kay’s responses to question five from the interview guide depicted a similar climate at Cover Middle School before the implementation of PBIS. They accredited the implementation of PBIS for making the school’s discipline practices more consistent. In Todd’s response to question 5, he eluded that Clover Middle had inconsistent discipline practices before the school implemented PBIS. “I was here when we were not very consistent with what was going on. Each teacher had their own management plan. With PBIS that changed” (Individual interview, December 7, 2017). Todd’s statements insinuating that PBIS improved the consistency of discipline practices was supported by the code reoccurring in the focus group transcriptions. In response to discussion question four from the focus group guide, Ben posted about “using a

discipline flow chart for a consistent approach to discipline” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Kim, Jan, and Allen agreed with Ben’s post that establishing discipline flowcharts was an influential factor in PBIS implementation. Christy’s response to the writing prompt reinforced that PBIS improved the consistency of indiscipline practices.

“PBIS has positively impacted the school climate at [Clover Middle]. Since expectations are taught, and consequences are doled out evenly/fairly, ambiguity has been eliminated, and teachers (as well as students) have a clear understanding of how things are run. The school has become more safe, more fair, and more positive.” (Written response, December 15, 2017)

Myra affirmed in her written response that the implementation of PBIS improved the discipline practices at Holly Middle School. “Since the implementation of a school-wide PBIS, discipline is down, and expectations for a safe and orderly environment has increased” (Written response, December 11, 2017).

Improved practices for acknowledging positive student behavior. This open code was developed from reoccurring statements found during the analysis of the individual interviews and focus group transcriptions. The code first emerged from Brent and Linda’s response to question six from the interview guide. As the principal of Westgate High School, Brent shared that staff members were arbitrary in how they rewarded students for positive behavior before implementing PBIS. He insinuated that PBIS improved how the school staff acknowledged the positive behavior of students. “I think that PBIS provides a framework that kids learn what the expectations are and that we deliver the goods [rewards] when we say we are. I think that PBIS holds us accountable, as adults, to deliver on our promises” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017). Linda’s response to question six also suggested that PBIS improved how the staff at

Westgate High School acknowledged the positive behavior of students. “Staff members are more consistent with how students are rewarded, and in turn, the students are more consistent with their behavior” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017). During the focus group, several of the participants suggested that implementing PBIS improved how staff responded to positive student behavior. Question four of the focus group guide generated statements that produced further support that schools implementing PBIS with fidelity experience improved practices for acknowledging positive student behavior. Myra made an initial post to question four that identified school-wide expectations and the teaching and reinforcement of those expectations as a practice of PBIS that influenced her school’s climate. “Establishing, teaching and the reinforcement of school-wide expectations, this has been the key for us” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Linda, Jan, and Brent posted in agreement with Myra. Rose and Kay commented on Myra’s post elaborating on why they felt acknowledging positive behavior impacted school climate. Rose commented, “I see the kids trying harder to earn praise and rewards” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Kay posted, “Yes, kids do better when the adults look for the good in kids. Looking for the good change the climate at my school” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017).

Research Question Three. Both themes three and four are used to answer research question three; what barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity? Theme three identified monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity as barriers to implementing PBIS while theme four identified establishing and maintaining staff buy-in as barriers to implementing PBIS with fidelity.

Theme Three: Experienced difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity. This theme emerged from three open-codes with high reoccurring frequencies that,

when analyzed, illustrated a common experience of difficulty monitoring and maintaining the fidelity of PBIS in secondary schools. The three frequently reoccurring codes were: (a) Identified maintaining effective and relevant reward system as a barrier; (b) Identified financial resources as a need for maintaining PBIS; (c) Identified monitoring fidelity of implementation as a barrier.

Identified maintaining effective and relevant reward systems as a barrier. This theme emerged only during the analysis of the individual interview transcriptions. Five of the 12 participants responded that maintaining a reward system is a barrier to the implementation of PBIS when they responded to question 11 of the interview guide. The five participants experienced difficulty either selecting appropriate student rewards or maintaining the reward system. Allen discussed his experience with teachers as not being consistent in implementing the reward system and planning rewards that students desired.

“Students are to receive stamps from each teacher for doing what is expected daily.

