FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ELEMENTARY ADMINISTRATORS' DECISION-MAKING

EXPERIENCES REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL-WIDE BEHAVIOR

IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Meredith Miller Welch

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs. Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory guided this study to answer the central research question: What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs? Sub questions for the study include (1) what school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs? and (2) what global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs? Criterion sampling was used to select elementary school administrators from a large school district in the southeastern region of the United States. Data was collected through demographic questionnaires, a virtual writing prompt, individual interviews, and focus groups. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological reduction process (1994) was used for data analysis. The analysis includes epoché, horizonalization, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and the integration of textural and structural descriptions to construct meanings and essences of the phenomenon. Data analysis resulted in themes providing suggestions for future research. The results of this study indicated the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP are: school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, time and money, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, consistency, and teacher buy-in.

Keywords: school discipline, exclusionary discipline practices, school-wide behavior programs, leadership decision-making

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List of Abbreviations

Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT)

Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESSA)

Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS)

Restorative Practices (RP)

Restorative Justice (RJ)

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

School-Wide Behavior Improvement Programs (SWBIP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The use of traditional, exclusionary methods of behavior management is a pressing

educational issue (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018). Each year,

more than 2.6 million children are removed from schools for out-of-school suspension, with

more than 40% having recurring suspensions. In addition, more than 2.7 million children

experience in-school suspension and more than 111,000 are expelled permanently (Civil Rights

Data, 2018). Alarmingly, the 2015-2016 suspension rates translate to more than 11 million days

of lost instruction, more than 60,000 school years, 60 million hours of lost instruction, and

billions of wasted dollars (ACLU, 2020). Furthermore, exclusionary discipline practices, such as

suspensions and expulsions, lead to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of school

dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system

(Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et

al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2017; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş &

Vuran, 2016). The American Psychological Association and the American Academy of

Pediatrics advocate for prevention efforts and alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices

through positive school-wide approaches to behavior management (Grasley et al., 2019).

Despite research and recommendations, many schools have yet to implement school-wide

approaches to managing student behavior. The problem is the factors that influence elementary

administrators' decisions whether or not to implement school-wide behavior improvement

programs are unknown. The purpose of this study was to describe the factors that influence

elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement

programs.

Chapter One of this study includes a historical, social, and theoretical overview of school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs. In this chapter, this researcher articulates any biases, philosophical assumptions, and the research paradigm. First, the problem and purpose statement define the intent of the study. Next, the practical, empirical, and theoretical importance of the study is discussed. At the conclusion of Chapter One, the research questions driving the focus of the study are defined and a list of definitions are provided to the reader with a basic understanding of terms used throughout the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

Research suggests using positive school-wide behavior improvement programs (SWBIP) to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices (Chitiyo & May, 2018; George, et al., 2018; Grasley et al., 2019). For this study, school-wide behavior improvement programs, not isolated to School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), included programs that encompassed positive and proactive supports for student behavior (Chityo & May, 2018; Grasley et al., 2019; Singer & Wang, 2009). Yet, despite a discriminatory history, many schools have not adopted positive behavioral interventions and supports. Instead, several schools continue to employ traditional, exclusionary discipline practices (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016). Although research has been conducted on the sustainability of SWBIP (Chitiyo & May, 2018), the benefits of implementing SWBIP (Chitiyo & May, 2018; Grasley, et al., 2019; Nese & McIntosh, 2016), and stakeholders' views of SWBIP (Aldridge & Damanik, 2017; Bretherton et al., 2016; Kline, 2016; Jean-Pierre & Drummond, 2018), little, if any, research exists on the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether or not to implement SWBIP. Analyzing the impact that

SWBIP has on society and theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP are foundational elements that must be explored.

Historical Overview

Exclusionary discipline practices became prevalent amidst growing concerns with crime control over the last three decades of the twentieth century (Jacobson et al., 2019). Following several mass school shootings in 1994, the passing of the Gun-Free School Act (GFSA) resulted in a zero-tolerance approach to school discipline in American Public Schools (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Dohy & Banks, 2018; Jacobsen et al., 2019). A zero-tolerance approach to school discipline is defined as removing students from school for a given behavioral offense (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). For example, in an extreme case, the GFSA mandated students carrying a firearm be expelled from school for a minimum of one year (Dohy & Banks, 2018).

Furthermore, for schools to maintain federal funding, the GFSA mandated schools enact zero-tolerance policies (Dohy & Banks, 2018). However, because the development and enforcement of such policies remained the responsibility of each state, the determination of suspensions and expulsions resulted in ambiguity and subjectivity (Dohy & Banks, 2018). Therefore, although the initial purpose of the GFSA was to reduce violent offenses and maintain safe and orderly schools, the statute ultimately resulted in the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices for minor infractions (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Dohy & Banks, 2018).

In January 2014, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education enacted a two-part federal guidance document with recommended practices for fostering supportive and equitable school discipline (Gregory et al., 2017). More recently, legislation titled Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA S. 1177), passed by Congress, includes several provisions intended to reduce

disciplinary exclusion and disparities in discipline data (Capatosto, 2015; Gregory et al., 2017).

Within the legislation, school climate is a critical indicator of student success and requires

educational entities to address how they will reduce exclusionary discipline measures (Capatosto,

2015).

As evidenced in historical research, zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices are

ineffective (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019;

Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran,

2016). Yet, problem behavior is one of the most pressing issues in today's classrooms (Chityo &

May, 2018). To address such issues, increased awareness of alternative methods to traditional

discipline is needed (Chityo & May, 2018; Gregory et al., 2017). As such, research suggests

using school-wide prevention models that establish expected behaviors and develop a consistent

strategy for maintaining disciplinary incidents (Chityo & May, 2018).

One suggested approach to reduce exclusionary discipline practices is School-Wide

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) (Chityo & May, 2018; Grasley et al.,

2019). Initially developed in the 1980s, SWPBIS is an approach to behavior management that

establishes students' social culture and behavior expectations for learning environments to be

safe and effective (Nese & McIntosh, 2016). Thus, SWBPIS began implementing behavior

programs that moved away from exclusionary strategies and a more proactive, positive approach

to student behavior (Chityo & May, 2018; Grasley et al., 2019; Singer & Wang, 2009). To date,

over 4,000 schools have adopted SWPBIS, and over 5,000 schools have identified preventative,

more proactive approaches to address student behavior (Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016).

Impact on Society

Elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP impact society-at-large in multiple ways. Maintaining high levels of academic achievement while improving school climate, safety, and discipline practices is a national priority (Adamson et al., 2019). In addition to addressing these national priorities, the use of exclusionary discipline practices in schools must be reduced (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier, Loman, et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). From a social perspective, exclusionary discipline practices and implementation of more proactive approaches of SWBIP impact students. Thus, students are the stakeholder group most likely to be impacted by reducing zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices within the educational system.

Because exclusionary discipline practices are deemed ineffective, implementation of proactive, school-wide approaches to school discipline is imperative (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). The social context of this research topic applies to any school, regardless of location or grade level. Furthermore, because the implementation of SWBIP involves all stakeholders, the social context of this study includes school administrators, teachers, school staff, and students (Jean-Pierre & Drummond, 2018),

Theoretical Underpinning

Theory, an organized and systematic set of concepts, is an essential component of research, allowing the researcher to understand a problem (Fain, 2004). Frameworks should assist researchers in ensuring research projects are comprehensive and focused on the intent of the proposed research (Green, 2014). Using observed phenomena, a theoretical framework

establishes a relational system of constructs and laws (Gall, 2007). Multiple theories have been used to examine aspects of school-wide behavior intervention programs. However, for this study, two prominent theories, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1971) and behaviorism (Watson, 1913), consistently appeared in research regarding behavior improvement programs and exclusionary discipline practices. In addition, to illuminate elementary school administrators' decision-making processes, behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) provided the framework for this study.

Social cognitive theory is a psychological perspective emphasizing the impact that one's social environment has on motivation, learning, and self-regulation (Martin, 2004; Schunk & Usher, 2019). Bandura's (1971) social cognitive theory, reformulated from social learning theory, emphasizes the importance of motivation and social behaviors in human behavior. In addition, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of observational learning. For observational learning to occur, individuals must have a model, retain what the model did, produce the modeled behavior, and be motivated to do so (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977b). In addition, the characteristics of the model can affect observers' motivation. These characteristics include competence, model status, and perceived similarity to the model (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Similarly, motivated actions depend heavily on the positive consequences of the model relating to cognitive beliefs developed through social interactions between the model and observers (Schunk & DiBendetto, 2020).

In addition to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991b), the theory of behaviorism (Watson, 1913) remains a prominent theory in discussions regarding behavior management and approaches to school discipline (Boulden, 2010; Lovitt, 1970). Behaviorism is a psychological approach that uses scientific and objective methods to understand behavior (Watson, 1913). This

approach to understanding behavior focuses on stimulus-response behaviors and identifies that behaviors manifest through environmental interaction (McLeod, 2017).

While social cognitive theory (1991b) and the theory of behaviorism (1913) are frequently used to frame research regarding behavior management and programs, for this study, behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) was used to discuss decisions made by school administrators whether to implement SWBIP. Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) provides a comprehensive understanding of the nature of human decision-making and the context-specific reasons guiding one's actions (Westaby, 2005). According to Westaby (2005),

> The overarching theoretical proposition in behavioral reasoning theory states that reasons serve as important linkages between people's beliefs, global motives (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control), intentions, and behavior. Furthermore, the theory assumes that reasons impact global motives and intentions because they help individuals justify and defend their actions, which promotes and protects their self-worth. (p. 98)

Behavioral reasoning theory defines decision-making behavior using reasons as linkages between people's beliefs, global motives, and intentions (Westaby, 2005). In addition, behavioral reasoning theory explains how reasons for or against a behavior can be used to better understand facilitator/constraint explanations (Westaby, 2005).

Together, social cognitive theory (Bandura 1991b), behaviorism (Watson, 1913), and behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) provide a theoretical lens regarding how leadership decision-making influences the implementation of behavioral improvement programs in schools. Understanding the interlacing of these theories supports the idea that the successful implementation of SWBIP is contingent on the decision-making of school leaders. As stated by

Jean-Pierre and Parris-Drummond (2018) about SWBIP, "The collective effort and synergy of all administrators, teachers, school staff, and students in implementing an alternative model is required to achieve sustainable and long-term positive changes" (p. 418).

As evidenced in the historical overview, zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices are ineffective (Adamsom et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Yet, managing student behavior remains one of the most challenging responsibilities that educators face today (Chityo & May, 2018). Moreover, effectively managing student behavior impacts society-at-large, specifically all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, school staff, and students (Jean-Pierre & Drummond, 2018). Thus, to understand the historical background and societal impact regarding the issue of managing student behavior, the issue must be viewed through the theoretical lens of social cognitive theory (Bandura 1991b), behaviorism (Watson, 1913), and behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005). Therefore, analyzing the historical development, impact on society, and theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions on whether to implement SWBIP are foundational elements that must be explored to fully understand the issues at hand.

Situation to Self

A foundational premise of phenomenological research is the ability for scholars to learn from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). Thus, as a researcher, it is essential to share how one is uniquely positioned in the research so that others can glean new insights about a particular phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The following sections further articulate this researcher's motivation, research paradigm, and philosophical assumptions related to this study.

Personal Motivation

Using a phenomenological study, I sought to understand the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions on implementing SWBIP. My motivation for conducting this study stems from my professional experiences as an elementary school administrator. As a school administrator, I have been fortunate to serve in two very different school settings. The first was in a low-income primary school located in a rural community in the southeastern region of the United States. Currently, I serve one of the wealthiest and highest-performing elementary schools in the same region. Both schools have contributed considerably to my experiences and growth as a school administrator. However, each of these schools has managed student behavior using significantly different approaches. The first school mentioned uses a SWBIP called Conscious Discipline©. This approach, culturally responsive and positively framed, is implemented at capacity and promotes a common language among administrators, teachers, and students. My current school does not implement SWBIP. Instead, teachers have the autonomy to determine the management approach that best suits their classroom and students. My vastly different experiences in supporting teachers and students under varying approaches to discipline led me to explore the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Research Paradigm

In preparation for conducting my study, I leaned on the paradigm of social constructivism. Using the social constructivism paradigm, individuals engage in understanding the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As mentioned before, my motivation for conducting this study came from my experiences with school discipline in two different elementary school settings. Using social constructivism, I sought to rely as much as

possible on elementary administrators' views to gain meaning of a situation. Using broad and open-ended questioning, I focused on the specific contexts in which my participants work to understand administrators' experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Likewise, in alignment with the social constructivist paradigm, I recognized that my background shapes my interpretation of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, as Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, I positioned myself in the research and acknowledged how my interpretation of the study stems from my personal, cultural, and historical experiences. When determining the interpretive framework for this study, I assessed my ontological, epistemological, axiological, and rhetorical assumptions.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions provide the direction for the study using the researcher's view on reality, how the researcher knows reality, and the value-stance of the researcher. In addition, philosophical assumptions are used to develop the methodological procedures, theoretical procedures, and interpretive frameworks used to guide a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following information provides my ontological, epistemological, axiological, and rhetorical assumptions regarding the study.

Ontological

Ontological assumptions ask, "What is the nature of reality?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). As the researcher, I am aware that my experiences frame my perspective regarding school discipline. However, with knowledge of this bias, I had to ensure that I was conducting a study with the intent of reporting multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I ascertained the likelihood of my participants having different perspectives regarding SWBIP and maintained

that different perspectives and themes would be reported in my findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological

Next, I assessed my epistemological assumptions regarding the study. Epistemological assumptions ask, "What counts as knowledgeable? How are knowledge claims justified? and What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21)? First, I acknowledged the importance of getting as close as possible to the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fortunately, as an elementary school administrator in the district where the study was conducted, I had a large network of colleagues to assemble subjective evidence based on the participants' personal views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These relationships minimized the "distance" or "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between those being researched and myself.

Axiological

Regarding my axiological assumption, I understood my values are present in the study. Most significantly influencing my values in the study were my personal experiences as a teacher and school administrator concerning school discipline. In conjunction with my "position" on the topic, I sought to maintain my participants' views, regardless of their stance on SWBIP and added to the narrative of the case study. Through my study, using the identified philosophical assumptions and paradigm of social constructivism, I constructed meaning through the lived experiences of school administrators regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Rhetorical

Rhetorically, I ensured my findings were written using a personal and literary approach (Creswell, 2006). The findings of my study were written using first-person; I portrayed my

findings using a story that includes a beginning, middle, and end (Creswell, 2006). As the researcher, I ensured that the voices of my participants defined the reality of elementary administrators' experiences implementing SWBIP.

In summary, to develop the direction of my study, I used my ontological, epistemological, axiological, and rhetorical assumptions. Using my assumptions, I began to view my study through the theoretical lens of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005). In addition, as evidenced in the following sections, my assumptions led to the overall direction of my study, including the problem statement and purpose statement.

Problem Statement

Exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, lead to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Although the purpose of zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline practices is to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment, research indicates significant disadvantages for marginalized populations. For example, there are persistent gaps in the use of exclusionary discipline for students of color, students identified as receiving free and reduced lunch, and students receiving special education services (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). To address the problem of disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices, research suggests the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs designed to improve school climate and disciplinary outcomes (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). Interventions and programs that have been systematically reviewed and deemed effective in reducing exclusionary practices include Response to Intervention (RTI), Restorative Justice, and School-Wide Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016).

Although many studies address the phenomenon of school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs (Drewery, 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), research is deficient in identifying the school-based contextual factors and beliefs regarding school discipline that result in elementary administrators choosing whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs. This lack of clarity prevents elementary school administrators from improving their circumstances to have optimal conditions for implementing such programs with fidelity and sustainability. Therefore, the problem for this study was that the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP are unknown.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP at a sizeable southeastern school district. In this research, SWBIP was defined as strategies or systems used to manage or eliminate problematic behaviors to be implemented by all staff members within a school (Kim et al., 2018). For this study, behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) was used to identify the school-based contextual factors and beliefs of elementary school administrators resulting in the implementation or absence of SWBIP.

Significance of the Study

Describing the factors influencing elementary administrators' decisions on implementing SWBIP has practical, empirical, and theoretical significance. The following section discusses how the research relates to previously conducted research and fills a gap regarding elementary

administrators' role in implementing SWBIP. In addition, the practical relevance of the study, including why and to whom the study is essential, is discussed.

Practical

This study provided practical relevance as it pertains to the education field, specifically for school administrators in their pursuit to improve overall school discipline and culture. Using a phenomenological study, the factors, including administrators' beliefs regarding school discipline and the school-based contextual factors that influence elementary administrators' implementation of SWBIP are described. These findings have the potential to allow fellow administrators to reflect on their philosophy of SWBIP and may help enlighten school administrators and district leaders responsible for the oversight of school programs to prepare for the potential negative contextual factors faced when implementing SWBIP. Furthermore, understanding the contextual-factors influencing implementation of SWBIP could enlighten administrator professional development in the successful implementation of school programs. Therefore, these findings are of practical importance. In addition, they may provide clarity and ideal solutions to the inconsistencies of behavior management programs resulting in the overuse of exclusionary discipline methods for marginalized populations.

Empirical

Empirically, the findings from this research address a gap in the literature regarding elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. The findings from this study, regarding the contextual factors and beliefs that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP, has the potential to influence school administrators' professional development on successful implementation of SWBIP, specifically on overcoming contextual factors resulting in inconsistent approaches to school-wide behavior management as

well as addressing the disproportionate use of exclusionary practices on marginalized student populations. In addition, this study has empirical significance as it sought to improve student outcomes for vulnerable populations (Green et al., 2017). To equalize opportunities for these students, this study sought to add to the empirical research regarding reasons why SWBIP is not universally applied.

Theoretical

This study provided theoretical significance by expanding on Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory (BRT). BRT defines decision-making behavior using reasons as linkages between people's beliefs, global motives, and intentions (Westaby, 2005). In addition, BRT explains how reasons for or against a behavior can be used to better understand facilitator/constraint explanations (Westaby, 2005). For this study, BRT frames the contextual factors influencing the decision-making of school administrators regarding SWBIP.

This study sought theoretical relevancy regarding how contextual factors and beliefs influence decisions made by school administrators. Specifically, Westaby's (2005) BRT framed this study to understand the school-based contextual factors and beliefs regarding student discipline that influence school administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. Understanding the context-specific reasons that influence decisions is vital in leadership as these reasons serve as justification to school stakeholder groups in promoting procedural justice perceptions (Westaby et al., 2010).

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Research Questions

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Given that the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe elementary administrator experiences regarding school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs, the following questions frame this study:

Central Research Question

What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether or not to implement SWBIP? Many studies have identified the positive impact that implementation of SWBIP could have in reducing the overuse of exclusionary discipline methods (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Drewery, 2016; Green et al., 2017; Kehoe et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). An essential factor for SWBIP to be successful is consistent implementation. Therefore, behavior management practices must be a central component of the school's vision, ultimately making school leaders responsible for implementation (Aldridge & Damanik, 2017; Bretherton et al., 2016; Reno et al., 2017).

Although many studies address the phenomenon of school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs (Drewery, 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), research is limited regarding the school-based contextual factors and beliefs regarding school discipline resulting in whether or not school administrators choose to implement SWBIP. Thus, the central research question for this study sought to illuminate the factors that influence elementary administrator decisions whether or not to implement SWBIP.

Sub Question 1

What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP? Research points to the significant influence school administrators have in implementing school-wide behavior improvement programs (Aldridge & Damanik, 2017; Bretherton et al., 2016; Reno et al., 2017). Behavioral reasoning theory is based on the proposition that reasons link people's beliefs, global motives, intentions, and behavior (Westaby, 2005). According to Westaby's (2005) theory of behavioral reasoning, context-

specific reasons are described as specific subjective factors that individuals use to explain their anticipated behavior (Westaby, 2005). In addition, BRT hypothesizes that reasons influence administrators' attitudes, norms, and perceived control to act and influence leaders' intentions (Westaby, Probst, & Lee, 2010). The linkages of beliefs, global motives, intentions, and behaviors allow individuals to justify their decisions and actions (Westaby, 2005). Using behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), the purpose of this question was to describe how context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Sub Question 2

What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP? Behavioral reasoning theory defines global motives as broad substantive factors influencing individuals' intentions (Westaby, 2005). Attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control are considered global motives as they are broad and influence individuals' intentions (Ajzen, 2001). According to Westaby (2005), attitude reflects one's behavior based on their way of thinking or feeling about something. Subjective norms are defined as the perceived social pressure to behave in a particular manner (Westaby, 2005). Finally, perceived control is one's perception of the ease or difficulty of completing a task or behavior (Westaby, 2005). This research question sought to understand how elementary administrators' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control influence their decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Definitions

1. *Attitude* - a person's way of thinking or feeling about something is reflected in their behavior (Westaby, 2005)

2. *Behavioral supports* – a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies to support student behavior (Collier-Meek, Sanetti, & Boyle, 2017).