Sometimes teachers forget. The other challenge is the lack of planning for different and more engaging PBIS celebrations. We often have students who do not desire to earn the stamps to attend the PBIS celebration.” (Individual interview, November 6, 2017)

During my interview with Linda, she also implied that maintaining an effect student reward system was a potential barrier to implementation of PBIS. “Giving the rewards and getting the students to buy into the rewards can be hard. Some of the students I work with will say that they don’t care about rewards, even when they do” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017). Kim and Todd briefly referenced maintaining the student reward system as a second barrier to implementing PBIS at their schools. Brent disclosed that one of the biggest criticisms

that his staff had relayed to him was related to how students were selected for rewards in previous years. He explained,

“As teachers, they wanted to award kids, but at first they didn’t have a lot of input in how we were going to do that. In who should be rewarded and who should not be rewarded and when and how they will be rewarded.” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017)

Brent went on to explain how his PBIS team approached that barrier by giving the staff more of a voice through periodic surveys.

Identified financial resources as a need for maintaining PBIS. I developed this code from reoccurring statements found when analyzing the transcriptions of the individual participant interviews. When responding to question 11 from the interview guide, Brent mentioned his struggle, as a principal, funding the acknowledgment system that is a part of the school’s implementation of PBIS.

“Funding has been difficult. We’ve had to be really creative in fundraising and umm, getting support from our district but, umm, there wasn’t like a PBIS budget or Title One funds that we could tap into, so, we have had to be really creative.” (Individual interview, November 29, 2017)

Brent was the only participant to list financial resources as a barrier to implementing PBIS specifically. However, several participants indicated that more financial resources would help overcome the barriers to implementing PBIS. When responding to question 12 from the interview guide, four participants suggested that extra funding would be beneficial in overcoming barriers to the implementation of PBIS. Jan mentioned the need for extra funding for purchasing student incentives. “Money always helps. I mean for the rewards and stuff” (Individual interview, December 6, 2017). Kay and Todd’s responses echoed the same need for

more funds to maintain the acknowledgment system of PBIS. Tammy identified that extra funding would be beneficial for purchasing technology that could make data tracking easier. “If we could purchase a digital program for tracking our student incentives, I think it would improve our staff buy-in” (Individual interview, December 7, 2017).

Identified monitoring fidelity of implementation as a barrier. This code first surfaced while I was analyzing the interview transcriptions and reoccurred more frequently in the transcribed focus group posts. Question five from the focus group guide generated the most frequency of the code. During my interview with Brent, he listed monitoring the fidelity of implementing PBIS as one of several barriers he experienced implementing PBIS. “Monitoring the fidelity is a challenge, and luckily I have a team that is willing to adjust you know, when we see an issue” (Individual interview, November 27, 2017). During the focus group, Christie initiated a conversation about the initial implementation of PBIS being hard to monitor. “The first year was tough because it [PBIS] was something new, hard to monitor” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Todd and Ben both agreed with Christi’s post. Ben went as far as to speculate that implementation fidelity may have been the biggest barrier to implementing PBIS at Clover Middle School. “I would say that maybe our biggest barrier to implementing PBIS, adults being consistent” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Kay insightfully responded how she felt that implementation fidelity was the key to her school’s successfully implementing PBIS.

“Obstacles that we have been faced, that I’m aware of, would be that a majority of staff were not on board and not rewarding the kids as stated in the PBIS handbook, fidelity is the key of it all! Teachers have to be willing to take small success just as they would the obvious huge successes.” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017)

Theme Four: Experienced difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in. This theme emerged from a statement that first appeared when I analyzed the data from the individual interviews. I then coded several reoccurrences and related statements during the analysis of the data gathered from the focus group session. I identified two open-codes with high reoccurring frequencies that, when analyzed, illustrated a common experience of difficulty monitoring and maintaining the fidelity of PBIS in secondary schools. The two frequently reoccurring codes were: (a) Identified establishing buy-in of teachers as a barrier and, (b) Identified maintaining teacher buy-in as a barrier

Identified establishing buy-in of teachers as a barrier. I first recorded this code in the individual interview transcriptions. I recorded several reoccurrences of the code while analyzing the focus group transcriptions. Jan and Linda specifically referenced staff buy-in as a barrier to their school's initial implementation of PBIS. During my interview with Jan, she identified initial staff buy-in as a past barrier to the school's implementation of PBIS. "Just getting everyone on the same page is all. That initial staff buy-in, you know" (Individual interview, December 6, 2017). When I asked Linda at the end of her interview if there were anything else she'd like to share about implementing PBIS, she reflected on the importance of establishing implementation buy-in from staff members. "Buy-in makes a huge difference. Before, we had a group where some were for it, and some were not. It doesn't work unless you have 100 percent or, close to 100 percent on board for it to work" (Individual interview, November 27, 2017).