3. *Elementary* – In South Carolina, elementary, except for a few schools, consists of grades kindergarten through fifth grade (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020).

4. *Perceived controls* – perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the task or behavior (Westaby, 2005).

5. *School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS)* – a multi-tiered preventative behavior support framework aiming to reduce problem behaviors and improve learning environments (Kim et al., 2018).

6. *Subjective norms* – perceived social pressure to behave in a particular manner (Westaby, 2005).

7. *Zero-tolerance discipline* - removing students from school for a behavioral offense (Anderson & Ritter, 2017).

Summary

Exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, lead to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Unfortunately, despite the benefits of non-exclusionary discipline practices such as SWBIP (Chityo & May, 2018; Grasley, et al., 2019; Nese & McIntosh, 2016), many administrators have not yet adopted a positive behavior intervention program. At this time, the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP are unknown. Thus, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological

study was to describe the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. The following chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature regarding the theoretical framework and the literature related to this study to answer the research question, "What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?"

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Managing student behavior is a prominent topic in educational research (Chuang et al., 2020; Gage et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2017). Extant literature exists on both effective and ineffective behavior management practices. Current literature provides clear evidence suggesting approaches to behavior management that reduce ineffective practices that negatively impact students. For example, behavior management research evidences the negative long-term implications that zero-tolerance, exclusionary school discipline practices have on student outcomes (Adamson et al., 2019; Anyon et al., 2018; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016).

Exclusionary methods of behavior management are linked to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of high school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Yet, exclusionary methods of behavior management continue to be used. Despite research suggesting prevention efforts and alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices, many schools have yet to implement a systematic change in the approach they use in managing student behavior (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016).

Significant stakeholders in the implementation of a systematic change in behavior management through a school-wide approach to behavior management are school leaders. As lead stakeholders in a school's vision, school leaders are ultimately responsible for the effective implementation of positive school-wide behavior management programs (Aldridge & Damanik, 2017; Bretherton et al., 2016; Reno et al., 2017). First, this chapter discusses Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory to understand this phenomenon. Following, related literature on the

implications of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline methods, and positive school-wide behavior improvement programs will be reviewed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a well-defined focus and summary of research regarding school leaders' influence on the implementation of school-wide behavioral programs that serve as alternatives to zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices.

Theoretical Framework

One of the most significant responsibilities of school leaders is making decisions (Kline, 2016). To understand the reasons behind school leaders' decisions, framing this study is Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory. Behavioral reasoning theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the nature of human decision-making. Specifically, the theory explains how global motives and context-specific reasons guide one's actions (Westaby, 2005).

The overarching theoretical proposition in behavioral reasoning theory states that reasons serve as important linkages between people's beliefs, global motives (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control), intentions, and behavior. Furthermore, the theory assumes that reasons impact global motives and intentions because they help individuals justify and defend their actions, which promotes and protects their self-worth (Westaby, 2005) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Behavioral Reasoning Theory* (Westaby, 2005)

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Behavioral reasoning theory originates from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Sahu et al., 2020; Westaby, 2005) and the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974; Sahu et al., 2020). Following several failed attempts to understand the behaviors of individuals in isolation, Ajzen (1991) investigated aggregation regarding individuals' behaviors. In the theory of planned behavior, aggregation is defined as behavior reflecting both the general disposition of an individual and other factors unique to an occasion, situation, or action being observed (Ajzen, 1991; Mischel, 1968; Rotter, 1966; Wicker, 1969). In addition, the theory of planned behavior predicts and explains behavior in specific contexts. A central aspect in the theory of planned behavior is the individual's intention (Ajzen, 1991).

According to Ajzen (1991), intentions are motivations of behavior and determine how much effort and work ethic an individual is willing to exert to perform the behavior. Intention to participate in behavior is contingent upon one's voluntary control. Volitional control is defined as the behaviors that individuals can consistently execute based on their thoughts regarding the expected outcome and the social norm (Hso & Kuo, 2003; Sheppard et al., 1988). While one's volitional control determines one's willingness to perform a behavior, nonmotivational factors, including opportunities and resources, typically determine one's behavioral performance (Ajzen, 1991).

Another critical component of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is perceived behavioral control. "Perceived behavioral control refers to people's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183). Like Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, individuals' perceived behavioral control is influenced by their perception of how well they can perform the task (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, individuals are likely to participate in tasks that evidence socially-expected subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore,

the theory of planned behavior combines intention, perception of behavioral control, attitude regarding the behavior, and subjective norms to determine the reasoning behind individuals' actions and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991) (See Figure 2). Ajzen's (1991) concepts of intention and perceived control are essential to this study as they provide a framework for understanding how elementary administrators' intentions and volitional control, when impacted by non-motivational factors, influence their decision-making decisions regarding whether to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs (SWBIP).

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Figure 2. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

Although the theory of planned behavior provides an understanding of the intention behind behavior, for this study, behavioral reasoning theory provides a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of human decision-making and the context-specific reasons guiding one's actions (Westaby, 2005). Conceptually, the theory distinguishes itself from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as it differentiates between global motives and context-specific reasons (Westaby, 2005). Westaby (2005) defines global motives as "broad substantive factors

that consistently influence intentions across diverse behavioral domains" (p. 98). These substantive factors and significant predictors of intention are attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitude

Identified as a substantive factor that influences individuals' global motives, attitude is defined as a conscious choice in performing a behavior through analytic and deliberate evaluation (Sahu et al., 2020). Research indicates individuals' attitudes are identified as significant predictors of adoption decisions (Ajzen, 2002; Claudy et al., 2013). Furthermore, research indicates that the more favorable an individuals' attitude is towards a behavior, the more likely they are to perform or adopt the behavior (Claudy et al., 2013). Specific to this study, understanding how individuals' attitudes affect decision-making is essential when considering how school leaders' attitudes regarding SWBIP influence their intention to implement such programs.

Subjective Norm

Subjective norm is defined as the peer-based social pressure to perform a behavior (Sahu et al., 2020; Ursavas et al., 2019). Research suggests that an individuals' perception regarding enacting a behavior is influenced by the thoughts of those whose opinions are valued (Ursavas et al., 2019). More specifically, subjective norms are individuals' perceptions of how a decision will be approved or disapproved by peers of importance (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ursavas et al., 2019). The concept of subjective norms is imperative to this study as staff buy-in is reported as one of the most significant reasons that school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs are either not adopted or are abandoned (Kittelman et al., 2019). Therefore, a school

leader's subjective norm regarding his staff's willingness to implement a SWBIP could serve as a reason for his decision-making regarding such programs.

Perceived Control

An individual's perceived control is his perception of behaving in a certain way (Ajzen, 1991; Moura et al., 2019; Sahu et al., 2020). Research evidences that the more successful an individual perceives he will have control over a behavior, the more likely he is to perform the behavior (Moura et al., 2019). Alternatively, when individuals have little perceived control regarding a behavior, they are less likely to perform the behavior (Moura et al., 2019). Therefore, perceived control is an essential factor when considering elementary school leaders' decision-making regarding SWBIP. Based on research, a school leader's perception of successful SWBIP implementation would indicate their willingness to implement such programs.

Different than global motives are context-specific reasons (Westaby, 2005). Context-specific reasons correlate to the behavior under investigation and serve as antecedents of global motives and intentions. Thus, an individual may provide context-specific reasons to justify a behavior that contrasts with his global attitude toward the behavior (Westaby, 2005). This component of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) applies to this study as it justifies why school-based contextual factors could inhibit a school administrator from implementing a school-wide behavior improvement program even if his attitude is in support of such programs.

Together, global motives and context-specific reasons provide the conceptual framework for behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005). Moreover, these concepts result in reasons that serve as underlying determinants of behavior (Westaby, 2005). "Reasons are defined as the specific substantive factors people use to explain their anticipated behavior" (Westaby, 2005, p. 100). Using the theory of explanation-based decision making (Haste & Pennington, 1993) and

reasons theory (Fishbein & Westaby, 1996), behavioral reasoning theory concludes that

individuals' decisions are often made based on the most justifiable and defensible set of reasons

(Westaby, 2005). Reasons can also be defined as having two broad sub-dimensions: "reasons

for" or "reasons against" performing a behavior. Often termed as pros and cons, benefits and

costs, facilitators and barriers, reasons can explain facilitator/constraint experiences (Westaby,

2005). Often, reasons serve as unique justifications regarding individuals' decisions (Sahu et al.,

2020).

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Figure 3. Global Motives and Context-Specific Reasons (Westaby, 2005)

Context-specific reasons is an essential concept of behavioral reasoning theory as they

describes leadership behaviors (Westaby et al., 2010). "Context-specific reasons are important in

leadership because leaders often need to use reasons to justify their decisions to employees,

stakeholders, and relevant constituents, which we presume can promote procedural justice

perceptions" (Westaby et al., 2010, p. 481). Furthermore, understanding the impact of context-

specific reasons is vital because reasons dictate the consistency of action in organizations leading

to a climate of trust (Westaby et al., 2020). As stated by Westaby et al. (2010) regarding

consistency of action among school leaders, "this represents leaders who 'walk the walk,' which is often considered an important element of effective leadership" (p. 482).

It is presumed that leaders justify and defend their behavior by evaluating the strongest set of reasons for or against a behavior (Westaby et al., 2010). Leaders process their reasons explicitly or implicitly depending on the situation. Explicit processing involves conscious processing, while implicit processing is subliminal processing (Westaby et al., 2010). Westaby et al. (2010) posit that once leaders identify these sets of reasons, they should develop confidence in their decision-making.

Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) provides a lens to view elementary administrators' decision-making. Westaby's (2005) theory asserts that leaders' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control influence their reasons for or against a behavior. A leader's like or dislike for a behavior, social pressure to engage in the behavior, and whether or not he feels he will be successful at the behavior determines a leader's course of action in decision-making (Westaby et al., 2010). "The more that a leader has a good attitude about a behavior, feels social pressure to do it, and thinks it is easy to perform, the higher likelihood the leader will form an intention to engage in the behavior" (Westaby et al., 2010, p. 482). Specifically, using this framework, the beliefs and values, reasons, global motives, and intentions of elementary school administrators were investigated to understand decisions for or against the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs.

Related Literature

Education is one of the most effective mechanisms to equalize opportunities and improve outcomes for students (Juvonen et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). Yet, one of the most pressing educational issues in today's schools, the use of exclusionary discipline practices, removes

students from the very learning environment that provides access to education (Anderson &
Ritter, 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Okonofua et al., 2016). In addition to
removing access to learning opportunities, exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions
and expulsions, lead to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of school dropout, recurring
behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019;
Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al.,
2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Instead of using exclusionary
practices to address student behavior and discipline, the American Psychological Association and
the American Academy of Pediatrics advocate for preventative efforts and alternatives to
exclusionary discipline practices through positive schoolwide approaches to behavior
management (Grasley et al., 2019).

Extant research exists on the history of school discipline and the negative implications of
exclusionary discipline practices. This literature review provides a robust synthesis of the
historical development of school discipline and research regarding zero-tolerance, exclusionary
discipline practices, including their correlation to disparities in discipline data, increased risk of
school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and increased student involvement in the juvenile
justice system. In addition, the literature reviews positive behavior improvement programs as
well as school administrators' roles in the implementation of such programs. The summary of
this chapter will provide a focused conclusion of current research about exclusionary discipline
practices and the importance of implementation of schoolwide positive behavior improvement
programs. In addition, the summary will identify how this research, specifically regarding
elementary administrators' decisions regarding the implementation of schoolwide behavior
improvement programs, addresses gaps in existing research.

History of School Discipline

The use of exclusionary discipline practices in schools has long existed (Jacobsen et al., 2019; Stearns 2016). Although removing students from classrooms is now defined as exclusionary discipline practices, shaming to improve student behavior can be traced back to ancient Egypt (Stearns, 2016). In addition, the research describes the long-lasting implications that shaming can have on children (Stearns, 2016). Specifically, research suggests that exclusionary practices result in overwhelming emotion resulting in a feeling of inadequacy instead of the intended result of improving inappropriate behavior (Stearns, 2016).

Although more extreme shaming measures such as dunce caps in the early 1900s dissipated over the last century, quieter forms of shaming continued in American education. For example, long-standing research shows that when students cannot conform to expected behavioral demands, modified approaches to shame are used (Stearns, 2016). Practices such as sending disruptive children to the office or assigning students various colors based on behavioral performance developed in the 20th century continue to be used even today (Stearns, 2016).

Shaming practices, specifically exclusionary discipline practices, became more prevalent over the last three decades of the twentieth century (Jacobson et al., 2019). In the 1990s, zero tolerance gained popularity in the United States as part of the US Attorney General's anti-drug policy when strict actions were taken among border-crossers found in possession of even the smallest amount of drugs (Ritter, 2018). In these cases, zero-tolerance was defined as strict consequences for all infractions, regardless of severity (Ritter, 2018). In addition, Zero-tolerance translated to the school system through the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Dohy & Banks, 2018, Jacobson et al., 2019; Ritter, 2018).

The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) became prevalent following several mass school shootings in 1994 (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Dohy & Banks, 2018; Jacobsen et al., 2019). The GFSA was a component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Ritter, 2018). In addition to the GFSA invoking strict disciplinary actions for various offenses, it also mandated students carrying a firearm be expelled from school for a minimum of one year (Dohy & Banks, 2018).

Furthermore, for schools to maintain federal funding, the GFSA mandated schools enact zero-tolerance policies (Dohy & Banks, 2018). During the 1990s, discipline policies and decisions were highly publicized after school shootings, such as in Columbine, Colorado, in 1999 (Ritter, 2018). However, because the development and enforcement of such policies remained the responsibility of each state, the determination of suspensions and expulsions resulted in ambiguity and subjectivity (Dohy & Banks, 2018). Therefore, although the initial purpose of the GFSA was to reduce violent offenses and maintain safe and orderly schools, the statute ultimately resulted in the overuse of exclusionary practices for minor infractions (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Dohy & Banks, 2018).

During this GFSA era, the perceived need of school decision-makers for school discipline practices to keep students safe was understandable. However, the public policies enacted to send a clear message regarding anti-violence and guns resulted in a sharp increase in student suspensions and expulsions (Ritter, 2018). Thus, in the following years, a need for discipline reform ensued. In January 2014, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education enacted a two-part federal guidance document with recommended practices for fostering supportive and equitable school discipline (Gregory et al., 2017). More recently, legislation titled Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA S. 1177), passed by Congress, includes some provisions intended to reduce

disciplinary exclusion and disparities in discipline data (Capatosto, 2015; Gregory et al., 2017).

Within the legislation, school climate is a critical indicator of student success and requires

educational entities to address how they will reduce exclusionary discipline measures (Capatosto,

2015).

As evidenced in historical research, zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices are

ineffective (Adamsom et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019;

Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran,

2016). To address the negative implications of zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline

practices, increased awareness of alternative methods to traditional discipline is needed (Chityo

& May, 2018; Gregory et al., 2017). As such, research suggests using school-wide prevention

models that establish expected behaviors and develop a consistent strategy for maintaining

disciplinary incidents (Chityo & May, 2018). Subsequent literature provides an overview of the

negative implications of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices.

Zero Tolerance, Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Traditional methods of school discipline, such as zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices,

remove students from their educational environment for a variety of violations (Anderson &

Ritter, 2017; Ritter, 2018). Although the intent of such methods originated because of the Gun-

Free Schools Act to ensure a safe and positive school community, the use of zero-tolerance

discipline actions resulted in stark increases in suspensions and expulsions and the over-

application of such policies (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Grasley-Boy et al., 2018; Ritter, 2018).

Alarmingly, even though research evidences no correlation in zero-tolerance policies having a

positive influence on improving student behavior (Anderson & Ritter, 2017, Grasley-Boy et al.,

2018; Green et al., 2017; Levinsky, 2016), exclusionary policies continue to dominate discipline policies in public schools (Green et al., 2017).

A significant concern of zero-tolerance policies is that they do not provide students the strategies and services necessary to improve behavior (Green et al., 2017; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2019). Unfortunately, the setting where students learn and are most likely to gain appropriate behavior and self-regulation skills is when students are removed from a behavioral infraction (Kline, 2016). In addition, removing students from their classroom can further exacerbate the behavior, developing feelings of frustration from embarrassment, isolation, stigmatization, or disengagement (Anderson et al., 2019; Green et al., 2017; Kline; 2016). These feelings evidence long-term negative implications on student outcomes, including increased risk of school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016).

Demonstrating the epidemic proportions at which suspensions and expulsions continue to be used, recent statistics evidence that nationally, approximately 2.8 million kindergarten through 12th grade students are suspended annually (Green et al., 2017). Moreover, while it would seem that suspensions would be assigned for severe offenses, 54% of reported discipline incidents using zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices are most often used for minor disciplinary infractions, including non-compliance, defiance, and disrupting the classroom environment (Grasley-Boy et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017).

Zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices are used to change or deter a student's behavior. However, as stated by Green et al. (2017), "These practices tend to satisfy the punisher and have little lasting effect on the punished" (p. 421). For example, zero-tolerance, exclusionary

practices are often used to single out a student, albeit making them an example to deter the continued output of the behavior. Yet, research evidences (Green et al., 2017) that students who possess the necessary self-regulation skills would not engage in the behavior, to begin with, further emphasizing the need for students to receive instruction on appropriate behavior and opportunities to practice. Green et al. (2017) states, "Those who lack the skills to get their needs met and be successful in the classroom (i.e., the students at highest risk for suspension) will engage in problem behavior despite the consequences received by peers" (p. 422). Therefore, instead of using zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices as a reactive response to discipline incidents, efforts should reduce problem behavior, particularly incidents considered less extreme (Gage et al., 2018).

Disparities in Discipline Data

Inconsistent approaches to behavior management evidence early and staggering disparities among racial and marginalized populations (Gregory et al., 2016; Gregory & Gergus, 2017; Hambacher, 2017; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2016). Moreover, punitive discipline practices have been identified as possible inequitable practices in schools (Nguyen, 2019). Overwhelmingly, racialized and marginalized students are affected by punitive school discipline (Gordon, 2017; Nguyen). In addition to impeding minority students' educational opportunities, in some cases, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices has been deemed a violation of students' civil rights (Nguyen, 2019). Referred to as the "racial discipline gap," the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices among minority youth is a national concern (Kline, 2016; Nguyen, 2019).

Minority students, specifically low-income Latino, American Indian, and black youth, are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Nguyen, 2019).

According to Kline (2016), "Black students are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than white students. Zero tolerance policies further exacerbate this growing concern and fail to teach students preventative strategies" (p. 97). In addition, Black students are more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled due to minor infractions such as disobedience, defiance, and disrespect (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Young et al., 2018). These findings implicate the potential harboring of implicit or explicit racial bias (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Disciplinary decisions are almost always determined by the classroom teacher instead of school administrators. However, the sociocultural factors ungirding the disciplinary approaches of teachers allows for subjectivity and the removal of students from the classroom for less severe violations (Nguyen, 2019). Often, disciplinary actions are a "singling-out process" that occurs due to students' gender or ethnicity being different from their teacher's (Nguyen, 2019). Although U.S. schools continue to grow in diversity, the teaching force remains remarkably homogenous, with 82% of teachers being White, English speaking, female, and middle class (Hambacher, 2017). This homogeneity often leaves teachers unconscious of how racist practices, including the interpretation of students' behaviors of color, are perpetuated (Hambacher, 2017). Thus, understanding the implications of explicit and implicit racial bias is essential.

Racial bias is the mental association between a race and an individual's evaluative or stereotypic thoughts (Marcucci, 2020). Explicit racial bias is often considered one's conscious prejudice or racism towards a different race from their own (Hambacher, 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016). For example, while most Americans do not believe that Black individuals should be treated differently, they often associate black individuals with negative thoughts (Marcucci, 2020). Alternatively, implicit bias is a stereotypical unconscious association based on one's perceptions, judgments, and decision-making (Hambacher, 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Although humans are predisposed to implicit biases, individuals' cultural environments, including input from media and interpersonal interactions among family, schools, and other spaces, determine which bias develops (Marcucci, 2020). For example, although most Americans deny any anti-Black bias, 83% of White Americans hold an implicit pro-White/anti-Black evaluative bias (Marcucci, 2020). Furthermore, implicit racial bias is often associated with stereotypical associations of hostility and criminality (Marcucci, 2020). Implicit racial bias, which is the unconscious stereotypes that individuals hold towards races other than their own, is vital in understanding how discipline decisions towards other races can be left to subjective interpretation (Hambacher, 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Racial bias results in students of color being assigned more severe consequences than white students (Hambacher, 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016). An example of this type of bias is students of color receiving a disciplinary consequence for behaviors such as disrespect or excessive noise, while white students are more likely to receive an office referral for skipping class (Hambacher, 2017). This unconscious decision-making allows for old patterns of punitive disciplinary actions to occur (Carter et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019). In addition, when making decisions regarding discipline, implicit bias causes individuals to respond to behavior based on irrelevant features of the behavior (Carter et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2017; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Regardless of the implicit or explicit, research is detailed that racial bias plays a significant role in the disproportionality in discipline (Nguyen et al., 2017).