Responses posted to question five from the focus group guide generated the code to reoccur five more times. Brent posted that he felt that it was particularly hard to obtain teacher buy-in at the high school level. Allan asserted his agreement with Brent.

“I agree. I was as a high school four years ago during PBIS implementation. Teachers buy-in was an issue. Many of the teachers did not understand how or why they were to reward students for doing what they were supposed to do. Once they were past that PBIS was more acceptable.” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017)

Linda chimed in agreeing that it seemed more difficult to obtain initial buy-in. She offered the excuse, “It’s [PBIS] often seen as an elementary thing” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). Responding separately from Allen’s post, Linda posted a response to discussion question three indicating that once the PBIS team obtained staff buy-in, implementing PBIS was easy at Westgate High School. Her post stated, “Getting buy-in was hard. But, once all the staff was finally on board and we consistently followed our PBIS plan, implementation has been easy. I like that there are clear and consistent expectations throughout the school” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017). In response to Linda’s post, Kim explained. “I can see that. At first, the task of actually implementing PBIS seemed overwhelming. There is a lot to do beginning implementing PBIS. Once I went through training and began implementing PBIS, it became routine” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017).

Identified maintaining teacher buy-in as a barrier. This code emerged while I was analyzing the focus group transcriptions. Five participants posted statements that indicated that maintaining teacher buy-in was a barrier to implementing PBIS. Tracy initiated a conversation that recognized not only was it difficult to obtain buy-in but to also maintain staff buy-in over time as a barrier to implementing PBIS. “The biggest obstacle in implementing PBIS at our school was getting the entire staff to buy in at a timely manner and staying consistent after doing so” (Focus group discussion, December 7, 2017). Christie added, “Achieving and then constantly maintaining staff buy-in impacts the outcomes of PBIS” (Focus group discussion,

December 7, 2017). Rose, Myra, and Kay posted in agreement that maintaining staff buy-in is a barrier to the implementation of PBIS. Rose explained how most staff members start off implementing PBIS consistently but that keeping the momentum is hard. “At the beginning of the year we are all about PBIS, but as the year progresses, it’s hard to keep up everyone’s momentum, and we become less consistent” (Focus group post, December 7, 2017).

Summary

Chapter Four presented the results of a qualitative research study conducted to discover how secondary school staff members in the southeastern region of North Carolina perceived school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity. This phenomenological study sought to understand how a sample of 12 middle and high school staff members perceived their school’s climate after the school had implemented PBIS. Results were presented in narrative form and organized by themes used to answer the three research questions that guided the study. Results show that all 12 participants favorably described their school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity and credited some aspect of the PBIS framework for improving their school’s climate. Each of the participants identified at least one barrier to implementing PBIS with fidelity in secondary schools during their interview and then also agreed with one another’s presented barriers during the online focus group discussions. This study’s findings are significant in several ways and, as discussed in Chapter Five, may have meaningful implications in the understanding of the impact of implementing PBIS in secondary schools and understanding of the barriers faced by middle and high schools implementing PBIS.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover how secondary school staff members in the southeastern region of North Carolina perceived school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity. Based on the definitions of PBIS provided (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Swan-Bradway et al., 2013), PBIS was defined as a data-driven systematic framework that implements multiple tiers of evidence-based practices to promote positive behavioral change in students and to meet the academic, social, and behavioral needs of all students by fostering a positive school climate. At the time of this dissertation, research related to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools was limited (Bradshaw et al., 2015). Many research studies related to PBIS were quantitative (Freeman et al., 2016) and few qualitative researchers focused on the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff members (Pinkelman et al., 2015). Three research questions guided the study and the analysis of the data that was collected: (a) How do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity?; (b) What benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity?; (c) What barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity? Data collection began with conducting semi-structured interviews with the study participants. After the completion of participant interviews, the participants partook in an online focus group. Data collection concluded with a final written response to a prompt provided by each participant.