When suspended or expelled, disadvantaged students, often lacking access to resources and opportunities to learn, are further reduced in their opportunities for formal learning (Farkas, 2009; Von Hippel, 2009). In addition, the disproportionality and controversy associated with zero-tolerance discipline policies are associated with resistance and criticism and are often

challenged to violate civil rights in federal courts (Kim et al., 2010). Therefore, instead of

exclusionary, zero-tolerance practices, alternative behavioral practices should be implemented to

reduce discipline referrals, suspension rates, and ultimately disparities in school discipline data

(Kline, 2016; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Repeated Disciplinary Incidents

One of the unintended adverse outcomes of zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices is the

likelihood of repeated disciplinary incidents among students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Grasley-

Boy, 2019, Green et al., 2017). Data evidences that of the 6% of students suspended each year,

50% of those students will receive a subsequent suspension, and 70% will receive additional

office referrals within the same year (Green et al., 2017). In addition, when students are

suspended or expelled, they are removed from both social and academic support. Students

lacking the social and academic skills necessary to succeed in the classroom are likely to engage

in inappropriate behavior, ultimately creating a repeated cycle of disciplinary consequences

(Johnson et al., 2017). Data evidences the reinforcement of inappropriate behavior and

disengagement among students, resulting in increased disciplinary incidents (Grasley-Boy, 2019;

Green et al., 2017). To address this concern, research evidences the importance for schools to

address student behavior by using proactive approaches to address students' academic,

behavioral, and social-emotional functioning (Johnson et al., 2017).

Risk of School Drop-Out

Another concerning result of using zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices is the

increase in students' likelihood of dropping out of school. According to Kline (2016),

"Suspension is the number one predictor of students dropping out of school" (p. 98). In addition,

the likelihood of a student dropping out of school increases by 77% upon experiencing a

minimum of one suspension (Green et al., 2017). These statistics are alarming considering the influential role schools have in equalizing and improving outcomes for students.

The use of exclusionary practices temporarily removes students from the educational settings intended to equip them with the skillsets necessary to manage their behavior. They are also proven to increase students' likelihood of dropping out and permanently removing themselves from school. In addition, research evidences students feel a greater sense of belonging to environments that they view as fair and inclusive (Bottiani et al., 2017). Thus, when students view their school as fair and just, they are more likely to adhere to the academic and behavioral expectations set forth, therefore experiencing success in the classroom and a decreased likelihood of dropping out of school (Bottiani et al., 2017).

Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System

Zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices are also proven to increase students' risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Often, the principal determines disciplinary consequences. When assigned appropriately, discipline consequences are proven to be positive and impactful (Farr et al., 2020). However, overly punitive consequences that counterproductively exclude students from the learning environment can have harmful effects (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2020). Attributing to the "school-to-prison pipeline," students who are removed from schools due to exclusionary practices are more likely to be arrested and at-risk for delinquent behaviors (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016; Mowen et al., 2017; Newey, 2019).

Statistically, if a student receives an exclusionary discipline consequence, specifically an out-of-school suspension, the student's probability of being arrested more than doubles (Grasley-Boy, 2019). Additionally, similar to minority students being disproportionately subject to

exclusionary discipline practices, racial disproportion is evident in the juvenile justice system (Kline, 2016, Newey, 2019; Young & Butler, 2018). Black people, in particular, are subject to a process that invokes negative life trajectories and social reproduction due to being persistently disciplined and less connected to the institutions responsible for their success (Hambacher, 2017). Alarmingly, while Black people represent only 13% of the U.S. population, they constitute 40% of all inmates in prison and 42% of the death row population (Hambacher, 2017).

School-Wide Positive Behavior Improvement Programs

Different approaches to managing behavior in the classroom are typically based on the school's philosophy and the cultural positioning of the educational system (Bretherton et al., 2016). Studies have shown behavior improvement programs are positively correlated with improved academic achievement and reduction in disciplinary incidents (Chityo & May, 2018; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016). Kline (2016) states, "With the most effective and respectful policies in place, students are presented with an opportunity to learn with fewer obstacles, resulting in greater academic performance and personal success" (p. 98).

Positive, proactive, and preventative approaches to behavior management should be provided to students, such as school-wide behavior improvement programs. As stated by Camacho and Krezmien (2020),

"When a student has difficulties with reading, we provide reading instruction to assist them with decoding, fluency, or comprehension. When a student is struggling with writing, we teach the student to construct a well-written paragraph. When there are math challenges, we provide the student with the opportunity to receive extra support with problem solving or calculations. If schools are going to effect the same change in the behavioral realm, the primary response for school misbehavior needs to move away from

suspensions to interventions designed to improve behaviors, like schools do in the

academic realms." (p. 65)

Schoolwide behavior improvement programs can improve student behavior, promote a

healthier school climate, and enhance academic achievement (Jean-Pierre & Drummond, 2018).

To reduce zero-tolerance, exclusionary methods of discipline, educators' intention must be on

positive, proactive measures to improve student behavior (Green et al., 2017). Recent research

shows an increase in the number of schools implementing school-wide behavior improvement

programs. Anyon et al. (2018) state, "Promising new shifts have occurred as school districts

begin moving away from exclusionary practices toward those focused on building relationships

and treating discipline as an opportunity to support students' healthy social-emotional

development" (p. 222). In a study conducted by Camacho and Krezmien (2020), districts

utilizing positive consequences could decrease their suspension percentages to within less than

1.9% of the state suspension rate over ten years. Likewise, alternate approaches to behavior

management can improve school culture through inclusion by resolving conflict and misbehavior

peacefully (Pavelka, 2013). Although there are many positive approaches to behavior

management, relatively well-known programs include Positive Behavior Intervention and

Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

SWPBIS is a framework based on behavioral and biomedical sciences with distinctive

features and procedures to support student behavior (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018).

Developed in the United States and now implemented in various other countries, School-Wide

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) is a school-wide approach created to

improve school climate. To improve school climate, School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention

and Supports (SWPBIS) invokes a preventative behavioral framework that incorporates explicit teaching of expected behaviors to create a prosocial learning environment (Bohanon et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). Instead of using zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices, the goal of SWPBIS is to teach children the skills necessary to demonstrate appropriate behavior while allowing time for practice and positive reinforcement (Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). Instead of using punishment to manage behavior, SWPBIS focuses on universal, targeted, and intensive support to encourage students' behavioral, social, and emotional growth (Tyre et al., 2018). The universal supports in SWPBIS encourage a school climate where all students are taught consistent behavioral expectations and acknowledged when appropriate behavior is demonstrated (Houchens, 2017; Tyre et al., 2018).

SWPBIS has three tiers of student behavioral support to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. Tier 1 of SWPBIS supports student behavior by providing a safe and effective learning environment through established school-wide behavioral expectations, acknowledgment of positive student behavior, and a school-wide system for handling problem behavior using positive reinforcement and active supervision (Bohanon et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). At this level, universal interventions are in place to support all students. Another layer of SWPBIS is Tier 2 support. This level of support is used for students who need more support than universal interventions implemented in Tier 1. At this tier, targeted interventions specific to the student's needs are provided (Bohanon et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). Finally, students with more significant behavior, unable to be addressed by Tier 1 or Tier 2, are provided Tier 3 of SWPBIS and are provided individualized support (Bohanon et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). School leadership teams are responsible for implementing SWPBIS by ensuring

understanding of the program among the entire staff, overseeing the fidelity of implementation, and determining the effectiveness of the program (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018).

Research evidences the positive outcomes that SWPBIS has on student behavior (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). Improvements include reduced antisocial behavior, reduced disciplinary referrals, and reduced exclusionary discipline practices such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). In addition, SWPBIS yields positive outcomes on instructional time and relationships among teachers and students (Tyre et al., 2018). Encouraged by the Academy of Pediatrics, SWPBIS should be used to reduce the reliance on exclusionary discipline methods and to increase the use of preventative and proactive school discipline (Grasley-Boy, 2019).

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice originated from premodern native cultures of the South Pacific and the Americas and Canadian Mennonite initiatives in the early 1970s (Payne & Welch, 2019). Later used in criminal justice systems and now in school settings, Restorative Justice is an approach to behavior management that equips schools with the opportunity to respond to students' inappropriate behavior respectfully through inclusive, educational, nonpunitive approaches to improve behavioral choices (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2019; Kline, 2016; Payne & Welch, 2019). Kline (2016) states,

> Restorative practices can be described as an umbrella of tools that educators can use to establish positive relationships with all students and stakeholders. In addition to its preventative focus, restorative practices are also used to respond to conflict and repair relationships that have been damaged. (p. 98)

Restorative Justice allows all stakeholders to discuss wrongdoing, including who and how others were impacted and what needs to be done to repair the harm (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2019; Kline, 2016; Mowen et al., 2017; Newey, 2019).

Instead of viewing student misbehavior as a discipline issue, Restorative Justice views behaviors as a violation of the offender's relationship with a victim or the offender against the community (Payne & Welch, 2019). To mend the violation within the relationship, Restorative Justice offers a systematic approach for offenders to reconcile with the victims to understand how their behavior impacts others (Payne & Welch, 2019). Typically, this reconciliation is conducted in a conference that includes both the offender, victim, and community members (Payne & Welch, 2019). The concept behind Restorative Justice and the process of reconciliation are that when individuals feel connected to the community and understand the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships, the more likely they are to avoid violating rules and adhering to school norms (Payne & Welch, 2019).

Restorative practices are based on the thesis that when humans are focused on relationships, they are more successful in environments where social engagement is present. Restorative Justice deducts that when humans feel that those in position are doing things with them, instead of to them, they are happier, more cooperative, and productive. In addition, they are more likely to make positive changes in their behavior (Payne & Welch, 2019). Ultimately, Restorative Justice aims to develop empathy and excitement while simultaneously reducing the negative emotions of anger and humiliation (Payne & Welch, 2019).

As opposed to punitive and exclusionary discipline practices, Restorative Justice evidences promising outcomes in schools such as reduced recidivism and higher academic achievement (Payne & Welch, 2019). Furthermore, restorative justice improves overall student

behavior, but research also evidences fewer incidents of victimization through bullying and decreased absenteeism (Payne & Welch, 2019). Furthermore, improved school climate through cheerful staff and student relationship has been documented (Payne & Welch, 2019). Thus, Restorative Justice delineates that when students feel connected to their community and understand how their behavior affects others, they are more likely to adhere to school norms, ultimately improving school climate and reducing overall school discipline (Payne & Welch, 2019).

School Leaders' Role in Implementation of Behavior Improvement Programs

School principals must identify the variables that will improve the school's academic, behavioral, and social/emotional status (Bohanon et al., 2018; Farr et al., 2020). School principals often identify the need for a schoolwide approach to creating clear expectations that guide school staff members' work (Bohanon et al., 2018). From a behavioral perspective, schoolwide programs like SWPBIS and Restorative Justice can establish a sense of community and create a shared experience among school stakeholders (Bohanon et al., 2018; Farr et al., 2020; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). Through these programs, stakeholders can create common associations, allowing them to develop trust and work towards a shared goal (Bohanon et al., 2018; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018).

For SWBIP to be effective, principals must reflect on their disciplinary practices and commit to enacting positive disciplinary practices to ensure the success of all students (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2020; Lyons, 2014; Wienen, 2019). Even though statistical evidence proves the benefits of Restorative Justice and PBIS, sustainability is a continued concern (Nash et al., 2016). Research evidences that while it takes a minimum of three years to initially implement schoolwide behavior improvement programs, schools are likely to abandon

programs within the first two years of implementation (Chityo & May, 2018). Ultimately, when schools abandon positive, proactive approaches to behavior management, they revert to traditional methods of zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices resulting in staff and students feeling frustrated and overall school culture being negatively impacted (Chityo & May, 2018). To avoid abandonment, schools must be aware of implementation barriers.

SWBIP Implementation Barriers

Identified barriers for SWBIP implementation include lack of staff and student buy-in, stakeholder support, communication, misunderstandings and philosophical differences in beliefs, skepticism that SWPBIS is needed, and feelings of hopelessness regarding change (Chityo & May, 2018; Tyre et al., 2018; Wienen, 2019). Other barriers to SWBIP implementation are resources and time. Resources for implementing alternative school-wide behavior improvement programs often require specialized staff and time to be implemented effectively (Jean-Pierre & Drummond, 2016).

To combat identified implementation barriers of school-wide behavior improvement programs, research suggests using data collected from staff to guide decisions for the degree of support needed (Tyre et al., 2018). Most likely conducted through a needs assessment, staff feedback regarding implementation of programs provides ownership in the process and can provide valuable feedback for professional development and coaching (Tyre et al., 2018). Without staff feedback, implementation of SWBIP is likely to be met with greater resistance, discontent, and issues with implementation (Tyre et al., 2018).

Equally as important as staff surveys, school leaders must consider contextual fit before implementing schoolwide programs (Tyre et al., 2018). In this case, the contextual fit is defined as the school's language, culture, and context (Nelen et al., 2019). When considering whether a

SWBIP is a right fit contextually, school leaders may reflect on the school's cultural patterns, meanings, and values. This is essential for student success, and it is necessary to gain staff buy-in (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018). In addition, for SWBIP to be implemented with fidelity, practices must be culturally sound to be effective and sustainable (Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018).

Understanding both the positive influence and potential barriers of schoolwide behavior improvement programs applies to this study. The factors evidence the strategies and also the barriers that determine whether SWBIP implementation is successful. Furthermore, these factors are applicable when considering behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) as they validate the theory's premise that contextual factors, in this case, specific to the educational setting, influence individuals' decision-making for or against a behavior. Therefore, using behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), this study seeks to understand the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Leadership Styles in Decision-Making

A critical factor in a school's success is an administrator's leadership style, particularly in his ability to make decisions (Bayburin et al., 2015; Sahu et al., 2020). Although once viewed as part of a hierarchal structure where leadership and communication were considered procedural, school leadership has evolved, holding school leaders responsible for the bottom-line results of student achievement (Anderson, 2017; Bayburin et al., 2015). Research evidences the decisions an administrator makes and how he makes them is dependent on his leadership style (Kasphrzhak et al., 2015). To effectively implement SWBIP, research suggests a discussion of transformational leadership (Kareem, 2016).

Transformational leadership is defined as encouraging followers, through trust and cooperation, to deal with changing environment by generating creative solutions for complex problems (Bouwmans et al., 2017; Heidmets, et al., 2018; Kareem, 2016). Transformational leaders identify when change is needed, create a vision to enact the change, and execute the change with members of a group (Anderson, 2017). In addition, this leadership approach encourages growth and change through challenging values, beliefs, and attitudes (Anderson, 2017; Bouwmans et al., 2017). Understanding transformational leadership with the implementation of SWBIP is important as leadership styles impact staff satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2017). Furthermore, transformational leaders possess the specific components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Bass; 1997; Rajesh et al., 2019). Research evidences that these transformational leadership behaviors can positively impact organizational change (Rajesh et al., 2019).

Idealized Influence

Transformational leaders possess the ability to commit to and communicate a clear vision and a sense of mission through idealized influence (Anderson, 2017). Idealized influence begins with a shared contribution of school leaders and staff members initiating and identifying a vision (Bouwmens et al., 2017). Through this collective effort, transformational leadership increases teachers' commitment to the school and their willingness to work towards organizational goals (Anderson, 2017; Bouwmans et al., 2017).

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation refers to a leader's ability to communicate high expectations using encouragement and enthusiasm (Anderson, 2017; Collins et al., 2020). An essential

component of inspirational motivation is the need for a school leader to effectively communicate a shared vision and action play to achieve organizational goals (Collins et al., 2020). Additionally, school leaders must identify the organizational change that needs to occur and understand their staff members' emotions to improve (Collins et al., 2020; Fischer, 2017). Inspirational motivation, a component of transformational leadership, establishes a clear linkage between a leaders' ability to motivate staff members to achieve organizational goals. Understanding inspirational motivation can be applied to the implementation of SWBIP as leaders must effectively communicate the behavior management improvements that need to occur while motivating staff members to employ a school-wide approach to behavior management.

Idealized Consideration

Idealized consideration occurs when a leader can provide feedback that is specific to an individuals' needs. This type of consideration involves leaders' willingness to coach, mentor, and provide feedback that encourages followers to embrace new ways of thinking and doing. In addition, it encourages followers to reassess values and beliefs (Anderson, 2017; Bouwmans et al., 2017). Idealized consideration is an essential concept of transformational leadership regarding SWBIP to increase staff buy-in regarding the systemic change in how behavior is managed within the school setting.

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders also possess the ability to stimulate creativity and professionalization by encouraging the reflection of personal beliefs and values. This level of intellectual stimulation occurs when staff members' learning and growth are encouraged while their problem-solving abilities are enhanced (Bouwmans et al., 2017; Collins et al., 2019).

Transformational leaders can intellectually stimulate followers by challenging assumptions, considering others' ideas, and encouraging risk-taking (Collins et al., 2019). Followers under transformational leaders are encouraged to think innovatively and use creativity in their practice by thinking outside the box (Collins et al., 2019; Fischer, 2017). This outside-of-the-box thinking is critical in implementing SWBIP as risk-taking and creative thinking are necessary to implement new school programs.

The components of transformational leadership can be categorized as both charismatic and empowering. Transformational leaders are charismatic as they can inspire and influence through the expression of ideas. Using empowerment, transformational leaders can increase stakeholders' willingness to participate in the organizational goal (Bouwmens et al., 2017). Empowerment moves members from their self-interest to invest in their team. This type of leadership creates a learning environment that develops teams and encourages team learning activities (Bouwmens et al., 2017).

Research evidences a positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and a transformational leadership style. Specifically, under transformational leaders, teachers indicate that leaders are more likely to listen to opinions, carefully solve problems, and create an environment where individuals feel they can express their opinion (Ahman et al., 2017). Another influencing factor of teacher job satisfaction is trust (Heidmets et al., 2018). Trust creates a positive atmosphere through efficient and robust leadership in schools (Gregory, 2017). In addition, through trust, leaders should create opportunities for teachers to practice agency, allowing their voices and viewpoints to be heard in organizational decision-making (Heidmets, et al., 2018).

Summary

Research is clear that the use of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices produce disparities in discipline data, recurring behavioral incidents, increased student risk of high school dropout, and increase the likelihood of students' involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Furthermore, there is little-to-no evidence that zero-tolerance, exclusionary, discipline practices have positive effects on students (Levinsky, 2016; Öğülmüş, K., & Vuran, S., 2016).

Instead of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices, research suggests prevention efforts and alternative methods to behavior management (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Green et al., 2017; Kline, 2016) through the implementation of positive school-wide behavior improvement programs. While many behavioral programs create proactive discipline and consistency in practices, this literature review discussed two programs, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Restorative Justice. While different in their structural components, both programs improve student behavior through teaching and practicing appropriate behavioral expectations. In addition, the programs seek to remove the use of exclusionary discipline practices by equipping students with the skills necessary to be successful in the classroom.

Yet, even though research evidences no correlation in zero-tolerance policies having a positive influence on improving student behavior (Anderson & Ritter, 2017, Grasley-Boy et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017), the literature does not address why positive school-wide approaches to school discipline are not consistently implemented. To address this gap in the existing literature, using behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), this study describes elementary administrator experiences regarding implementing school-wide behavior improvement programs.

By understanding elementary administrators' experiences regarding decision-making of implementation of such programs, continued efforts can be made to remove barriers from the successful implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs. In doing so, schools can begin to address the adverse effects of exclusionary, zero-tolerance practices, including disparities in discipline data, increased risk of school dropouts, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study describes the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP in a large school district located in the southeastern region of the United States. For this study, elementary administrators consisted of both principals and assistant principals serving kindergarten through fifth grade. In this chapter, transcendental phenomenology is defined, and its appropriateness for the study is justified. Following, the research questions providing the foundation for the study are reintroduced. Next, the setting, participants, and research procedures are discussed, as well as the identification of this researcher's role. Later, a breakdown of the data collection methods and analysis is provided. Finally, at the end of the chapter, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are discussed.

Design

For this study, this researcher applied a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological design. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study as it is a fluid process of philosophical assumptions about a problem, viewing the problem through both interpretive and theoretical frameworks, and using a procedural approach of inquiry to study the problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research has several defining characteristics. First, qualitative research occurs in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the natural setting consisted of several elementary schools located in a large school district in the southeastern region of the United States. Another defining characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher serving as a critical instrument in applying multiple data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using virtual writing prompts, interviews,

and focus groups, this researcher sought to gather data from elementary administrators regarding the factors that influenced their decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

This study adhered to a transcendental phenomenological design. Unlike hermeneutical phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology describes participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenological research is conceptually bound with intentionality and intuition (Moustakas, 1994). "Intentionality refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus, the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness is intentionally related" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). According to Moustakas (1994), every intention is comprised of noema and noesis. Noema refers to the observable phenomenon. Noesis refers to the internal structures that drive the interpretation of the noema. Intuition refers to the inborn talent of deriving knowledge from human experience (Moustakas, 1994). It is "describing what presents itself, what is actually given" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Through intention and intuition, transcendental phenomenological research seeks to describe participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, this study sought to describe the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding whether to implement SWBIP.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

Sub Question 1: What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

Sub Question 2: What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

Setting

The setting of this transcendental phenomenological study was a public-school district located in the southeastern region of the United States. The school district will be referred to using the pseudonym Jones School District. Jones School District, consisting of multiple elementary schools, was one of the largest school districts in its state. At the time of the study, it covered more than 800 square miles, featuring 50 elementary schools, 20 middle schools, 2 K-8 schools, 14 high schools, and 18 special schools, centers, and child development centers. The district served approximately 77,000 students, ranking as one of the largest districts in the nation. In addition, the district offered a district-wide school choice program utilized by 16% of its students (District Profile, 2019).

Each elementary school in Jones School District was equipped with a minimum of one school principal and one assistant administrator. Dependent on enrollment, some elementary schools had two assistant administrators. Assistant administrators in Jones School District were titled as either assistant principals or administrative assistants. While both assistant administrator titles required a valid school administration credential of the state, the distinguishing factor in these roles was years of experience. Typically, assistant principals in Jones School District had more years of experience; however, it should be noted that there were administrative assistants in the district with the same number of years of experience as assistant principals. Years of experience was collected from participants using the demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D).

An essential consideration in the site selection was participants' familiarity with the setting. The setting was the district and school in which the elementary administrators served. Another reason for the site selection was the presence of this study's phenomenon. In Jones

School District, there was a varied implementation of SWBIP among the 51 elementary schools, in that the district allowed its school leaders to decide whether to implement SWBIP (District Profile, 2019). Participants represented schools where no behavior improvement programs were implemented and schools that were currently implementing behavior improvement programs such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice (RJ). When recruiting participants for the study, understanding the various approaches to behavior management programs among the schools allowed the researcher to have a variety of elementary administrators with varying backgrounds and experiences to ensure data saturation (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants

Participants for this transcendental phenomenological study were selected from a sample pool of willing elementary administrators in Jones School District. Participants were selected using two types of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was essential for this study to inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The two types of purposeful sampling utilized for this study were maximum variation and snowball sampling. As defined by Creswell & Poth (2018), maximum variation sampling "consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria" (p. 158). Maximum variation sampling was a crucial sampling strategy for the study to differentiate the study sites to increase the likelihood of gathering different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using maximum variation sampling, the sample was introduced to the study through e-mail communication with principals and assistant principals in Jones School District. Initial

communications were sent to administrators from a minimum of six schools in Jones County School District.

While determining the sample size, snowball sampling was used. Using this strategy, participants were asked if they knew any other school administrators who may qualify to contribute to the study, subsequently adding additional perspectives in the data collection process (Robinson, 2014). The sample size included 11 participants.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Administrator Title: Principal (P), Assistant Principal (AP), Administrative Assistant (AA)	Years of Administrative Experience	Status of SWBIP Implementation (None, Partial, School-Wide)
Participant 1	Male	White	P	20-25 years	None
Participant 2	Male	White	P	6-10 years	None
Participant 3	Male	White	P	16-20 years	Partial
Participant 4	Female	White	AP	1-5 years	Partial
Participant 5	Female	White	AA	1-5 years	None
Participant 6	Male	White	P	6-10 years	School-Wide
Participant 7	Female	Black	P	6-10 years	None
Participant 8	Female	White	AA	1-5 years	None
Participant 9	Female	White	AP	11-15 years	None
Participant 10	Male	White	AP	1-5 years	School-Wide
Participant 11	Female	Black	AA	1-5 years	School-Wide

Upon agreement to participate in the study, participants completed an informed consent and a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D). Using the questionnaire, participants identified pertinent demographic information, including their gender, ethnicity, administrative title, years of administrative experience, and the current status of SWBIP within their designated school setting. The questionnaire's validity and reliability were established by confirming that the questionnaire measures its intended content and that the demographic questions could be used repeatedly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Procedures

The following section outlines the necessary steps that were needed to conduct this study. The first procedural step in this study was to seek approval through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix A). After gaining approval from the IRB, participants within Jones School District were sought out through e-mail communication. Following participants' interest in the study, e-mail communication that included a welcome letter, an informed consent form (see Appendix C), and a link to the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) were sent. Participants' demographic information was compiled into the table discussed in the previous section

Two pilot interviews were conducted before participant interviews. The pilot interviews ensured clear and logical questions and determined when clarity regarding questions was necessary. Following, formal data collection using virtual writing prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups began. The virtual writing prompt and individual interviews occurred within the same participant session.

Interview sessions began with participants completing a virtual writing prompt (see Appendix E). The virtual writing prompt consisted of a t-chart where participants listed the pros

and cons of deciding whether to implement a school-wide approach to behavior management. The prompt read, "What pros and cons did you consider when deciding whether to implement a school-wide behavior improvement program?"

Next, participant interviews were conducted. Pending Covid-19 mitigation procedures, interviews were conducted in-person at the school setting where the administrator served. If social distancing guidelines prohibited face-to-face interviews, Zoom Video Conferencing would have been used to facilitate these meetings online. All participant interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. Following participant interviews and the transcription process, interviews were sent to participants for member checking to ensure trustworthiness and credibility.

To ensure triangulated data, participants participated in focus groups. Focus groups occurred after individual interviews had been conducted, transcribed, and reviewed by participants. The discussion structure of the focus groups was based on participants' responses during the virtual writing prompt. For this procedure, participants were provided a compiled list of all participants' responses regarding the pros and cons considered when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. Questions were established regarding participant responses and were directly correlated to the CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2. Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by this researcher and with a transcription service.

Following data collection, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological reduction, including the procedures of epoché, horizonalization, textural descriptions, imaginative variation, structural descriptions, and textural descriptions, were utilized. Using this process, meaning units from writing prompt responses, transcribed interviews, and focus groups were determined to develop the textural and structural descriptions of the experiences

(Moustakas, 1994). Thus, in following the procedural steps for data collection in this study as well as Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process, the central research question for this study, "What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?" was answered.

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher, I understood that my role was a human instrument serving as a data collection method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Although research was obtained through virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups, I collected and mediated data as the human instrument. As the human instrument, I viewed my study from an emic perspective. Using this perspective, it was my responsibility to frame and elaborate upon the concepts and themes that emerged from participant writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups (Fetterman, 2008). Using this perspective within a transcendental phenomenological design allowed me to interpret elementary administrators' decision-making experiences whether to implement SWBIP.

As the interpreter of the data, it was essential that I defined and held myself accountable for the biases and assumptions that I could have brought to the study. Noted previously in the study, I am close to my research topic as I serve as an elementary school administrator and have background knowledge regarding SWBIP. By informing the reader of my background, I sought to create an open and honest narrative contributing reflexivity in my interpretation of the data. One assumption I had to be mindful of not shaping my interpretation of the study is that implementing school-wide behavior improvement programs is more effective than autonomous teacher approaches to behavior management.

As the researcher, I had to be conscious of my connections to the participants in the study. Referred to as "backyard" research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), this study was conducted

within the organization with which I am employed and with colleagues in my professional network. I currently serve as an elementary school assistant principal in Jones County School District. Therefore, the participants that participated in this study were considered colleagues. However, it is crucial to note that I did not hold a supervisory role over any of the participants that participated in this study. Creswell & Creswell (2018) suggest that this type of research can lead to a researcher's inability to accurately collect and report data. To avoid such bias, as the human instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in the research, I had to remain vigilant in not compromising the data and take steps necessary, such as journaling, to depict accurate findings.

Data Collection

The data used in this study included a virtual writing prompt, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The data collection methods followed a sequential set of steps to promote study logistics, ensured data triangulation, and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding whether to implement SWBIP. Although there are multiple types of data triangulation, for this study, data triangulation referred to the use of multiple methods of data collection regarding the same phenomenon (Patton, 1999; Polit & Beck, 2012). Data triangulation in qualitative research is important as it increases how participants engage in the study and increases the validity of the study findings by interpreting how the data are integrated (Carter et al., 2014). Therefore, data triangulation, obtained through virtual writing prompts, interviews and focus groups, was integrated to arrive at study results for this study.

Virtual Writing Prompt

The first data collection method for this study was a virtual writing prompt (See Appendix E). The virtual writing prompt consisted of a t-chart prompting participants to answer

the following question, "What pros and cons did you consider when deciding whether to implement a school-wide behavior improvement program?" This data collection method was appropriate for this study as it supported the study's central research question, "What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?" In addition, this method provided an understanding of the facilitator/constraint explanations of leadership decision-making as defined by behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005).

The virtual writing prompt was provided through a Google document to be completed by the participant on a laptop at the beginning of the individual interview. A digital format for the virtual writing prompt provided immediate digital transcription. However, if a participant preferred, a paper and pencil option was made available. Participants were allowed as much time as needed to complete the prompt. Virtual writing prompt responses were automatically saved in a secure Google Drive folder and converted to a Microsoft Word document. All responses remained anonymous, formatted with a pseudonym, and stored in a secure digital file. Following participant interviews, responses were coded to determine structural and textural themes within the study (Moustakas, 1991). In addition, virtual writing prompt responses were compiled into a table and used for discussion during focus groups.

Interviews

The second data collection method for this study was the interview. The qualitative research interview allowed the researcher to understand the participants' point of view and defined the meaning of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions for this study answered the study's CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2.

Following Covid-19 mitigation procedures, interviews were scheduled and completed at the elementary school in which the administrator served. Interviews were conducted in an office

setting to increase privacy and to minimize the risk of distractions and disruptions during the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview questions began with a social conversation to create a relaxed atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994). Following, broad questions were used to obtain rich, vital information from participants regarding the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding whether to implement SWBIP. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by this researcher and with a transcription service. Interview transcriptions were stored on a password-locked computer and participants received a copy of their interview to ensure accuracy.

Individual Interview Questions for Elementary Administrators

1. Introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another.

2. Tell me about your background as an educational professional.

I'd like to start with some questions regarding your perception of student behavior at your school.

3. What is your overall impression of your staffs' ability to manage student behavior?

4. How does the staff in your school believe student behavior should be handled?

5. How much influence do you believe you have over the student behavior in your building?

Let's discuss your beliefs and values regarding student behavior.

6. What do you believe about student behavior?

7. What do you believe to be true about SWPBIS?

8. When thinking about student behavior at your school, what do you value most?

9. When thinking about your teachers as managers of student behavior, what do you value most?

I'd like to now transition our discussion to your reasons, motivations, and intentions in deciding whether to implement a school-wide behavior improvement program.

10. What reasons did you consider when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP at your school?

11. Did any school-based factors, specifically school discipline data, motivate you to consider implementing a SWBIP?

12. What was your intention in deciding whether to implement a SWBIP?

13. Research evidences the impact that exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions have on discipline data, increased risk of high school dropout, increased behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. How does your understanding of these issues influence your approach to student behavior?

14. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs?

Questions one and two were "ice-breaker" questions. The questions began the interview in social conversation and aimed to create a relaxed and trusting interview environment (Moustakas, 1994).

Questions three through 13 were tightly aligned with Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory and the research questions for this study. Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) asserts that reasons serve as important linkages between people's beliefs, global motives (e.g., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control), intentions, and behavior. In turn, individuals' beliefs serve as linkages of reasons for or against a behavior (Westaby, 2005). Thus, this portion of the interview questions was designed to address each linkage defined by behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005).

Questions three, four, and five were designed to understand administrators' perceptions of student behavior at their respective schools. Specifically, these questions addressed the global motives of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control (Westaby, 2005) that influence administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. Responses to these questions provided themes to answer SQ1 regarding school-based, context-specific reasons.

Questions six through nine were aligned with the linkages of beliefs and values (Westaby, 2005). Using these questions, this researcher sought to understand administrators' beliefs about student behavior, SWBIP, and what they value most in how students behave and how their teachers manage student behavior. Responses to these questions provided themes to answer SQ2 regarding the global motives that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Questions 10 through 13 were designed for participants to express their reasons, motivations, and intentions in deciding whether to implement SWBIP. These questions collectively answered SQ1 regarding school-based, context-specific reasons and SQ2 regarding the global motives that influence administrators' decision-making. They also provided participants an opportunity to define their level of understanding regarding the impact that exclusionary discipline has on discipline data, increased risk of school dropout, recurring behavioral incidents, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Adamson, McKenna, & Mitchell, 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016).

Question fourteen served as a closing question to allow participants time to add additional information regarding their experiences with the school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs.

Focus Groups

A third means of data collection was the focus group. Similar to the interview process, focus groups engage in face-to-face interactions to answer questions posed by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, focus groups are particularly advantageous when the interviewees cooperate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Cooperation is important in focus groups because instead of the researcher asking each person questions, participants are encouraged to talk to one another and ask each other questions (Kitzinger, 1995). For this study, two to three focus groups were interviewed.

Focus groups were established using responses from the virtual writing prompt. Participants were encouraged to engage in discussion using a compiled list of pros and cons from the virtual writing prompt responses. Before the focus group discussion, a copy of the compiled list of virtual writing responses was provided to participants. Structured discussion starters and open-ended questions were used to allow this researcher to engage in "structured eavesdropping" (Kitzinger, 1995). Each focus group was asked three open-ended questions to promote a deep level of discussion among the participants (Nagle &Williams, 2013). The focus group questions are listed below:

Focus Group Questions

During the interview process, you completed a virtual writing prompt of the pros and cons you considered when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. Today, we will engage in a discussion regarding an anonymous compiled list of your responses.

1. Looking over the list of pros and cons administrators considered when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP, in hindsight, which of these factors were truly important and why?

2. In your opinion, how has your decision regarding SWBIPs impacted student behavior at your school?

3. In hindsight, if you were able to change your decision regarding the implementation of a SWBIP, would you? Why or why not?

4. Now that you have made your decision whether to implement a SWBIP, what experience and wisdom would you relay to others who are tasked with making a similar decision?

The four questions used during the focus groups were structured using Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory. Each question provided additional insight into answering the CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2. Specifically, the questions addressed Westaby's (2005) concepts of reasons, beliefs, and perceived control regarding elementary administrators deciding whether to implement SWBIP.

Like interviews, focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by this researcher and with a transcription service. Interview transcriptions were stored on a password-locked computer and participants received a copy of their interview to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed throughout the collection process. Interviews were transcribed manually and through a transcription service. Moustaskas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process was used for data analysis. The process of phenomenological reduction included epoché, open coding, horizonalization, clustering into themes, textural and structural descriptions, and text-structural synthesis (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process.

Epoché

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, epoché was practiced. This process allowed this researcher to set aside any personal biases before beginning data analysis. Moustakas (1994) describes the epoché process as a time for researchers to set aside their "prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas" (p. 85). By engaging in the epoché process, researchers can see things for the first time, diminishing preconceived ideas about people, things, and events to enter them into a new state of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, the process allows researchers to approach their study with openness and receptiveness so the observations can be understood as they appear (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher journaled before, during, and after the study to consistently engage in epoché during this study. To suspend

any assumptions or biases that personal background may have brought to the study, this researcher wrote thoughts transparently and suspended any ideas that prevented her from looking at the participants and data with fresh vision (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizonalization

The next step in transcendental phenomenological reduction is the process of horizonalization. Horizonalizing ensures that all ideas in the study are considered equally important. To do this, all collected data is highlighted to identify significant statements, sentences, or quotes to understand how participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Horizons, according to Moustakas (1994), are unlimited. That is, the process of experiencing things can never be exhausted. "When we horizonalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).

Following data collection, this researcher began open coding transcribed interviews. In qualitative research, coding is often a word or short phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2015, p. 3). The process of open coding does not begin with any preconceived codes. Instead, commonalities amongst the data are used to organically develop conceptually relevant codes (Saldana, 2015). Using Excel to codify clusters of meaning in the data allowed this researcher to explore the phenomenon's essence based on how the participants experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural Descriptions

Textural descriptions describe what the participants experienced using significant statements and themes from the horizonalization process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Textural descriptions require the researcher to "return to the thing itself, in a state of openness and

freedom, facilitate clear seeing, make possible identity, and encourage the looking, again and again, that leads to deeper layers of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Determining textural descriptions involves seeing the experience in singularity and the phenomenon in its totality through a series of transcendental reductions (Moustakas, 1994). Following epoché, open coding, and horizonalization, this researcher sought to construct a complete textural description of the experience using the participants' lived experiences.

Structural Descriptions

Structural descriptions are part of the imaginative variation stage of phenomenological reduction. The purpose of structural descriptions is to identify the "underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Structural descriptions include identifying the underlying meanings of textural descriptions and determining how they account for the phenomenon's emergence (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, structural descriptions include "considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts regarding the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). The structural description for this study described the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Text-Structural Synthesis

Text-structural synthesis is the final step in the phenomenological reduction process. This step allows a unified statement regarding the essences of the experience and the phenomenon in its entirety to construct textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Important in understanding text-structural synthesis is that the essences of an experience are never exhausted (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, a text-structural synthesis is bounded by time and place and based on a researcher's completion of a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994).

Following an exhaustive review of collected data, epoché, horizonalization, textural and structural descriptions were used to synthesize the experiences of school administrators' deciding whether to implement SWBIP.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness determines the quality of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The four criteria used to determine the degree of quality in qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). For this study, triangulation, member checking, bias clarification, and prolonged engagement in the field were used to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

Eisner (1991) encourages structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy to determine credibility for a study. Structural corroboration involves multiple types of data to support or contradict an interpretation (Eisner, 1991). In alignment with structural corroboration, this study sought to use three types of data collection for triangulation. First, using virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups, data was used to support the description of elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding whether to implement SWBIP. In addition, using consensual validation, this study demonstrated credibility through member checking to seek participants' opinions and ensure that the "description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation are right" (Eisner, 1991, p. 112). In addition, prolonged engagement in the field was used to ensure that the study's decisions were salient (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is suggested that researchers spend as much time as is feasible in the field to familiarize themselves with the site and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, the study used referential adequacy to allow for criticism to bring "more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 256).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the processes of inquiry ensuring the research is logical, traceable, and documented (Schwandt, 2007). Similarly, confirmability is concerned with factual data and is not derived from the researcher's imagination (Schwandt, 2007). A key process to ensure dependability and confirmability in this study was member checking. Member checking determined the accuracy of the study findings by taking the descriptions and themes of the study back to the study participants to discuss their insight into whether or not the findings were accurate. Member checking did not result in any follow-up interviews with participants. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through extensive time in the field, a thick text-structural synthesis, and a closeness with the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability is the generalization of the study, among other cases (Schwandt, 2007). Specifically, this researcher's responsibility was to provide the readers with enough information about the phenomenon to be transferred to other studies. To do this, rich, thick descriptions were used to convey the study's findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest providing a description that "may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (p. 200). Using the transcendental phenomenological reduction process, techniques of epoché, horizonalization, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and text-structural synthesis, this researcher sought to provide a structure of data collection and analysis so that the study could be replicated in similar educational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

"Ethical behavior helps protect individuals, communities and environments, and offers the potential to increase the sum of good in the world" (Israel & Hay, 2006, p. 2). This researcher sought to ensure trust, maintain research integrity, satisfy the organization, and adapt to the professional demands of the study. This researcher needed to anticipate ethical issues throughout the process. As the researcher, this role as the steward of disseminating accurate and factual information was acknowledged. Ethical conduct, stewardship, and dissemination were interwoven throughout the process to maintain the integrity of the research. Creswell and Poth (2018) identify many ethical issues researchers may encounter during each research phase.

Before conducting this study and before collecting any data, approval was sought from the IRB (see Appendix A), and local access permissions were gained for the study sites. This researcher practiced ethical, and most importantly, respectful stewardship of the participants. Respectful stewardship of the participants included obtaining informed consent and ensuring their understanding of the study's voluntary nature and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, as a steward of the participants, all physical and electronic data needed to be securely stored. In addition to all data remaining anonymous and labeled with pseudonyms, all physical data was secured in a locked file cabinet while electronic data was secured in a digital file folder accessible only by this researcher.