This chapter provides a summary of the study's findings along with highlights of the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the findings. Delimitations and limitations of the study are presented and discussed. Also included are recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this study worked at three different secondary schools located in two different school districts in the southeastern region of North Carolina. They shared a great deal of information about their experiences with implementing PBIS in secondary schools and their similar perceptions of school climate after the implementation of PBIS in their schools. Analysis of the data revealed 10 open-codes which yielded four central themes: (a) experienced a positive school climate; (b) experienced improved school practices after implementing PBIS with fidelity; (c) experienced difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity; (d) experienced difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in. The results of this study show that all participants perceived a positive school climate, identified a benefit of implementing PBIS, and identified barriers to the fidelity of PBIS implementation.

Answering the first research question, the results of this study suggested that secondary school staff members describe their school climate in positive terms after their school reaches fidelity in the implementation of PBIS. During the interviews, each of the participants described their school's climate after the implementation of PBIS in positive terms. Each participant also used positive terms when asked to describe their school climate after the implementation of PBIS in one sentence in the final stage of data collection. Not one participant of the study associated the implementation of PBIS with a negative school climate. The consistency in which participants experienced a positive school climate after the implementation of PBIS, despite their different school and district settings, provided a firm answer to the first research question.

The answer to the second research question developed in another area where the secondary school staff members shared a lot of common experiences, the improvement in school practices after the implementation of PBIS. When data across all data sets were analyzed, each

participant had described a positive change in school practices as a benefit of implementing PBIS. Participants identified that either their school experienced improved discipline practices or improved student acknowledgment practices after the implementation of PBIS. Although participant experiences were divided among two themes, the commonality that the participants experienced improved school practices as a benefit of implementing PBIS in their school provided a solid answer to the second research question.

Answering the final research question, the results of this study suggested that secondary school staff members experience monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity and establishing and maintaining staff buy-in as barriers to implementing PBIS. This answer to the third research question was provided by themes three and four. These themes appeared in a discussion around potential barriers that was first introduced in the individual interviews then later revisited during the focus group. Although the results yielded various perceptions of barriers to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools, difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity and difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in were identified as barriers experienced most among the study participants.

Discussion

As described in Chapter Two, this study was grounded in theoretical and empirical literature. A theoretical framework is presented and used to support the research questions. The following section establishes the contribution the results of this study provide to the theoretical and empirical literature by shedding light on the relationship between the study's findings and the information documented in the literature review. This section includes how this study confirms previous research, contributes to the field of education, and extends on literature presented in Chapter Two.

Theoretical Literature Discussion

This study of secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate after the implementation of PBIS with fidelity was grounded in Mezirow's (1996) transformative learning theory and influenced by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Together, these theories established the relationship between secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate and the implementation of PBIS with fidelity.

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1996) guided the theoretical approach of the study. Based on the theoretical framework of transformational learning theory described by Mezirow (1996), this study explored the influence that PBIS, when implemented with fidelity, had on secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate. Interestingly, all participants perceived the climate of their school in a positive light after the implementation of PBIS. Moyer and Sinclair (2016) provided insight gained from applying transformative learning theory to the analysis of learning experiences outside that of the typical classroom setting and highlighted gaps within the literature related to the learning domains of transformative learning theory. The results of this study extend the literature related to the theory of transformative learning by applying the theory to learning that takes place outside of the classroom setting by examining the perspectives of secondary school staff members and by producing an opportunity for other school staff members and educational leaders to learn from the understanding of those experiences.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) provided the foundational theoretical framework for the implementation of PBIS. Social learning theory has been widely used to support the implementation of PBIS in many schools as an initiative for addressing student behavior (Chin et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2014; Sheridan et al., 2011). Similar to how Farmer et al. (2014)

described using social learning theory to create a theoretical foundation for implementing PBIS to address behavioral change in a school environment, this study used the theory to create a theoretical foundation for the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools to bring about school climate change. Results of this study provided additional evidence that social learning theory supports the implementation of PBIS.