To ensure the accurate dissemination of the data, honest perspectives from all participants were reported. After the research process, as the steward of the study, this researcher disseminated ethical findings to provide beneficial knowledge to education. In addition, to maintain ethical considerations, this researcher acknowledged her role as a school administrator and personal experiences under systematically different management approaches required her to

be more aware of personal biases. To maintain truth in the study, biases and thoughts were journaled throughout the study and reviewed for biased perspectives. The study findings were reported verbatim based on participant experiences.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the factors that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. This chapter described the methods that were used to conduct this transcendental phenomenological investigation. Using data triangulation, this study incorporated the data collection methods of virtual writing prompts, individual semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Following data collection, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological reduction process included epoché, open coding, horizonalization, clustering into themes, textural and structural descriptions, and text-structural synthesis. The data collection methods and data analysis process for this study, combined with Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory as the theoretical lens, ultimately defined the essence of the phenomenon regarding elementary administrators' decision-making experiences whether to implement SWBIP.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs (SWBIP). This chapter provides a rich description of each study participant and a thematic summary, using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process, of elementary administrators' experiences in deciding whether or not to implement SWBIP. In addition, virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

CQ: What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

SQ1: What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

SQ2: What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

Following an overview of the study's participants and results, the chapter concludes with a narrative of discovered themes addressing the research mentioned above.

Participants

The participants for this study included 11 elementary school administrators consisting of five principals, three assistant principals, and three administrative assistants. Across the participant group, ten elementary schools within a large southeastern school district of the United States were represented. Participants included six females and five males, two of whom were

African American, and nine were Caucasian. Years of administrative experience amongst study participants ranged from two to 22 years.

Participants for this study represented elementary schools at varying implementation levels of SWBIP. Six participants served elementary schools that had no school-wide approach to behavior management. Two participants served elementary schools with partial implementation of SWBIP. On the demographic questionnaire, participants in this category confirmed that their respective school suggested a school-wide approach to behavior management, yet classroom teachers still had autonomy in the classroom management program they utilized. Finally, three participants served schools in which a school-wide approach to behavior management was implemented with fidelity.

In accordance with the IRB, participants were identified using a culturally appropriate pseudonym. Pseudonyms were assigned alphabetically in the order participant interviews occurred. Participant descriptions included demographic information, professional experience in education, and a narrative of the administrators' current status of implementation of a SWBIP.

Adam

Adam served in the education field for 28 years. His career in education began as a kindergarten teacher and later first-grade teacher at a public school in the southeastern region of the United States. In addition to serving as a classroom teacher for seven years, Adam also served as a school counselor for one year. Following this, Adam relocated to a neighboring state where he gained experience as an assistant administrator for five years in a private school. Since 1999, Adam has served his residing school community as an assistant principal or principal.

At the time of the study, Adam was currently serving as principal of an award-winning, high-performing, high socioeconomic status school. Although Adam's school predominately

served Caucasian students, the student population was highly diverse in its representation of countries and spoken languages from around the world. Adam referred to his school community as highly engaged and supportive. He understood the needs of his community and was passionate about engaging all stakeholders to enhance the success of his students. Adam's school did not utilize a school-wide approach to behavior management.

Professionalism was a defining characteristic of Adam. In addition to having an infectious smile and charismatic attitude, this researcher would coin Adam as a "teacher's principal." Adam's sentiments towards his staff and his understanding of their personal needs were evident. For example, when referring to veteran teachers that struggled with managing behavior, Adam stated,

> You know, you can have one teacher in 10 years, being totally solid on student management, but one or two years out of that, they're going through a rough time in their own life and they're just a little bit messy, you know? So, you have to come alongside but you have to keep big picture as the administrator to know, okay, I can tell something's going on here with this teacher.

Ben

Ben was quite comical. His desire to have fun was evident through his joke-telling approach to school leadership. Although Ben sought to create memorable experiences for students, he also understood the importance of creating appropriate boundaries. For example, when discussing how principals set the tone for the school building, Ben stated,

> I think that the principal sets the tone for the building in all ways…we have created an environment here where we have no problem having fun, as long as we have fun within

the boundaries. But the minute that the boundaries are crossed or violated or compromised, the fun has to stop because it impacts the fun of others.

At the time of the interview, Ben was in his second year of serving as an elementary principal. Ben began his career in a northern state as a long-term substitute in a third-grade classroom. This placement, which lasted from January to June, was followed by one year as a reading interventionist. Following this, Ben taught kindergarten for just over five years. Ben's career in school administration began as a program director for a local middle school. Ben described this role as a combination of assistant principal, program director, and basically whatever was needed to open the school. Ben maintained his position as a program director until obtaining his current position as principal.

At the time of the interview, Ben's school served over 900 students. Approximately 60% of students were Caucasian, 20% were African American, and 20% were Hispanic, Asian, or "other" ethnicities. Ben's school felt pride in their belief that all children could learn and reach their academic, social, and emotional potential through high expectations. Ben referred to his staff as being relationship-focused and desired to make decisions with students' best interests in mind. There was no school-wide approach to managing student behavior at Ben's school.

Charles

Charles had a total of 23 years of experience in education. His career began as a fourth-grade teacher for five years, followed by an assistant principal position for two years. Since that time, Charles served as building principal for a total of 16 years. In addition, he served his current school community for nine years. Charles had experience implementing a SWBIP, as his previous school utilized the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model to

support student behavior. At the time of the interview, his is current school, while using some components of PBIS, did not implement a school-wide approach to behavior management.

Charles' experience and knowledge of PBIS shone through during the interview. His statements regarding supporting students' behaviors were both compassionate and realistic. It is evident that he wanted to work alongside teachers and understood his limited ability to change another person's behavior. For example, Charles stated,

> I believe that I can help teachers come along, help with some of their mindsets. But ultimately, I can't solve it all and do it all for them. I can't make a child behave for them every single day if they're not willing to embrace some of the things that we've shared with them that they need to do with their learning environment, with how they need to interact with students, focus on the positive, not always the negative, and things such as that - and building those systems that will help support the students moving forward. So, the adage, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. I really prescribe to that with leadership, I can bring them along the way, but in the end, I need them to own it and move forward with it.

Charles' leadership style supported his current school well. Serving approximately 1,000 students, Charles' school was located in an affluent, suburban region of the district. Of these students, an estimated 80% were Caucasian, 9% were Black, and the student population represented varying ethnicities. Charles' school had a history of high academic achievement with over 33% of his school's population identified as gifted and talented. In addition to its high academic performance, Charles' school community had high parent engagement and community support.

Denise

Denise was an educator for 19 years, all of which had been in the same school district. Denise's experience as an educator included ten years as a classroom teacher in second and third grades. Following her tenure as a classroom teacher, Denise transitioned to serving her school for seven years as its instructional coach. At the time of the interview, Denise had served as assistant principal of her current elementary school for two years.

Denise's personality was straightforward and direct. In addition, Denise was a learner. Regardless of her years in education, Denise realized that she had room to grow as an administrator, particularly regarding discipline. To improve her ability to support student behavior, Denise read books and attended Conscious Discipline's school-wide program sessions. Denise said,

> I'm just trying to learn and teach myself a lot more about discipline and how to deal with students who do have repetitive behaviors. We have to figure out a way to help the kid deal with whatever is triggering them.

At the time of the interview, Denise's school served approximately 800 students from a family-friendly community. The school served a diverse demographic of students both residing within city limits as well as suburban neighborhoods. Denise's school took pride in itself on being in the beginning stages of implementing Leader in Me as a SWBIP. However, as indicated by her response to the demographic questionnaire and in her interview, the teachers at Denise's school had autonomy in determining the behavior management approach in their respective classrooms.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth's career as an educational professional began as a classroom teacher in second and fifth grades. Following these five years as a classroom teacher, Elizabeth obtained a position in a neighboring district as a reading interventionist and instructional coach. Elizabeth continued in that role for three years until accepting an assistant administrator position. Elizabeth served for five years as an administrative assistant at her current school.

Elizabeth's school was uniquely positioned in its district to serve an affluent neighborhood community in the cities' downtown area. The school served approximately 550 students, of which the vast majority were Caucasian with highly supportive families. Elizabeth's school did not utilize a school-wide approach to managing student behavior. Although Elizabeth acknowledged her school experiences minimal behavior issues, she affirmed that her leadership staff and teachers worked hard to establish relationships with students to manage student behavior effectively.

Elizabeth's demeanor and statements displayed kindness and honesty. In addition to expressing her desire to build relationships with students, she discussed how much she values students that do the right thing. She said,

> I value that our students try hard to meet the expectations of their teachers. They very much want to do well and succeed, and so I value what they're willing to do, and when there are situations where things go wrong, they know how to try and correct that themselves.

Frank

Frank was an experienced elementary school principal who had nineteen years of experience in the education field. Most of his experience was spent in administration. The first

four years of Frank's career were spent teaching middle school math and science. Following his years as a classroom teacher, Frank transitioned into an administrative role. He served six years as an assistant principal and then five years as a building principal in a neighboring school district. In his first role as a building principal, Frank lead a school-wide initiative in project-based learning.

Frank later transitioned to his current role as principal for four years in a school that housed two distinctive programs. Frank's school was unique in that it served an inner-city community of students that were primarily low-income and highly diverse. The other program in his school, that served students in grades 3-8, was populated by qualifying students from around the district based on their academic giftedness. Students in this program came to the school from highly supportive families. Although these students displayed some behavior issues, Frank attributed most of his school's behavior issues to students attending the school based on their attendance zone. Frank's school implemented PBIS school-wide.

Although Frank was transparent about the behavior challenges he experienced at his school, his wealth of knowledge regarding students' social and emotional needs was vast. Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic needs was Frank's wheelhouse. He had extensive training in social-emotional learning as well as school-wide programs such as PBIS and Conscious Discipline. His focus on supporting students was evidenced in his comments. For example, Frank believes,

> The principal can determine whether that behavior just receives an extrinsic type of discipline or consequence or that the bad behavior you attempt to try to get at the root of the problem, you know, that tone or that stance that school leadership takes essentially is where the teachers go as well.

Grace

Grace served in the education field for 18 years. Her career in education began as a classroom teacher for ten years. Following, she went into administration. Concerning administration, Grace states, "It is my passion and mission in life. I absolutely love being able to help people, support teachers, support parents, and ultimately have a positive impact in the lives of students." Grace served as principal of her current school for five years.

At the time of the interview, Grace's school was a "neighborhood school" serving approximately 700 students, most of which were middle-class families. Approximately 70% percent of students were Caucasian, 10% were African American, and the remaining percentage were either Hispanic or Asian. Students who identified as receiving free or reduced lunch were approximated at 30%. Grace expressed genuine love for her school by stating, "This is my dream school. I absolutely love this school, and this community, and just the community feel and family atmosphere that we have here. We have incredible things going on." Grace's school did not utilize a school-wide approach to managing student behavior.

Hannah

Hannah served as a school administrator for three years. Displaying her witty personality, Hannah also evidenced her student-centered nature. When discussing a teacher she felt was an exemplar in supporting student behavior, Hannah emphasized the importance of equipping students with tools in their toolbox so that they will know how to handle future situations that arise. Hannah believed in the power of problem-solving and taking time to allow students to express their perceptions and thoughts regarding situations. This approach certainly translates to how Hannah served as a school leader. Prior to serving in administration, she taught for ten years in second, third, fourth, and fifth grades. She also served as a reading interventionist. At the time

of the interview, Hannah was serving as an administrative assistant at a high-performing, predominately high socioeconomic status school in a suburban part of her school district.

The students of Hannah's school, although predominately Caucasian, were representative of diversity from an array of countries and spoken languages. Many were international students whose families had relocated to the area for their work. Hannah's school was identified as having less than 15% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Hannah attributed the low number of discipline issues in her school to the high level of parent engagement and support. Hannah's school did not utilize a school-wide approach to managing student behavior.

Ivy

Ivy served as assistant principal of her current school for ten years. Prior to her current school, all of her experience was in Title I schools. She had experience in teaching and leadership using the PBIS model of behavior management. Ivy was a highly relational school leader. She believed it is important to build relationships with students to create a culture of success. She stated,

> If you have a new student that doesn't have a connection with you, you really have zero influence with them, I feel. I really try hard to make some connections with those students that are new to the building or that I notice right away are high-fliers, that are getting in trouble, having to visit my office, making sure to establish relationships with those families, too.

Ivy identified her current school as serving students of higher socioeconomic statuses, as high performing, and as having minimal behavior issues. According to Ivy, approximately 5% of students tended to need additional behavioral support. While just over 60% of Ivy's school was Caucasian, the school considered diversity one of its' greatest strengths. Approximately 30% of

the schools' student population received free and reduced lunch. Ivy's school did not implement a school-wide approach to managing the behavioral needs of students.

Jeremy

Jeremy's career in education began 14 years ago as a middle school math teacher for sixth and seventh grades. Jeremy was in his fifth year as an elementary school assistant principal. He had served his current school as assistant principal for three years. Jeremy brought a positive, high energy to his interview session. It was clear that he valued being present with teachers and students and having the reputation of being supportive. He discussed being present in the building and seeing the students. He stated,

> I think it's just supporting the teachers. I think me being out there and being in the classroom, if it's just for a few minutes, but just to walk the classroom, check with the teacher to see how they're doing, just so the kids know that Mr. Albin is going to be coming around, just that we're there supporting the teachers, I think, which is the biggest thing. I don't have to do a whole lot, but if the teachers know that they have my support, I think they're more inclined to follow the correct steps and they know if they have to call for an administrator or they know if an administrator needs to call and talk to somebody, they know that it's going to happen and that things will get better.

Jeremy's school served a relatively suburban community of students with a diverse representation of approximately 800 students. Just over 50% of the students were identified as Caucasian, 20% of students were African American, with the remaining 30% identified as Hispanic, Asian, or "other." Approximately 40% of the students received free or reduced lunch. Jeremy was proud of the work that had been done to support the behavioral growth of students at

his school. Jeremy's school utilized PBIS as a SWBIP to support the behavioral needs of its students.

Kathleen

With a calm, kind, and professional demeanor, Kathleen's journey in the education field was unlike any of the other participants. The education field was a second career for Kathleen. Before teaching and serving in administration, Kathleen was a paralegal working for a southeastern state's judicial system. After many years in this role, she decided to pursue education as a way to give back and help others. She served as a classroom teacher and most recently, an assistant administrator of her elementary school.

Kathleen's experience as a paralegal equipped her with a different perspective on education and students' trajectories for success. In particular, she valued working to change student outcomes to avoid the juvenile justice system. She understood that educators must be willing to adapt to change to meet students' needs. When discussing challenging behavior, Kathleen stated,

We have to make sure we're equipped to handle the things that we see in today's time, and that are much different than before. It's just that we are seeing some things that we've never seen before in a lot more younger kids that we haven't seen before.

Kathleen's school was comprised of a diverse group of students, where more than half came from low-income families. Because of this, Kathleen acknowledged the challenges of lack of parental involvement and high behavioral incidents. Kathleen's comments in her writing prompt, interview, and focus group described her relational approach to leadership well. It is evident that Kathleen chose education to make a difference and she was living that decision daily. Kathleen's school implemented Leader in Me school-wide.

Results

Results in this section represent the significant statements and commonalities that occurred through data analysis of the virtual writing prompt, participant interviews, and focus groups with the 11 elementary school administrators who participated in this research. Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process was used to analyze data into structural and textural themes. A list of significant statements was developed using responses to virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus group transcriptions. The participants' statements were then coded and developed into themes. The research questions were used as the basis for all identified themes.

In practicing epoché throughout the data collection and analysis process, this researcher participated in journaling which ensured that any biases remained separate from the investigation and that the participants' decision-making experiences as elementary administrators were heard. From the beginning of the investigation, this researcher was able to glean similarities among participants' responses. In addition, utilizing multiple sources of data collection allowed this researcher to look through a wide lens of the factors that influenced elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. The participants' diverse experiences as elementary administrators and their varied approaches to managing behavior at their respective schools provided an interesting insight to begin coding data. The following information includes a thorough address of the research questions using themes supported by participant quotes collected during the data collection process.

Theme Development

To develop an accurate portrayal of the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP, data analysis for this study aligned with

Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological process. Data were triangulated using virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups. Throughout the data collection process, epoché was used to remove as much researcher bias as possible from the data. After data collection, all data were entered into NVivo. The practice of horizonilazation was then used to ensure each significant statement from all data sources received equal value (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 2 portrays the frequency of significant statements amongst the three forms of data collection. Significant statements were then reduced or eliminated to identify core themes (Moustakas, 1994). Next, core themes were clustered to develop textural descriptions regarding the nature of elementary administrators' experiences (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2002). The last phase of developing themes was providing a composite description using an integration of elementary school administrators' experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP to answer the central and sub-research questions.

Table 2

Frequency of Themes Appearing in Virtual Writing Prompts, Interviews, and Focus Groups

Theme	Virtual Writing Prompts	Interviews	Focus Groups
Consistency	11	57	14
Student Behavior Should be Taught	9	26	12
Staff and Student Relationships	19	41	27
Staff Buy-In	21	39	26
School Discipline Data	11	37	16
School Culture	8	6	5
Teacher Efficacy in Managing Behavior	7	25	16
Time and Money	11	3	1

Table 3

Open Code, Frequencies, & List of Themes

Theme	Code	Frequency
	Global Motives	
Consistency	Maintaining consistent expectations	23
	Students need to know how adults will respond	13
	Common language	30
	Everybody on the same page	16
Student Behavior Should be Taught	We have to teach kids what is expected	32
	Students need time to learn appropriate behavior	9
	Help students with behavior	6
Staff and Student Relationships	Build relationships	26
	Relating to students	22
	Connecting to challenging students	20
	Relational teachers are more successful	19
Staff Buy-In	Involving staff in the process	18
	You've got to have buy-in	17
	Supporting behavior as a school-wide belief	14
	Working alongside teachers	14
	Decisions based on the needs of the school	23
	Context-Specific Reasons	
School Discipline Data	Student referrals	14
	School-based data	16
	Discipline depends on the school	13
	Some schools need more structure than others	6
	"High fliers" – recurring behavioral issues	6
	Some students are going to struggle	9
School Culture	Teacher's feelings about behavior	6
	Considering other school-wide initiatives	7
	Needs of the school	6
Teacher Efficacy in Managing Behavior	Behaviors are just different now	13
	Teachers do the best they can with what they know	15
	Teachers really try to support students	6
	Awareness of students' needs	6
	Some teachers need a program more than others	8
Time and Money	Time it takes to train staff	4
	Budgeting for school-wide programs	3
	Making sure everyone is on the same page	6
	Training can take years	2

Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process revealed many shared experiences among the participants. Statements made by participants were clustered and thematized using the lens of Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory. Table 3 (See page 102) shows the frequency of codes that were used to develop the themes for this study. Statements revealed shared attitudes, subjective norms, perceived control, and context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Global Motives

Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 20005) defines global motives as individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. The theory posits that global motives, like context-specific reasons, help individuals defend their actions. For this study, global motives include the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control of elementary school administrators in deciding whether to implement SWBIP. Virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups illuminated several global motives that elementary administrators referred to as influencing factors regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Specifically, elementary administrators consistently made significant statements categorized into the following themes: 1) consistency, 2) teacher buy-in, 3) student behavior should be taught, and 4) staff and student relationships.

Consistency.

Overwhelmingly, when asked about their beliefs and attitudes regarding behavior, elementary administrators made significant statements regarding consistency in SWBIP. However, it important to note that statements regarding consistency were both for and against the

implementation of SWBIP. Furthermore, participants made statements regarding the importance of their consistency regarding supporting teachers with behavior support and maintaining expectations for students. Regarding administrator and teacher consistency, during his interview, Adam stated:

If they [students] don't feel like the administrator is going to be consistent and be fair but also understand there are going to be exceptions, if they don't see that consistency by the principal, I think it's going to be a problem for them at the classroom level. Same works on the teacher side too, you know that when they, it's kind of two-fold, when I see them [teachers] managing kids well and providing high structure for kids and good reinforcers and consistency and that kind of thing, I value that highly because I know if we can keep that consistent, then we are going to make some good academic gains too. On the other hand, it's when the teacher is a little too loose on those kinds of things, those structures and routines, then I'm concerned about academic performance in that room too.

Participants, particularly in the virtual writing prompts, made significant statements regarding consistency being necessary to implement a SWBIP. According to Ben, "Consistency from the top down is the only way that those [SWBIP] are successful." In her interview, Kathleen shared similar feelings about the impact that consistent leadership can have on the implementation of SWBIP. She stated:

I think if it's done with fidelity and consistent, it can be positive and influential, and that it's something that can carry on throughout life, but the main thing with any type of PBIS or any type of focus area is consistent, and making sure people are on board. I think for staff is that you're here, and we have a mission and vision, how are you fulfilling that within your classroom, within the school building, and making sure people would realize

that no matter what goes on? This is what we said that we were going to be focused on the mission of the kids, and this is what we said, student achievement, living happy, healthy lives, and so making sure that that is always the focus of what we do.

Whether they decided to implement a SWBIP or not, all participants expressed their belief that such programs can increase consistency in behavioral language and expectations. For example, in his interview, Jeremy discussed the consistency that SWBIP can have on students' awareness of expectations from year to year. He states:

And if you have a buy-in and it's school-wide, I think that's just a must to be school-wide. So when kids go from K-1 to and they're going to grades four and five or when they get a little older where you might see a little more discipline if it's been set in from the moment they were at your school and every year it's consistent, then by the time they get into fourth or fifth grade, you shouldn't have those, except maybe new kids that come in, but aside from new kids, if things are set school-wide and the teachers are all following through, the next year should be that much easier.

During focus groups, Frank and Hannah discussed consistency from the perspective that consistency in programming can increase teachers' understanding of how to handle behavior and the appropriate steps to take when assistance is needed. Frank stated, "You [administrators] implement something like this [SWBIP] with the hope that there will be more consistency across the grade levels, that teachers would feel more equipped to be able to respond." Likewise, Hannah discussed the need for consistency in how student behaviors are handled and all stakeholders' common understanding of behavior language. Hannah stated, "I feel like when it's school-wide, we can support each other a little more."

Consistency and common language appeared more than any other statements in all forms of data collection. Participants believed that SWBIP increased the consistency of the staff's language and practices. Some participants described this as being on the "same page." In his interview, Charles stated, "I believe school-wide approaches work well because it gets everybody on the same page with the same language, and the same common understanding." During her interview, Ivy stated,

> So, I believe the programs are good to get everybody on the same page. I believe it's good to have a common language in the building for approaching behavior, but I don't think it should become the first thing a child says to their mom when they get in the car is what color they were on, because then what are we teaching them? It needs to be more of the conversation of, "This is what happened, and this is what I'll do next time not to do it." So that's what I believe about that.

Common language was discussed from the viewpoint of creating consistency for students to know what to expect. Hannah had seen first-hand the positive impact that SWBIP can have on schools. In her interview, she stated, "Kindergarten through fifth grade, the same language was used, the same sort of procedures in the classroom where students knew that things are going to be handled in the classroom and what to expect." Similarly, Adam believed all students, even "middle of the road" kids, benefited from consistent language.

When viewing participants' responses to virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups through the lens of global motives, it was evident that elementary school administrators shared attitudes and ideas of perceived control regarding consistency of behavior expectations and language through SWBIP. Just as administrators shared feelings of SWBIP increasing consistency in expectations and language, it is important to note that administrators also shared

concerns over the difficulty of maintaining consistency. In particular, administrators expressed the difficulty of maintaining consistency within the building among all staff members and onboarding new staff members each year.

Teacher buy-in.

Participants expressed the importance of teacher buy-in as a global motive when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. In the global motive subgroup of perceived control, all elementary administrators' statements shared sentiments of teacher buy-in being essential to successfully implement a school-wide program. Once more, administrators' experiences illuminated that as leaders, their influence in implementing a school-wide program only went so far, that teacher buy-in was critical for success.

Participants' statements expressed their understanding that for SWBIP to be successful, staff members must be "on board" with the program's implementation. Specifically, staff members saw how the implementation of the SWBIP aligned with the school's mission and vision. In her focus group, Kathleen stated,

> I think if it's done with fidelity and consistent, it can be positive and influential, and that it's something that can carry on throughout life, but the main thing with any type of PBIS or any type of focus area is consistent, and making sure people are on board. I think for staff is that you're here, and we have a mission and vision, how are you fulfilling that within your classroom, within the school building, and making sure people would realize that no matter what goes on? This is what we said that we were going to be focused on the mission of the kids, and this is what we said, student achievement, living happy, healthy lives, and so making sure that that is always the focus of what we do.

To gauge staff members' buy-in, participants discussed gathering their input through committees such as faculty councils. In some instances, discussions in faculty council meetings led to identifying common language and practices for the school. In other cases, such as with Grace, staff members' responses regarding SWBIP were a determining factor in not implementing a school-wide program. In her interview, Grace stated,

…and we had meaningful discussions as a faculty, as a leadership team, if we needed that, and we did take a look to see if we needed that, and we just did not have the data to support that, we didn't have to buy in to support that, so we have not gone toward that route. And that doesn't mean that we won't ever go there, but just right now where we are, we are not having to... We don't have a need to put those programs in place.

While gathering teacher buy-in was identified as a factor influencing elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP, participants also understand that school-wide initiatives were unlikely to be accepted by all of the faculty all of the time. Charles believed in the importance of gathering input from key stakeholders in the building and allowing implementation to expand from there. In his interview, he stated,

I'm not saying you need every last, single person…you're not going to get 99 out of 99 people, but you've got to have buy-in…from your grade levels and your departments and your team leaders, and then from there it will grow.

Participants also understood a key component of staff buy-in came from the school administration team. For SWBIP to be implemented successfully, participants believed it was important that administrators work alongside teachers to successfully implement. "It's rolling up your sleeves and working with the teachers, if it's a new teacher, if the teachers are struggling

with something, they have questions, just being in there and modeling it for them, 'This is how you want to do this for classroom management,' because you want to get to buy in."

In addition to these significant statements regarding staff buy-in, when deciding whether to implement SWBIP, participants also expressed staff buy-in as both a pro and con on individual writing prompts. Some participants, particularly the participants with some degree of implementation of SWBIP, believed that SWBIP increased the opportunity for staff members to have buy-in. Alternatively, most participants expressed the challenge of gaining staff buy-in for a SWBIP to be implemented successfully. The statements represented in this section illuminate the beliefs that elementary administrators have regarding the importance of gaining staff buy-in. More specifically, when viewed through the lens of global motives, particularly perceived control, it is clear that elementary administrators understood their limitations as school leaders if they did not possess buy-in from school stakeholders.

Student behavior should be taught.

A shared attitude among participants was that student behavior should be taught. Because of this attitude, some participants did not believe in SWBIP to teach students behavior. Instead, they believed that behavior should be handled on an individual basis as "teachable moments." However, other participants who also believed that student behavior should be taught, believed that there was more reason to implement a SWBIP with language and expectations to develop necessary behavioral skills.

Charles referred to teachable moments in the interview. When asked about his values, he shared the importance of reflection and being able to say to students, "I'm so glad the next time that this were to happen you were able to use those things that were taught to you to help manage

those behaviors." Charles believed in teaching students coping skills and giving them space to use them in real-world experiences.

Several participants shared similar feelings to Charles regarding teaching students' behavior. In her focus group, Elizabeth stated, "I firmly believe that we should not punish students for something that they don't know better." In addition to Elizabeth's beliefs, Frank believed that school was responsible for serving as a safe place for students to be taught behavior and responsible for giving guidance and support for desired behaviors. When teaching students behavior, Frank also expressed the importance of understanding students as individuals and that some students take longer than others to learn appropriate behavior skills. He stated:

Some kids can do that and some kids struggle to even formulate the words to be able to express their need. So, I think behavior is - We all have a different threshold, we all have a different tolerance, we all have different personalities. I think is helping kids understand that their emotions are okay and emotion and behavior can be connected, but they can also, you're making a choice, if you understand the emotion you're feeling is helping them - That takes time. To kind of build that. To have the resistance or the self-control level, not to respond, how you might just want to. To help give them skills and strategies and tools to be able to make a different choice.

Hannah shared a similar attitude about students being taught appropriate behaviors and expectations. During the interview, she shared a personal experience with her own child's teacher. Her sentiments regarding this teacher illuminated her values as both an administrator and parent. Furthermore, it highlighted the impact that adults had on students when behavior was viewed as a "teachable moment." Hannah stated:

I'm going to use my daughter's teacher as an example. I'm choosing this fifth-grade teacher because she does a phenomenal job helping the students reflect on their behavior but also make a plan for when it happens next time. So, she was telling me about a particularly difficult student that got upset and threw something on the floor. So instead of just clipping them down or calling me to come get the student, she took the time after that student had taken some deep breaths and calmed down to go over what happened. "Hey, what were you feeling? What caused that feeling? And then next time you feel that way, what are you going to do differently?" And she really holds them to the fire too and will bring that conversation up again. "Hey, here, you seem to be getting upset. Remember when we talked about last time? What is your strategy?" And again, my daughter's in that class, and she has been saying some of that, "Hey, my strategy for this is," and using some of that language that we expect really adults to use. But it gives kids tools in their toolbox just like teachers have tools in their toolbox, but it does it in a way where they're going to remember it because they connected it to their own experiences.

Similar to Frank and Hannah, other participants shared beliefs regarding the importance of teaching students' behavior. In his interview, Adam discussed how behavior should be taught much like academics. He stated,

… especially for young kids, it's training and so just like we teach kids academic skills and content, behavior can also be taught and I think some kids are really good at picking up on modeling and reinforcers because it's not that I'm not a total behavior modification kind of person with rewards and all that stuff. A lot of it is modeling and those are the most powerful ways to teach kids good behavior. I also think, just like adults, some kids

are really tuned into models, and some are not, some are clueless. So, with some of those

kids, you have to be more discreet about how you teach them good behaviors.

Ivy expressed similar statements regarding behavior and the importance of expectations

being taught. One of the things she valued most was teaching students how to deal with conflict

management. She stated, "I think the key to student behavior is helping students learn how to be

successful in life, so I think that's the biggest thing is helping children learn how to be successful

regardless of what other barriers are in their way to functioning well in a group environment."

Denise shared Ivy's sentiments regarding supporting students with behavior skills. " …just

giving the students the support they need. The student that continually acts out and I can't really

help them, maybe is that they do need therapy, maybe they do need something more than what

we can give them within the regular classroom setting."

Participant responses through the virtual writing prompt, interviews, and focus groups

clarified that elementary administrators' attitudes regarding behavior influenced their decision-

making experiences regarding whether or not to implement SWBIP. As mentioned in significant

statements above, administrators both for and opposed to SWBIP believed that behavior should

be taught and modeled. Furthermore, participants believed that students should have

opportunities to practice expected behavior. The global motive that student behavior should be

taught aligns with one of the premises of SWBIP, for example PBIS, that schools should

incorporate explicit teaching of expected behaviors to create a prosocial learning environment

(Bohanon et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Nelen et al., 2019; Tyre et al., 2018).

Staff and student relationships.

Relationships with students as a means to support behavior were a consistent theme

through all data collection measures. Participants expressed the impact that both they and their

teachers had on student behavior through establishing relationships with students. In addition, staff and student relationships were identified as a global motive that influenced elementary administrators' decisions on implementing SWBIP.

The interview with Adam discussed how strong relationships helped teachers when students displayed challenging behaviors. He stated, "They know how to cultivate relationships with kids so that when those bumps in the road do come, they know how to work through that with the student." Another significant statement revealed his thoughts about the varying efficacy that teachers possess in building relationships with students. He stated:

> I find the teachers that do have some discreet training and experience in different
> approaches for student behavior, I tend to find that they do better and then also those
> teachers where student relationships come naturally, those teachers I think sometimes
> tend to do better. The teachers that lean more towards the technician - the teacher that it's
> like they're all about academics - they don't counterbalance that with the relationships
> piece or the behavior management piece, sometimes they struggle a little bit.

Like Adam, Ivy believed that relationships with students had a direct impact on student behavior. She stated, "I believe that student behavior usually is a direct result of either the lack of a relationship with the child or a need that the child has that's not being met." She elaborated more about the importance of understanding students' needs by knowing what is impacting them outside of school. She stated,

> I think teachers that create relationships with their students, that are in tune with the
> needs of their classrooms. Some of our children are just... They have so many different
> things going on at home and to think that, that doesn't impact them when they come to
> school, is quite frankly not someone who needs to be in education. If you don't realize

that there's an impact of what's happening in that child's life and how they behave in school, I just think our kids face, especially this year too, our kids are just facing so many different things, whether it's divorce or somebody died or being in a family that's not stable right now or a parent that maybe is sick in the hospital with COVID, or whatever may be the case. We've got to know what's happening in our students' lives and how that has an effect on them at the school level. Because especially in an elementary school, children don't know how to compartmentalize those things. We have teachers that struggle with compartmentalizing what's happening in their lives and still being effective at school, so how can we expect our students to do that? So I think I value most creating those relationships where they know what's happening with their kids.

During interviews and focus groups, participants also made noteworthy comments regarding their influence over school behavior by establishing relationships with students. For example, Hannah discussed how she worked hard to establish relationships with the more challenging students. She established relationships through daily check-ins or conversations with students about their behavior. Elizabeth also expressed that her influence over student discipline was reflected in the relationships she built with students. She stated, "I try and be visible in the building so that they know what we expect." Ivy's statements regarding student behavior were similar. When asked about her influence over student behavior at her school, she stated:

I think I have a good amount of influence over it, with students that I've made relationships with. Having been here so long, a lot of the students that we have had their whole school life really. So with students like that, I have a lot of influence. If you have a new student that doesn't have a connection with you, you really have zero influence with them, I feel. I really try hard to make some connections with those students that are new

to the building or that I notice right away are high-fliers, that are getting in trouble, having to visit my office, making sure to establish relationships with those families, too. It depends. If it's a student I've known a long time, typically, I have a lot of influence on them.

In her interview, Grace, a building principal for five years, discussed specific steps to enhance her relationships with students. One specific action she took was to develop a compliment box for students to be celebrated on the school's morning news show. Grace's intentional focus on relationships with students through a compliment box mirrored how she approached behavior administratively. She said,

> I think the trust and the relationship. It could be really intimidating and probably coming from the perspective of when there is a behavior that has escalated to an office-level offense. I really take pride and value in the relationship that I have with students. So when they walk in my office, they know that I am there really, truly to support them, to find out what has happened and to provide reassurance that we're going to work through it together and figure it out…I also value working together with a team to figure out behavior. So often behavior is an indicator of possibility of basic need not being met, is something deeper. So just being able to respond and possibly help connect that student with resources in the school, in our district and the community, can help them with that a situation is something that I value.

Participants provided significant statements through data collection evidence that relationships with students are a key factor influencing how elementary administrators approach behavior in their schools. Participants' responses were primarily focused on teachers' relationships with students, the teachers' varying efficacy in establishing relationships with

students, and administrator influence over school behavior by developing relationships with students. For this study, relationships with students emerged as a global motive that influenced elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Context-Specific Reasons

Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory defines context-specific reasons as subjective factors that individuals use to explain their anticipated behavior (Westaby, 2005). For this study, context-specific reasons refer to school-based factors that influenced elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Consistently throughout virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups, participants made significant statements regarding their respective school discipline data, culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and the amount of time and money used to implement school-wide approaches to behavior management such as PBIS and Restorative Justice. The following information details the context-specific reasons that influenced elementary administrators' decisions on implementing SWBIP and significant statements made during the data collection process.

School discipline data.

All 11 participants referred to school discipline data as a school-based, context-specific reason when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. Several of the school administrators referred to their school discipline data as not supporting the implementation of SWBIP. In particular, elementary administrators serving at affluent, suburban schools often reported minimal behavior infractions. For example, in his interview, Charles discussed his school's discipline data and its ranking within the district. He stated,

Yeah, so if you boil down to the data, the referrals don't lead you to believe that we need to have a school-wide system, and when you stack our school up against most elementary schools, we're going to be in that top 5% as far as least amount of discipline referrals. So, there's no referral data there.

When discussing his data, Charles stated that he did not see a need to implement a SWBIP because of the low number of discipline referrals at his school. Although Charles's school did not implement a SWBIP, he did choose to implement some of his previous PBIS training at his school. Specifically, Charles referenced his proactive approach to behavior management and his school's motto, including an acronym that reflects PBIS behavior practices. He stated, "The teachers have a good grasp, and the kids are fairly well behaved, but we could always improve, we could always do better, and that's what led me to put some things in place, but not the full-blown PBIS training."

Ivy, an assistant elementary administrator serving at an affluent, suburban school, echoed many of Charles' sentiments regarding minimal behavior distractions. She stated:

Yes, because we have very little school-wide behavior issues. Our teachers don't even really write referrals… I would say the majority of my teachers don't even know how to go into IMS (incident management system) and write a referral, because they've never done it. Not that they haven't been shown, they just don't use it. I've had one student this year that's received numerous referrals. He's going into an emotionally disabled, self-contained class. But other than that child, we probably had maybe less than 15 referrals all year, so there's not a lot of major behavior issues at our school.

Like Ivy, several participants referred to students with recurring behavioral incidents as repeat offenders or high fliers. Their statements regarding these students reflected their beliefs

that their school data did not support the implementation of SWBIP. Moreover, these administrators did not believe a determination to implement a SWBIP should be made to address the needs of a small number of their student population. Adam, a principal at a high socioeconomic status suburban school, referred to the incident rate of behaviors at his school as minimal. Adam stated:

When we look at our number of referrals by far the most referrals are bus referrals, without exception and again different setting, different structures in place, and different reinforcers in place when you look at this and then if you remove bus referrals again our incident rates are so low that - and again it's always the same kids - a small number that we're seeing on those referrals. So, I guess that would be probably the main data that I would cite that would leave me to say I don't know that I need to school-wide program to address the behaviors of a very small number of students.

Discipline data also revealed itself as context-specific reasons when administrators were seeking to address the specific needs of their school. In focus groups, both Grace and Ben, elementary principals who experienced schools with and without SWBIP, discussed utilizing discipline data as a needs assessment to address the school's specific needs. When deciding whether to implement a SWBIP, Grace stated:

I think it should be based on data, input, and buy in from the staff and if they're needed at school. I think for some schools and like I've shared my experience, I was at [school name], we needed a PBIS program. We needed a program that was going to be very heavy on incentives for that particular population of students. PBIS is not a bad thing, I think PBIS, like I said, works when the data supports it, you have staff buy-in and the

proper training. I think any SWBIP initiative is just so important to have those pieces in place.

Likewise, Ben referred to the importance of utilizing and reviewing discipline data on a regular basis in order to address the needs of the individual school. He said,

The reality is, if your referrals don't show disrespect towards peers, then why would you do Love Your People? So, there kind of has to be some data behind that decision, but then it has to be one of those focuses where we're not going to say we're going to do it and then do it, that's something that has to be frequently revisited and feedback is given.

In addition to significant statements from interviews and focus groups, discipline data was identified in participants' virtual writing prompts. Thus, not only did elementary administrators believe discipline data should be used as a needs assessment tool when determining whether a school-wide approach is necessary to address student behavior, they also believed data should be used to determine the type of program, if necessary, that would also best meet the needs of the staff and students.

School culture.

Elementary administrators referred to their school culture through responses to the virtual writing prompt, interviews, and focus groups. In particular, elementary administrators discussed the needs of their school regarding SWBIP and the home lives of their students and the degree of support needed to support their behavior. One example of school culture as a school-based contextual factor was Charles's transition to a new school as the building principal. He stated:

When I took over at [school name], they had a lot of school-wide initiatives that were expected and handed to them (teachers) that when I did my typical - like when you come into a school, you sit back and you observe and you listen and you monitor for a year

before you try to make any changes. And what I heard from them overwhelmingly was it wasn't with behavior school-wide systems, it was other school-wide things, exemplary writing things and other things like that, that they felt they were burned out. They were tired of all the trainings that go along with Leader in Me and this and that. And then it just felt like there truly wasn't enough buy-in from it overall, and they just wanted to adhere to certain principles, but not make it so formal and so rigid in itself.

Frank, the elementary administrator of a school implementing a SWBIP, referred to utilizing a school-wide approach to support teachers. Frank expressed the varying levels of teacher efficacy in managing behavior. However, instead of pointing blame to their shortcomings, he discussed how his leadership team supports teachers with student behavior.

We were very supportive, very collaborative. We want the teachers to feel supported that way. We also want - we're doing our best to try to equip them with skills and support in that way too, so that they're, they're building their own capacities in that regard.

Identified repeatedly as a significant statement during data analysis was administrators' comments regarding students' home lives. Depending on the school's socioeconomic status, administrators discussed students' behavior as a direct result of students' home lives. For example, elementary administrators of affluent, suburban schools reported minimal behavior issues and no need for a SWBIP. Alternatively, administrators serving in schools identified as lower-income, more diverse, and having less support from home were likely to report recurring behavioral issues and a need for a SWBIP.

Principals of schools serving higher socioeconomic statuses echoed similar comments regarding the low number of discipline issues that they had to address in their schools. In her

interview, Hannah, principal of an elementary school, serving students of higher socioeconomic status with highly involved families, stated,

> Our kids are fairly well behaved; they usually come from families that have instilled some motivation, some goals, some discipline. So again, and this goes back to many, many years before I even came here, we have students that come from families that are very active in their education, that are responsive to teachers' calling, that encourage students through external motivators like, "I'll get you this if you get A's on your report cards," the kids are highly involved in athletics…because of this, we do not see that many extreme behaviors at our school. So there has not been a need identified from the staff as a whole or as from our principal for having a school-wide system.

Like Hannah, Ivy, Adam, Ben, and Grace worked with highly engaged families resulting in minimal discipline issues. Ivy stated, "We don't really have a lot of disrespect issues…nothing that usually isn't corrected by a phone call home." Grace stated, concerning keeping open lines of communication with families, "Our parents really appreciate just the open conversation and the transparency with issues that come up. So, I would definitely say natural consequences, immediate response, and then involving parents as well." Ben stated, "…you're just dealing with a lot of families that support the school and don't question the behaviors that are handed out." Regarding parent support, Adam stated, "…we serve a community where parents are really engaged, they're going to support from home.