Empirical Literature Discussion

The results of this study contributed to the existing body of literature that supports the implementation of PBIS to bring about school climate change. Many teachers, schools, and school districts across the nation struggle to address the problem behavior of students and maintain a positive school climate (Bosworth et al., 2011; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Monahan et al., 2014). School climate has become the main focus of many federal and local school improvement initiatives (Bradshaw et al., 2014). Maintaining a positive school climate has been associated with improved student behavior (Elsaesser et al., 2013; Low et al., 2014) and has been recognized as having an important influence on individual student outcomes (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Klein et al., 2012; Shukla, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Wang & Degol, 2016). The implementation of PBIS is intended to enhance school climate and address student behavior throughout the school environment (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Researchers have suggested that PBIS has positively influenced school environments (Bradshaw, et al. 2009; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). The results of this study revealed that all 12 participants favorably described their school climate after PBIS had been implemented with fidelity and credited some aspect of PBIS for improving their school's climate. Seven of the participants explicitly used the term "positive" to describe their current school climate during their interview, and the other six participants used terms reflective of a positive school climate. With the consistency in which the

participants experienced an improved school climate, the results of this study provided significant additional support for the implementation of PBIS to improve school climate.

This research study contributed to the existing body of literature regarding the implementation of PBIS specifically in secondary schools. Most of the current research regarding PBIS had a primary focus on the implementation of PBIS in elementary schools (Kelm et al., 2014) and research related to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools was limited (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Calaraella, et al., 2011; Flannery et al., 2013; Malloy et al., 2015).

Previous researchers have suggested that there is a relationship between the implementation of PBIS and improved school climate in secondary schools (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Calaraella et al., 2011; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). The results of this study indicated that there are benefits to implementing PBIS in secondary schools. Each of the 12 participants of this study reported a benefit of implementing PBIS in their schools. The two most experienced benefits of implementing PBIS reported by the study participants was the improvement in ineffective and inconsistent discipline practices and the improvement in practices for acknowledging positive student behavior. With the results of this study indicating that there are positive benefits to implementing PBIS in secondary schools, this research study expanded the literature available on the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools and the literature available regarding the benefits of implementing PBIS.

The results of this study also expanded on the literature available regarding potential barriers to implementing PBIS in secondary schools. Researchers have previously identified barriers to implementing school-wide practices, like PBIS, as an area in need of further research (Feuerborn et al., 2016; Flannery et al., 2013; Turri et al., 2016). Each of the participants in this study identified at least one barrier to implementing PBIS with fidelity in their secondary school

setting. The results of this study revealed that most of the participants identified either difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity or difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in as barriers to implementing PBIS in their secondary school. Several researchers have identified staff buy-in as a frequent barrier to the implementation and sustainability of school-wide PBIS (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Lohrmann et al., 2016; McDaniel et al., 2014; Pinkelman et al., 2015). The results of this study not only expanded the literature related to the barriers of implementing PBIS in secondary school, but also helped to confirm the identification of staff buy-in as a potential barrier to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools made by other researchers.

Implications

This study brought to light theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for district leaders, school administrators, and teachers leading the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools. These implications assist in determining the strengths and weaknesses in studying the influence that PBIS has on the perceptions secondary school staff members have of school climate after the implementation of PBIS. Further, this study allowed the voices of secondary school staff members to be shared. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications presented in this study along with the shared voice of study participants could guide the decision-making process of implementing PBIS at the local school district level as well as at the individual school and classroom level.

District Leaders

The results of this study could be used to guide the decision-making process of school district leaders that provide support to secondary schools implementing PBIS. It is important for educational leaders to maintain positive school climates and safe school environments

(Calaraella et al., 2011; Klein et al., 2012; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Consistent with much of the literature presented in Chapter Two, the results of this study found that the implementation of PBIS with fidelity had a positive influence on school climate. The strength of the findings of this study is that all participants describe their school's climate in positive terms after the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. These shared positive school climate perceptions and the benefits of implementing PBIS can be used as additional support for school district leaders to encourage their secondary schools to implement PBIS. Researchers have identified district support has as an important aspect of the sustainability of PBIS (McIntosh et al., 2014). The results of this study may assist district leaders in making decisions on how they will demonstrate their support of PBIS in secondary schools. Those decisions could then potentially improve the sustainability of PBIS in the district's secondary schools.

School Administrators

Through an understanding of the perceptions of the secondary school staff members that participated in the study, school administrators may be more prepared to develop support strategies for the school-wide implementation of PBIS. Researchers have indicated that classroom teachers have expressed that PBIS becomes a priority within a school when school administrators are actively involved in implementation (Andreou et al., 2015). The results of this study provide administrators of secondary schools with information on how secondary school staff members that participated in the study perceived school climate after the implementation of PBIS with fidelity, the benefits of PBIS implementation experienced by the participants, and also the barriers of implementing PBIS the participants experienced. According to the experiences of participants of this study, their schools experienced either an improvement in ineffective and inconsistent discipline practices or improvements in practices for acknowledging positive student

behavior. School administrators can use this information to gain an understanding of how implementing PBIS may influence their school climate. School administrators may use the experiences shared by the study participants regarding the barriers to implementing PBIS to strategically plan to address the potential of difficulty when monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity of PBIS in their schools. The results of this study provided school administrators with both benefits and barriers to the implementation of PBIS that could be used to establish support strategies that may improve the likelihood of the school experiencing outcomes similar those experienced by the participants of this study.