Elementary administrators also discussed the negative impact that home lives can have on student behavior. In particular, administrators discussed having to address behaviors that had been learned at home. "I think that sometimes the different backgrounds that our students have grown up in…they have not necessarily been taught proper behaviors." Ivy discussed the impact

that personal circumstances at home can cause in a child's behavior. She stated,

> … They have so many different things going on at home and to think that, that doesn't impact them when they come to school, is quite frankly not someone who needs to be in education…. because especially in an elementary school, children don't know how to compartmentalize those things. We have teachers that struggle with compartmentalizing what's happening in their lives and still being effective at school, so how can we expect our students to do that?

Data from virtual writing prompts, interviews, and transcriptions revealed that school culture, particularly the staff's climate and involvement from parents, is a school-based, context-specific reason that influences elementary administrators' decisions to decide whether to implement SWBIPs. Elementary administrators' statements made it clear that they believed parental involvement and support with the school was directly correlated to student behavior.

Teacher efficacy in managing behavior.

When considering whether to implement a SWBIP, elementary administrators expressed teacher efficacy in managing behavior as a school-based contextual factor influencing their decision. Participants' statements referenced teachers' abilities to manage challenging behavior in the classroom as a contributing factor to the degree of support needed by the administration and whether or not a SWBIP is needed. Administrators expressed teacher efficacy in managing behavior varied among staff members. In particular, participants referred to outlying behaviors, those "high fliers," as being more difficult to manage for some teachers than others. For example, Charles stated:

> But when we get that outlier, that high-flyer, that's where I can see, for some of them, not all of my staff, but for some of them, that will throw them for a loop, and they struggle,

and that's where we have to come along and help us in coaching and involve some other teachers and staff members that do a good job with providing some of those skills for them.

Frank expressed similar sentiments regarding how the teachers in his building handled challenging student behavior. In particular, Frank discussed how difficult it was for a teacher to manage behavior when continued efforts by the school continued to be ineffective. He stated:

> … it's a struggle because you have a kid that as a repeat offender, you have a kid, that you've gotten the parents in, you're talking with the parents, you know, you are providing every intervention, you know, you have a mentor, you have, I mean they're checking in with counselors periodically, you've got all these things - and yet, they still continue to, you know misbehave, they still struggle with that.

Adam believed that most of his teachers could handle behaviors within their classrooms. However, when challenging behaviors occurred, his teachers involved administrators. He stated, "They are really going to handle the majority of their problems in their classroom but then when those high flier behaviors happen, they are going to reach out to administrators. Echoing Adam, Denise believed the majority of her staff was able to manage behaviors without the support of the administration. She stated, "…for probably about 85 to 90% of them, they're very good at handling behaviors…it's the same teachers every year that call you for discipline issues. It's either that they're unable, in my opinion, to build relationships with those students or they view very small things as being very big."

Although the administrators made significant statements regarding teacher efficacy in managing behavior, they also agreed that there will always be outlying student behavior. As stated by Ivy in her interview, "I think there's always going to be children in the building,

regardless of whether you're at a school like ours or at a high poverty school, where there's going to be children that struggle with behavior; they need extra support." In addition, principals' statements, regardless of the affluence of their school, all affirmed that students considered "high fliers" would need additional support regardless of whether a SWBIP was implemented at capacity.

Time and money.

Interestingly, the amount of time and money that it takes to implement a SWBIP was consistently identified as a school-based, contextual factor that influenced school administrators' decisions to not implement a school-wide program at capacity. All 11 participants' virtual writing prompts included significant statements regarding the cost and time it would take to train staff and some of the fees that would come with maintaining positive behavior incentives. More specifically, participants discussed the challenge of training new teachers each year to maintain fidelity in implementing a SWBIP.

School-based, context-specific reasons emerged from virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups regarding factors influencing elementary administrators' decision-making experiences to implement SWBIP. While administrators made many significant statements, consistently coded statements fell into the themes of school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and the time and money that it costs to implement SWBIP.

Research Question Responses

The following section uses themes and supporting participant quotes to address this study's research questions. Based on the study's theoretical framework of behavioral reason theory (Westaby, 2005), research questions guided the lens through which significant statements

were identified and developed into themes. In particular, participants' statements regarding their decision-making experiences were categorized into two subgroups: school-based context-specific reasons and global motives. The following questions were answered:

CQ: What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

SQ1: What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

SQ2: What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study sought to understand, "What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?" To identify the factors influencing elementary administrators' decisions on implementing SWBIP, participants' responses to virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups through behavioral reasoning theory's global motives and context-specific reasons were reviewed. The results of this study indicated the factors that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP were: school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, time and money, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, consistency, and teacher buy-in. Because sub questions for this study were based on the context-specific reasons and global motives, greater discussion of the themes is discussed below.

Research Question One

The first sub question for this study sought to understand, "What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?"

According to behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), context-specific reasons are defined as subjective factors that individuals use to explain their anticipated behavior. For this study, context-specific reasons are considered school-based factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Among all data collection measures, participants made significant statements regarding the school-based, context-specific reasons that influenced their decision to implement SWBIP. The school-based, context-specific reasons included: school discipline data, culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and the amount of time and money needed to implement a school-wide approach to behavior management.

When deciding whether to implement SWBIP, elementary administrators should consider their school discipline data. Findings from each data collection method clarified that school discipline data was a driving factor in whether an elementary administrator believes a SWBIP should be implemented. For example, elementary administrators from schools reporting minimal discipline referrals and highly involved parents were likely to not implement a SWBIP. Grace, an elementary administrator serving a school that does not implement a SWBIP, stated,

> …and we had meaningful discussions as a faculty, as a leadership team, if we needed that [SWBIP], and we did take a look to see if we needed that, and we just did not have the data to support that, we didn't have the buy-in to support that, so we have not gone toward that route. That doesn't mean that we won't ever go there, but just right now where we are, we are not having to.

Alternatively, elementary principals serving lower-income, more diverse schools were likely to believe that a SWBIP must establish consistent expectations, common language, and consequences. For example, another administrators' response referenced a previous school she

served where a school-wide approach was implemented. Regarding making decisions about implementing a SWBIP, Grace said,

> I think it should be based on data. Input and buy in from the staff and if they're needed at school. I think for some schools and like I've shared my experience, I was at Evergreen Elementary School, we needed a PBIS program. We needed a program that was going to be very heavy on incentives for that particular population of students. PBIS is not a bad thing, I think PBIS, like I said, works when the data supports it, you have staff buy in and the proper training. I think any SWBIP initiative is just so important to have those pieces in place.

Another school-based, context-specific reason influencing elementary administrators' decisions on whether to implement a SWBIP was their respective school cultures. Much like participants' responses regarding school discipline data, school culture was highly reflective of whether a school administrator believed a SWBIP should be implemented. Specifically, elementary administrators believed that the home lives of their students and the degree to which behavior support was needed was the driving influence behind the implementation of SWBIP. While some administrators discussed minimal discipline issues as a reason not to implement a SWBIP, other administrators, like Frank, discussed the need to provide structure for less fortunate children in having expectations and behavior models at home. He stated,

> ...It's getting the kids to understand why they feel the way they do or why they they chose to respond that way - And for them to understand that their response can also have consequences for them…to see beyond their emotion to something bigger.

Another school-based context-specific reason that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP was teachers' efficacy in managing behavior.

Administrators' expressed teacher efficacy in managing behavior varied among staff members. For example, participants referred to recurring, challenging behaviors, also known as "high fliers," as more difficult for some teachers to manage than others. Charles stated,

> But when we get that outlier, that high-flyer, that's where I can see, for some of them, not all of my staff, but for some of them, that will throw them for a loop, and they struggle, and that's where we have to come along and help us in coaching and involve some other teachers and staff members that do a good job with providing some of those skills for them.

> Important to note regarding teachers' efficacy in managing behavior, all participants agreed that regardless of the decision to implement a SWBIP, there were always outlying behavioral issues that required more support than what a program offered. As stated by Ivy, "I think there's always going to be children in the building, regardless of whether you're at a school like ours or at a high poverty school, where there's going to be children that struggle with behavior, they need extra support."

> Participants also discussed the context-specific reason of time and money as influencing factors regarding whether they chose to implement a SWBIP. Consistently, but in particular in participants' responses to the cons of SWBIP in the virtual writing prompts, elementary administrators discussed how costly a SWBIP can be and the time commitment that it would take to consistently train staff members.

> Sub question one of this study sought to identify the school-based context-specific reasons that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement to a SWBIP. Virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups identified that elementary administrators considered school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and the

amount of time and money it takes to implement SWBIP as factors when deciding whether to implement at a SWBIP.

Research Question Two

The second sub question for this study sought to understand, "What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?" Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) defines global motives as individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. Like context-specific reasons, the theory posits that global motives help individuals defend their actions or decisions (Westaby, 2005). Global motives, for this study, included the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement a SWBIP. Data from this study identified four global motives that influenced elementary administrators' decisions regarding SWBIP: consistency, teacher buy-in, student behavior should be taught, and staff and student relationships.

Overwhelmingly, in all forms of data collection, participants discussed the importance of consistency in school-wide expectations for behavior and language and consistency being essential for a SWBIP to be successful. Much like Ben's belief that consistency was the only way for SWBIP to be successful, Kathleen believed that leadership had a significant impact on the successful implementation of SWBIP. She stated:

> I think if it's done with fidelity and consistent, it can be positive and influential, and that
> it's something that can carry on throughout life, but the main thing with any type of PBIS
> or any type of focus area is consistent, and making sure people are on board. I think for
> staff is that you're here, and we have a mission and vision, how are you fulfilling that
> within your classroom, within the school building, and making sure people would realize

that no matter what goes on? This is what we said that we were going to be focused on the mission of the kids, and this is what we said, student achievement, living happy, healthy lives, and so making sure that that is always the focus of what we do.

Consistency was also discussed from the perspective of SWBIP increasing teachers' understanding of how to handle behavior and the steps. Frank stated:

The implementation of something like this with the hope that there will be more consistency across the grade levels, there would be more teachers who would feel more equipped to be able to respond.

Likewise, Hannah discussed the need for consistency in how student behaviors were handled and all stakeholders having had a common understanding of behavior language. Hannah stated, "I feel like when it's school-wide, we can support each other a little more." In addition, participants all agreed that SWBIP could increase consistency and commonality in the language that is used to support students' behavior.

Another school-based, context-specific reason discussed by participants was teacher buy-in. All participants agreed that for SWBIP to be successful, teacher buy-in was essential. However, the deciding factor for elementary administrators deciding whether to implement SWBIP was whether or not they would have staff support. This concept aligns with behavioral reasoning theory's (BRT) perceived control regarding the degree to which elementary administrators feel they will be successful in implementing a SWBIP. Participants made many significant statements regarding buy-in.

When discussing buy-in, Charles discussed the need to have the majority of the staff on board with the program that was being implemented. He stated,

…I'm not saying you need every last, single person…you're not going to get 99 out of 99 people, but you've got to have buy-in. You've got to have buy-in from your grade levels and from your departments and from your team leaders, and then from there it will grow.

Likewise, administrators believed in the importance of authenticity and research to support the adoption. "…it [SWBIP] should be more authentic in the fact that it's more driven by changing behavior versus just having consequences for behavior. We were in the process of trying to create buy-in from the staff." In addition, programs should be supported by research. "In order to get buy-in, there really needs to be a one to two-year study that predicates the adoption of that program." When viewed through the concept of perceived control, these statements regarding buy-in made it clear that elementary administrators understood their limitations as school leaders if they did not possess buy-in from school stakeholders.

Another global motive, an attitude expressed by most participants, was that behavior should be taught. Participants made statements regarding their beliefs that individualized behavior support must be provided for behavior to be a "teachable moment." Elizabeth and Frank believed that schools have a responsibility to teach students expectations for behavior and provide them time to practice expected skills. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that some students need more time than others to learn expected behavior. Frank stated:

> Some kids can do that and some kids struggle to even formulate the words to be able to express their need. So, I think behavior is - We all have a different threshold, we all have a different tolerance, we all have different personalities. I think is helping kids understand that their emotions are okay and emotion and behavior can be connected, but they can also, you're making a choice, if you understand the emotion you're feeling is helping them - That takes time. To kind of build that. To have the resistance or the self-control

level, not to respond, how you might just want to. To help give them skills and strategies and tools to be able to make a different choice.

The final global motive that elementary administrators discussed was the influence of staff and student relationships on student behavior. This global motive, in particular staff's efficacy to build relationships, was a factor considered by elementary school administrators when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. Regarding teachers' efficacy in building relationships, Adam stated:

I find the teachers that do have some discreet training and experience in different approaches for student behavior, I tend to find that they do better and then also those teachers where student relationships come naturally, those teachers I think sometimes tend to do better. The teachers that lean more towards the technician - the teacher that it's like they're all about academics - they don't counterbalance that with the relationships piece or the behavior management piece, sometimes they struggle a little bit.

Like Adam, Ivy believed that relationships with students had a direct impact on student behavior. She stated, "I believe that student behavior usually is a direct result of either the lack of a relationship with the child or a need that the child has that's not being met." Participants echoed these sentiments in their importance as school administrators, building relationships with students to support school behavior.

The second sub question for this study asked, "What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP?" Participants' significant statements were viewed through the theoretical lens of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005). Statements that could be categorized as an attitude, subjective norm, or perceived control were grouped into the theme of global motives. The following themes were identified as global motive

factors that influenced elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding implementation of SWBIP: consistency, teacher buy-in, student behavior should be taught, and staff and student relationships.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to describe elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological reduction process, participants' responses to virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed to answer the central research question: What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP? More specifically, in addition to the central research question, this study sought to understand the global motives and context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences when choosing to or not to implement a SWBIP.

Themes were thoroughly discussed with participants' statements woven throughout. In addition, research questions were carefully addressed using identified themes. The themes for this study were sorted into two groups, global motives and context-specific reasons. The following were identified as factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding implementation of SWBIP: school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, time and money, student behavior should be taught, relationships are key, consistency, and teacher buy-in.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs in a large school district in the southeastern region of the United States. Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process was used to analyze data from virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups. Data was viewed through the study's theoretical framework, behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), to describe the global motives and context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement a school-wide behavior improvement program. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and implications in light of relevant literature and theory, as well as implications, delimitations, and limitations of the study's findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand the factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of school-wide behavior improvement programs (SWBIP). Using behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) as the theoretical framework for this study, the following questions were answered: 1) What factors influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP? 2) What school-based, context-specific reasons influence elementary administrators' decisions to implement SWBIP? and 3) What global motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether or not to implement? Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process was used to analyze and determine findings from virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups.

Central Research Question

The factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP fall into two categories: context-specific reasons and global motives. Within the context-specific reasons, the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP include school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing student behavior, time, and money. Within global motives, the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP include student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, consistency, and teacher buy-in. The sub-questions for this study provide greater detail into the discoveries of this study's global motives and context-specific reasons.

Sub Question One

Sub question one for this study sought to understand the school-based context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. Through virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups, participants could justify the context-specific reasons that influenced their decision-making experiences to implement such programs. The context-specific reasons that influenced elementary administrators' decisions to implement SWBIP included school discipline data, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money.

Sub Question Two

Sub question two for this study sought to understand the global motives that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. Through virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups, participants were able to justify the global motives that influenced their decision-making experiences to implement such programs. The global motives

that influenced elementary administrators' decisions to implement SWBIP included consistency, teacher buy-in, student behavior should be taught, and staff and student relationships.

Discussion

This section includes a discussion of the study findings concerning the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Specifically, the following section will discuss the findings and extensions of the study's theoretical framework, behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005). In addition, this section will discuss the study's findings concerning previous research and its contributions to the field of education.

Theoretical Discussion

One of the most significant responsibilities of school leaders is making decisions (Kline, 2016). Given this understanding, Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study to better understand the nature of human decision-making. Behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) was used to identify and understand the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

The overarching proposition in Westaby's (2005) theory is that reasons serve as important linkages between people's beliefs, global motives, intentions, and behavior. Furthermore, the theory justifies that reasons impact global motives and intentions and help individuals justify and defend their actions (Westaby, 2005). Two primary components of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005), global motives and context-specific reasons, were consistently corroborated in this study. This section will discuss how the study's findings corroborate and extend previous research in light of the study's theoretical framework.

Originating from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, Sahu et al., 2002; Westaby, 2005), a key concept of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) is an individual's

intention (Ajzen, 1991) and volitional control (Hso & Kuo, 2003; Sheppard et al., 1988). Ajzen's (1991) work posited that intentions serve as motivations of behavior and determine how much effort and work ethic an individual is willing to exert to perform the behavior. Furthermore, one's intention to participate in behavior is contingent on volitional control. Volitional control is the degree to which individuals can consistently execute behaviors based on their thoughts regarding the expected outcome of the social norm (Hso & Kuo, 2003; Sheppard et al., 1988).

Participants made significant statements regarding their intentions and volitional control in all data collection forms when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. It was evident that school socioeconomic status played a significant role in the frequency of discipline issues at elementary administrators' respective elementary schools. Participant interviews and focus groups clarified that the frequency of discipline issues needing to be resolved directly correlated to whether or not elementary administrators implemented a SWBIP. This understanding corroborates Ajzen's (1991) proposition that an individual's intention determines the degree to which he is willing to perform a behavior. In this study, if an administrator intends to decrease discipline within the school, he or she is more likely to implement a SWBIP. Alternatively, in consideration of a school's socioeconomic status, where a school has a lower frequency of discipline issues, elementary administrators are less likely to intend to implement a SWBIP.

Similarly, the findings of this study substantiate previous research regarding volitional control (Hso & Kuo, 2003; Sheppard et al., 1988). Participants made many significant statements regarding the expected outcome, social norms, and the need for human and fiscal resources for a SWBIP to be implemented effectively. Participants expressed challenges, such as consistency and on-boarding new staff members when discussing the expected outcome of implementing a SWBIP. A key influencer of elementary administrators' volitional control when deciding

whether to implement a SWBIP is the social norm concerning staff buy-in. Mentioned 86 times amongst all participants was the importance of staff buy-in and cooperation to successfully implement a SWBIP. These significant statements corroborate the concept that individuals execute their behavior based on the anticipated social norms of the behavior. For this study, elementary administrators' volitional control was influenced by their school's social norm, specifically, the degree of staff buy-in they had in deciding to implement a SWBIP.

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior posits that while volitional control influences an individual's willingness to perform a behavior, nonmotivational factors, such as opportunities or resources, determine behavioral performance. Although participants discussed the challenges of implementing a SWBIP, mentioned only 15 times in data collection methods, human and fiscal resources did not appear to be the most significant factor influencing elementary administrators' decisions on whether to implement a SWBIP. Therefore, the findings from this study are contrary to Ajzen (1991) in that other factors, primarily those correlated to volitional control, had a greater influence on whether or not an elementary administrator decided to implement a SWBIP.

Perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991) is a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a task. An extension of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control is influenced by how well one can perform the task (Ajzen, 1991). Although participants did not directly discuss their confidence in their abilities to implement a SWBIP, several themes, including consistency, staff and student relationships, and teacher efficacy in managing student behavior was discovered. Supporting the work of Bandura (1977) and Ajzen (1991), these themes illuminate the perceived challenges that elementary administrators face when deciding whether or not to implement a SWBIP.

Global Motives

Westaby's (2005) theory of behavioral reasoning theory distinguishes itself from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) by providing a comprehensive understanding of the nature of human decision-making. Specifically, the theory differentiates between global motives and context-specific reasons. Global motives are substantive factors that influence individuals' actions across diverse behavioral domains. The substantive factors that predict an individual's intention are attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control (Westaby, 2005). Findings from this study revealed global motives of consistency, teacher buy-in, student behavior should be taught, and staff and student relationships. A review of the findings in light of the theoretical framework, Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory, indicates that global motives, specifically how individuals' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control influence their behavior.

Attitude

Attitude is a conscious choice in performing a behavior through analytic and deliberate evaluation and is a significant predictor of adoption decisions (Ajzen, 2002; Claudy et al., 2013; Sahu et al., 2020). Moreover, the more favorable an individual's attitude is towards the behavior, the more likely he is to perform the behavior (Claudy et al., 2013). The global motives identified in this study included consistency, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in.

Participants in this study shared the attitude that SWBIP increased a school's ability to maintain consistent expectations, allowed students to know how adults will respond, shared a common language, and kept everyone on the same page. Contrary to Ajzen (2002), Claudy et al., (2013), and Sahu et al. (2020), the findings from this study revealed that while elementary

administrators acknowledged the favorable outcome that SWBIP could have on consistency within the school, it did not increase the likelihood that they would perform the behavior of implementing a SWBIP.