Secondary Teachers

Significant implications of the study's findings arise for secondary classroom teachers. Over half of the participants of the study were secondary classroom teachers. Participants in the study shared similar experiences of positive school climates and benefits of implementing PBIS. Gleaning from the lived experiences of their peers, secondary school teachers may exhibit more commitment to the implementation of PBIS in their classrooms. Todd's experience of not demonstrating a commitment to implementing PBIS initially and then dramatically changing his perception may be of particular interest to some secondary teachers. Researchers have identified that obtaining full staff commitment to PBIS can be a challenge (Feuerborn et al., 2015). The results of this study may assist secondary school teachers in understanding how the implementation of PBIS may improve their school climate and thus improve their commitment to its implementation.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of this study occurred as a result of the choices I made related to the setting of the study and the selection of the study participants. The schools selected as sites for

gathering study participants were purposely limited to secondary schools scoring at or above 80 on the SET which indicated the school was implementing PBIS with fidelity. I also purposely limited the study participants to only secondary school staff members who were employed before the school implemented PBIS and after implementation. These delimitations provided an intended boundary to the reach of the study results.

Along with the presented delimitation, this study was also not without limitations. The results of the study are limited by the study's ability to be generalized to other geographical locations. Although the participants were staff members from three different secondary schools located in two different school districts to increase the generalizability of the study, the study was still limited to a regional portion of the state of North Carolina. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to school districts located beyond the southeastern region of North Carolina. An additional limitation of the study may be the voluntary nature of the study. The desire to participate in the study may have limited the data collected from the study participants. A preconceived positive perception of PBIS by the participants may have impacted their willingness to participate in the study and thus limited the data collected. These limitations contributed to the lack of generalizability of the conclusions that may be drawn from the results of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the findings of this study, along with its delimitations and limitations, further research is recommended. Specifically, further research is recommended that replicates the methods of this study in other geographic locations, research that further investigates the relationship between the implementation of PBIS and school climate in secondary schools, and research that further explores possible barriers of implementing PBIS in secondary schools

implementing PBIS. Because this study was limited to the southeastern region of North Carolina, additional studies replicating the methods of this study should be conducted in other schools across the nation. Since only two to the study participants were from a high school setting, additional research using high school settings should be conducted. Although this study addressed the need for research investigating the relationship between the implementation of PBIS and school climate in secondary schools, further research is needed to confirm if other secondary schools experience a positive relationship between implementing PBIS and school climate outcomes. Because this study revealed difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity as a barrier to the implementation of PBIS that was not clearly addressed in the literature presented in Chapter 2, further research is also needed to determine if establishing and maintaining implementation fidelity is a barrier to the implementation of PBIS in other secondary schools. These recommendations are based on the findings of this study, which found that the implementation of PBIS with fidelity had a positive influence on the participants' perceptions of their school climate and that there are benefits and barriers to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools.

Summary

This study was developed to explore how secondary school staff members perceived school climate after the implementation of PBIS. The lived experiences of the study participants provided insight on the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools, and the impact PBIS has on staff perceptions of school climate after PBIS had been implemented. Expanding on current literature, this research study examined the school climate perceptions of different secondary school staff members after their school had implemented PBIS with fidelity to identify any potential consistencies in the perceptions of those staff members. The results of this study found

that the implementation of PBIS with fidelity had a positive influence on the participants' perceptions of their school's climate and the participants revealed how their schools experienced benefits from implementing PBIS. The study's findings also revealed that the study participants had notable experiences related to difficulty monitoring and maintaining implementation fidelity and difficulty establishing and maintaining staff buy-in as barriers to the implementation of PBIS in secondary schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 6, 2017

Tory Lawrence

IRB Approval 2965.100617: A Phenomenological Study of Educators' Perspectives of School Climate in Secondary Schools Implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Support

Dear Tory Lawrence,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B: Assistance Request

Dear (NC Department of Public Instruction Behavior Consultant)

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting a qualitative research study as part of the requirements for a doctorate in Educational Leadership. The title of my research study is “A Phenomenological Study of School Climate in Secondary Schools Implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Support with Fidelity as Experienced by School Staff”. The purpose of my study is to understand secondary school staff members’ perceptions of school climate in schools implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) with fidelity.

I am writing to request your assistance in locating school districts in your region with middle or high schools identified as implementing PBIS with fidelity based on the schools’ current SET score. I will be reaching out to these districts to provide them with information about the study and to seek permission to invite school staff members to participate in my study.

Thank you for considering my request for assistance.

Sincerely,

Tory Lawrence
Doctorial Candidate

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Letter

Date:

To: (Staff Member at a Secondary School Implementing PBIS with Fidelity)

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting a qualitative research study as part of the requirements for a doctorate in Educational Leadership.

The purpose of my study is to understand secondary school staff members' perceptions of school climate in schools implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) with fidelity, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study. If you are currently employed as a teacher, teacher assistant, counselor, or administrator within a middle or high school that is currently implementing PBIS with fidelity, were employed at the school prior to the implementation of PBIS, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete an interview either face-to-face or via video conferencing, participate in an online focus group and respond to a written prompt regarding your experiences with school climate and the implementation of PBIS with fidelity. It should take you no more than one hour to complete each of these procedures. Your participation will be completely confidential, and no personal or identifying information will be shared. To participate, please sign and return the attached consent form via e-mail within five days. I will be contacting you to schedule the interview upon receipt of the e-mail.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a token of appreciation after the completion of all procedures.

Sincerely,

Tory D. Lawrence

Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT WITH
FIDELITY AS EXPERIENCED BY SCHOOL STAFF

Tory Lawrence
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of secondary school staff members' perspectives of school climate when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently employed at a middle or high school currently implementing PBIS with fidelity. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Tory Lawrence, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand how school climate is perceived by secondary school staff members when PBIS is implemented with fidelity. The researcher seeks to answer the following research questions:

4. How do various secondary school staff members describe school climate when a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity?
5. What benefits, if any, do secondary school staff members experience from implementing PBIS with fidelity?
6. What barriers, if any, do participants experience in the implementation of PBIS with fidelity?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an individual interview. You will choose the interview method (face-to-face or Skype) that you find most convenient. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and will be approximately 30 minutes in length.
2. Participate in a focus group. The focus group will meet in an online forum that will last approximately one hour scheduled at a time convenient for participants.
3. Complete a written response to a writing prompt. After participating in the focus group, you will be requested send an email within 24 hours to the researcher with a one sentence response to a writing prompt that will be provided.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. Why did you become involved in education?
2. How long have you been in education?
3. What is your favorite part of your job?
4. Describe the current climate of your school?
5. How would you describe the climate of your school prior to your school implementing PBIS with fidelity? Probe- Describe any significant difference in the school climate. What changes in school climate have you experienced?
6. How has the implementation of PBIS influenced the school climate in your school? Probe- Describe any changes in school climate that may have occurred and the length of time that the change became evident after the implementation of PBIS with fidelity.
7. Describe a personal experience with the change in school climate in your school. Probe- Describe any influence PBIS has had on school climate that you have experienced personally/professionally?
8. How do you think the school community (faculty, students, families, and community members) perceives the school's climate since the implementation of PBIS? Probe- How about before? Describe indications/observations that lead to your conclusions.
9. What aspect of PBIS do you feel has influenced your school's climate?
10. What barriers, if any, did the school experience in implementing PBIS with fidelity?
11. What barriers, if any, did you experience in implementing PBIS with fidelity?
12. What additional resources would have been helpful in overcoming any barriers?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with implementing PBIS with fidelity in a secondary school? Probe- any advice for others?

Appendix F: Focus Group Guide

1. Describe your school in three words.
2. Why did you choose those words?
3. Describe your experience with the implementation of PBIS
4. What aspects of implementing PBIS has had the most positive or negative impact on your school's climate?
5. What particular PBIS practice has had the most influence on your school climate?
6. What are some obstacles to implementing PBIS with fidelity that you may have experienced or seen others experience?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about your school's climate and the implementation of PBIS?

Appendix G: Written Response Prompt

Describe the school climate of your school since the implementation of school-wide PBIS in one sentence.