Elementary administrators shared the attitude that student behavior should be taught. Administrators believed that it was the school's responsibility to teach students what is expected, that we must help students with behavior and that students need time to learn appropriate behavior. Although elementary administrators shared the attitude that SWBIP could aid in teaching students behavior, this finding did not appear to influence administrators' decisions on whether to implement a SWBIP. Many administrators referenced the need to individualize behavior plans for students with recurring behavioral incidents. Administrators' attitudes regarding student behavior being taught were contradictory to the findings of Westaby (2005) in that it did not increase the likelihood of an elementary administrator deciding to implement a SWBIP.

Participants shared the attitude that staff and student relationships have a significant impact on student behavior. They believed in the importance of building relationships, relating to students, and connecting to challenging students. In addition, elementary administrators made significant statements regarding relational teachers demonstrating greater success in the classroom. Although elementary administrators shared the belief that SWBIP could support staff members, overall, they shared the attitude that some teachers were just innately better at building relationships with students. Thus, elementary administrators shared the attitude that a SWBIP is not essential to build relationships with students. Like previous research on predictors of adoption decisions (Ajzen, 2002; Claudy et al., 2013), this finding corroborates that because

administrators did not share a favorable attitude of SWBIP in enhancing staff and student relationships, they were less likely to implement a SWBIP.

Staff buy-in was identified as a prevalent theme within global motives. Elementary administrators shared the attitude that staff buy-in was a significant indicator of whether or not SWBIP could be implemented successfully. Elementary administrators' statements regarding staff buy-in were indicative of whether or not they decided to implement a SWBIP. Elementary administrators who currently implement a SWBIP discussed the role of involving their staff in the process and having a shared belief for supporting student behavior. Alternatively, elementary administrators not implementing a SWBIP discussed the challenges of having all staff members agree that a SWBIP was needed. These attitudes regarding staff buy-in corroborate that when elementary administrators felt favorable towards their staff's buy-in, they were more likely to implement a SWBIP. On the other hand, elementary administrators experiencing little staff buy-in were likely to have a less favorable attitude towards SWBIP and were therefore less likely to implement such programs. These findings corroborate previous research on how individuals' attitudes influence their decisions to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Claudy et al., 2013).

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms are the peer-based social pressure to perform a behavior (Sahu et al., 2020; Ursavas et al., 2019). Subjective norms are individuals' perceptions of how a decision will be approved or disapproved by peers of importance (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ursavas et al., 2019). The findings of this study corroborate the impact that subjective norms have on an individual's decisions whether or not to act on a behavior. In corroboration with Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, as well as previous research (Kittelman et al., 2019), staff buy-in was reported as a significant factor that

influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement a SWBIP. Statements by administrators illuminated that the degree of favorable staff buy-in regarding SWBIP influenced their decision to implement a SWBIP.

Perceived Control

Perceived control is defined as an individual's perception of being able to behave in a certain way (Ajzen, 1991; Moura et al., 2019; Sahu et al., 2020). Furthermore, research theorizes that individuals are more likely to perform the behavior if they feel they have control over the action (Moura et al., 2019). Findings from this study revealed the global motives of consistency, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in. These global motives, particularly consistency, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in, confirm findings similar to Moura et al. (2019) that when elementary administrators believed they had control over successful implementation, they were more likely to implement SWBIP. Participants' significant statements revealed administrators' acknowledgment of their limited control over how staff members chose to manage behavior, developed relationships with students, and increased staff buy-in. One administrator even stated, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." Like other elementary administrators in this study, Charles did not implement a SWBIP based on his perceived limited control over the successful implementation of a SWBIP. In this study, elementary administrators' perceived control was based on the discovered global motives of consistency, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in.

Context-Specific Reasons

In addition to discovered global motives, context-specific reasons were also identified as factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Westaby (2005) defines context-specific reasons as justifications for individuals' anticipated behavior. In some instances, context-specific reasons contrast with an individual's global attitude toward a behavior (Westaby, 2005). The findings from this study corroborate Westaby's (2005) research regarding how context-specific reasons influence individuals' decisions. The context-specific reasons revealed in this study included school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money. Elementary administrators discussed these context-specific reasons in light of why they chose to or not to implement a SWBIP. Context-specific reasons appeared to influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP more than global motives. The findings from this study corroborated the discussion in Chapter Two regarding how context-specific reasons were pertinent to this study as they could justify why school-based contextual factors could inhibit a school administrator from implementing a school-wide behavior improvement program even if their attitude is in support of such programs.

The findings from this study extend Westaby's (2005) theory of behavioral reasoning theory. Participants' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control were discovered as global motives that included consistency, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in. Likewise, the study also revealed context-specific reasons that influenced elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement a SWBIP. The context-specific reasons identified in this study included school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money. The factors were identified that influenced their decisions whether to implement SWBIP. In addition to corroborating how global motives and context-specific reasons influence individuals' decision-making (Westaby, 2005), the findings of this study also corroborate Westaby's (2005) proposition that reasons can often be in

contrast with an individual's attitudes regarding a behavior. Although elementary administrators' attitudes regarding SWBIP were mostly in favor of implementation, overall, the context-specific reasons identified in this study have greater influence over elementary administrators' decision-making experiences when deciding whether to implement SWBIP.

Empirical Discussion

This study sought to address a gap in the literature regarding the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. While a vast amount of research exists on the impact that SWBIP has on school discipline and culture, little research existed regarding the factors administrators consider when deciding to implement a SWBIP at their school. In addition, current research regarding SWBIPs suggests improved outcomes for vulnerable populations of students (Green et al., 2017). The following sections discuss the study's findings in corroboration with the empirical research on zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices, repeated disciplinary incidents, relationships with students, and staff buy-in discussed in Chapter Two.

Zero-Tolerance, Exclusionary Discipline Practices

A significant amount of research exists regarding the impact zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices have on student outcomes (Adamson et al., 2019; Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Borgmeier et al., 2017; Grasley et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Öğülmüş & Vuran, 2016). Research suggests that practices such as suspension and expulsions do not provide students with strategies to improve their behavior and contribute to ongoing behavioral incidents (Green et al., 2017; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2019). During the interview process, elementary administrators were specifically asked how their understanding of the implications of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices influenced their decisions

regarding student behavior. Several resonating themes emerged. Administrators discussed their desire to avoid exclusionary practices and expressed their limitations in providing alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. Statements made by administrators confirmed previous research that instead of using zero-tolerance, exclusionary practices as a reactive response to discipline incidents, efforts should be focused on reducing problem behavior to keep students in their most appropriate learning environment (Gage et al., 2018; Green et al., 2018).

All participants in this study were familiar with the research-based outcomes that zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices can have on student outcomes. When discussing whether to suspend or expel a student, elementary administrators shared that discipline decisions were not a "one size fits all" model, and such decisions should be made on an individual basis. Elementary administrators also believed that exclusionary practices were not always most impactful. For example, principals believed that it was rare that students saw suspension as a consequence. This finding corroborates previous research that exclusionary discipline practices tend to satisfy the punisher and have little lasting effect on the student to be punished (Green et al., 2017). According to participants, suspensions often resulted in students being unsupervised at home to play or avoid completing school work. Administrators echoed that keeping students in school was what was best for them and was always the goal. Administrators also referred specifically to students with individualized education plans and the importance of providing students a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Participants shared the belief that FAPE must also be considered for other students in the classroom, posing a challenge for determining disciplinary consequences when a student's behavior impedes the learning environment for other students. Furthermore, elementary administrators expressed the legitimacy of limited options regarding consequences when a

student posed a safety risk to the school. Participants stated that due to not having an in-school suspension option, such a consequence fell on the administrative team to supervise the student. Thus, administrators lost valuable time in supporting the overall operational and instructional environment of the school. The reality of these statements made by administrators aligns with the findings of Green et al. (2017). "Those who lack the skills to get their needs met and be a success in the classroom (i.e., the students at highest risk for suspension) will engage in problem behavior despite the consequences received by peers" (Green et al., 2017, p. 422). This finding lends itself to necessary future research on supporting elementary administrators and students with needs to find a supportive balance of managing behavior with appropriate consequences to allow students to remain in school.

Repeated Disciplinary Incidents

Empirical research discusses the impact of zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices on students incurring repeated disciplinary incidents (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Grasley-Boy, 2019, Green et al., 2017). Participants' statements from data collection methods echoed this research and provided an extension to the research regarding the limited options available when students' behavior impacts the learning environment. In addition, it was clear that elementary administrators shared similar experiences with previous research (Green et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017) regarding students that have multiple behavior offenses.

Students with recurring discipline infractions pose challenges to classroom instruction and administrators when determining the most appropriate consequence. Several administrators discussed knowing that suspension was not the best consequence for the student, but also felt limited in other consequences due to in-school suspensions being overseen by members of the administrative team. While often administrators can determine appropriate, meaningful

consequences for student behavior, in some circumstances, administrators echoed that exclusionary practices were their only option. This finding is consistent with data that evidences that of the 6% of students suspended each year, 50% of those students will receive a subsequent suspension, and 70% will receive additional office referrals within the same year (Green et al., 2017).

Relationships with Students

Elementary administrators believe that relationships with students are the most significant factor in managing behavior. This idea certainly corroborates previous research conducted by Anyon et al. (2018) that when students feel connected, they are more likely to interact in the classroom environment positively. Administrators made statements that their most successful teachers managing student behavior took the time to develop strong relationships. Alternatively, administrators also shared that they had to provide the most administrative support in classroom management to those not as effective in developing relationships with students. Anyon et al. (2018) affirm this finding that promising shifts in managing student behavior can occur when educators shift from exclusionary discipline practices to developing relationships with students and treating discipline as an opportunity to support students' healthy social-emotional development.

Staff Buy-In

Among all elementary administrators, staff buy-in was acknowledged as a significant factor in deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. This finding corroborates previous research regarding implementation barriers for SWBIP (Chityo & May, 2018; Tyre et al., 2018; Wienen, 2019). Simply stated, administrators know that program implementation cannot be successfully implemented unless their staff buys into its purpose. Several administrators discussed meeting

with their school's faculty council or committee and the lack of desire from staff members to implement a SWBIP. Tyre et al. (2018) suggested that collecting data from staff to guide decisions for program implementation was a way to combat the barrier of staff buy-in.

Gathering staff input can be associated with administrators' leadership style and their desire to be transformational leaders that seek teacher input. Corroborated with previous research (Bouwmans et al., 2017; Heidmets, et al., 2018; Kareem, 2016), transformational leadership encourages followers, through trust and cooperation, to deal with changing environments by generating creative solutions for complex problems. In the schools that are implementing a SWBIP, administrators discussed teachers' voices in wanting a SWBIP serving as a key factor in deciding to implement such a program. Given that staff buy-in is identified as a barrier in the successful implementation of SWBIP (Chityo & May, 2018; Tyre et al., 2018; Wienen, 2019), administrators must seek input from staff before implementing a school-wide program to avoid program abandonment within the first two years of implementation (Chityo & May, 2018).

Implications

Using the theoretical framework provided by Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory, specifically global motives and context-specific reasons, and the main ideas that emerged from the literature review in Chapter Two, the following section discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study. Implications will include a discussion of conclusions drawn from the findings of this research and recommendations for stakeholders. Finally, the recommendations discussed will provide specific recommendations for stakeholders, particularly school administrators seeking to make decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study advance the theory of Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory, specifically how global motives and context-specific reasons influence an individual's decision-making. Viewing data through the theoretical lens of behavioral reasoning theory (Westaby, 2005) allowed this researcher to discover clear distinctions amongst the global motives and context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Using the broad substantive factors identified as attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control, conclusions were drawn about the global motives influencing elementary administrators' decisions to implement SWBIP. The global motives of consistency, student behavior should be taught, staff and student relationships, and staff buy-in advance Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory as these motives influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. Understanding how global motives influence decision-making is important for school stakeholders, specifically school administrators. Knowing how one's attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control influence decisions could better equip administrators to feel more successful in deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. As the theory (Westaby, 2005) suggests, the more favorable one's attitude, degree of social acceptance, and control over a behavior is, the more likely he is to act on the behavior (Claudy et al., 2013; Moura et al., 2019; Sahu et al., 2020; Ursavas et al., 2019).

Another theoretical implication of this study is regarding the concept of context-specific reasons. Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory defines context-specific reasons as antecedents of individuals' global motives and intentions. This study concluded that context-specific reasons were often strong indicators of the influence of elementary administrators'

decisions on whether to implement a SWBIP. This conclusion has implications for school leaders. "Context-specific reasons are important in leadership because leaders often need to use reasons to justify their decisions to employees, stakeholders, and relevant constituents, which we can presume can promote procedural justice perceptions" (Westaby et al., 2010, p. 481). Knowing the context-specific reasons discovered in this study, including school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money, school administrators could be better equipped to justify their decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

In summary, this study's findings corroborate and extend Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory. Behavioral reasoning theory's (Westaby, 2005) concepts of global motives and context-specific reasons were used as the theoretical lens to draw conclusions. Using discovered themes of administrators' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control, and context-specific reasons, this researcher concluded the factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. The theoretical implications for the study's stakeholders, specifically school administrators, include an increased awareness of how global motives and context-specific reasons influence decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

Empirical Implications

The empirical implication of this study is that it filled a gap in the literature that was identified in Chapter One. While many studies addressed the phenomenon of school-wide implementation of behavior improvement programs (Drewery, 2016; Kehoe et al, 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Kline, 2016; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), research was deficient in identifying the school-based contextual factors and beliefs regarding school discipline that result in elementary

administrators choosing whether to implement SWBIP. Because of this, school administrators were unable to improve their circumstances to have optimal conditions for implementing such programs with fidelity and sustainability.

The findings of this study contribute to the immense amount of research on zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices, and the impact that SWBIP has on student outcomes. Although there is a vast database of research regarding the positive influence that school-wide approaches to behavioral management, like Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Restorative Justice, can have on students, there is little research regarding the factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement such programs.

The findings from this study provide a clear link to the barriers faced by school administrators and the factors that are considered when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. Administrators' statements through all data collection methods echoed challenges of consistency, building relationships with students, gaining staff buy-in, school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money. Although grouped into global motives and context-specific reasons, these barriers extend the empirical evidence of the challenges and benefits that must be accounted for when deciding to implement such programs. Understanding these barriers better equips educators, particularly school administrators, to make sound decisions regarding program and policy implementation.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study have practical implications for educators, specifically school administrators tasked with making decisions regarding the implementation of school-wide programs. Research evidences the positive impact that SWBIP can have on student outcomes, yet, there remain inconsistencies in administrators' implementation decisions. This study

provides clear findings of factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP.

Practically, school leaders need to understand the factors that influence their decision-making and justify their actions to others. Using Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory, school leaders can be better equipped to identify their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over school-based decisions that need to be made. In addition, school administrators must acknowledge the school-based, context-specific reasons that often make decisions contrary to their attitude regarding a behavior (Westaby, 2005).

School administrators must acknowledge the clear impact that staff buy-in has on successfully implementing a school-wide program. This study revealed staff buy-in as one of the most significant considerations to decide whether to implement a SWBIP. School administrators should involve staff in the process, work alongside teachers, and gather a collective vision regarding the school's needs. School leaders should consider the components of transformational leadership to gain trust and cooperation and deal with changing environments by generating creative solutions for complex problems (Bouwmans et al., 2017; Heidmets et al., 2018; Kareem, 2016).

Equally as important as developing staff buy-in, school leaders should consider the contextual fit of their school before implementing a school-wide program (Tyre et al., 2018). School leaders should consider the context of the school, specifically its culture and needs. This study revealed school discipline data, school culture, teacher efficacy in managing behavior, and time and money as context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' implementation of SWBIP. Conducting a needs assessment to determine the appropriateness of a SWBIP is important, not only to gain staff buy-in, but to ensure successful implementation.

The findings of this study provide district and elementary administrators an increased understanding of the global motives (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control) and context-specific reasons that justify administrators' decisions whether to implement SWBIP. If deciding to implement a SWBIP, school administrators must consider the global motives and context-specific reasons that influence their decision-making, the importance of gaining staff buy-in, and that contextual fit of the school. By following these practice implications, school administrators will likely experience greater success in implementing a SWBIP.

Delimitations and Limitations

As the researcher, purposeful decisions were made to limit and define the boundaries of this study. This study's findings represent a very specific group of individuals in a very specific location. In addition to defining the boundaries and scope of this study, the following section will discuss the study's limitations. Delimitations for this study included utilizing a phenomenology study design, research questions, participant selection criteria, and location.

Delimitations

After identifying the research topic, a qualitative, phenomenological research design was the best approach to this study. This approach was determined most appropriate for the study as it was sought to describe elementary administrators' experiences in relationship to the decision-making processes regarding the phenomenon of SWBIP. Following, the scope of the study was narrowed using the study's research questions. Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory was utilized as the theoretical framework for this study to narrow the global and context-specific reasons that influence elementary administrators' decisions regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Establishing specific questions for the study allowed for significant statements, later turned into themes, to be gleaned that extended Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory.

Participants were selected using specific criteria through purposeful sampling. To participate in this study, participants had to be 18 years or older, hold a valid state license to serve as a school administrator, and serve in a current elementary administrator role. Elementary administrators for this study included principals, assistant principals, and administrative assistants. Narrowing the scope of participants was essential to the study as the study sought to understand elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP.

This study was conducted in a large school district located in the southeastern region of the United States. This study site was selected based on a large number of elementary schools it encompassed. In addition, the district did not enforce a district-wide approach to student behavior. Therefore, elementary administrators, representative of different schools within the district, provided rich, diverse experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Participants in this study included schools that did not implement a school-wide approach to behavior management, schools with some degree of implementation of SWBIP, and schools with a SWBIP fully implemented.

Limitations

The scope of the study was limited based on specific participant criteria through purposeful sampling and the study setting. The participant criteria and setting of the study limited the study to its applicability to other parts of the country. For example, study findings are based on participants' experiences and vary depending on years of experience, school demographic, and location. The findings from this study were dependent on the participants that were selected to share their experiences, the demographic, specifically the school's socioeconomic status and behavioral concerns, and the general location of the school. If

conducted in another school district with different elementary schools and administrators, the study findings could be limited in generalizability.

In summary, creating boundaries for this study was purposeful. The delimitations for this study included the study's design, research questions, participant criteria, and setting. By limiting the scope of the study to narrow in on the research questions, the generalizability of the study's findings were also limited. Future researchers must understand the delimitations and limitations of this study to utilize findings in a way that best serves their district or schools' needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, this section provides multiple recommendations and directions for future research. Using this study design, future research could be conducted at the middle and high school levels. It would be interesting to hear the perspectives of middle and high school administrators and the factors they consider when deciding whether to implement a SWBIP. While many findings for the study could be similar, it could be inferred that middle and high school discipline poses a unique set of challenges, different from elementary schools, that could emerge as a theme in a study conducted at this level.

In addition to future research being conducted at middle and high school levels, research should be considered at the district level. Often, school districts adopt SWBIPs for their respective schools and administrators. Future research should be focused on district leadership and their decision-making process when deciding to implement SWBIP.

Future research on SWBIPs could also be studied using a different qualitative research design. A case study would allow a researcher to identify mutual links between the phenomenon and its school context. While many of the findings from this study were generalizable to other

elementary schools, some of the significant statements made by school administrators were specific to their school context. By conducting a case study, a researcher would have the opportunity to observe, interpret, and reflect (Stake, 1995) on how the unique school context influences the school administrator's decisions to implement a SWBIP.

In summary, future research regarding this phenomenon should be considered at the middle and high school level and the district level to add to the research regarding school administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Future research should ultimately add to the current global motives and context-specific reasons administrators choose to implement SWBIP. In addition, research should be focused on overcoming the barriers administrators face when implementing such programs. For example, could professional development and training in the barriers and challenges of SWBIP result in an increased number of elementary administrators choosing to implement such programs?

Summary

This phenomenological study sought to understand the factors that influence elementary administrators' decision-making experiences regarding the implementation of SWBIP. Using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction process, data from virtual writing prompts, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed. The findings from data triangulation corroborated Westaby's (2005) behavioral reasoning theory that purports global and context-specific reasons influence individuals' actions. In addition, findings from this study corroborated and extended empirical research regarding the impact that zero-tolerance, exclusionary discipline practices have on student outcomes.

After the initial contact with participants, it was evident that elementary administrators understood how students' behavioral needs varied. Administrators discussed the impact that

students' home lives had on their behavior and the notion that behavior, like academics, should be taught. Once over, administrators collectively shared the belief that the decision to implement SWBIP should be based on the needs of the individual school. Although all administrators identified "pros" of implementing a SWBIP, they also discussed the implementation challenges. Maintaining consistency, teacher buy-in, time, and money were identified as barriers that influenced the administrator to not implement such programs.

The findings of this study have implications for district and school administrators who are tasked with implementing school-wide policies or programs. The practical implications discussed in this study included the importance for administrators to understand the global motives, specifically their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived control, and context-specific reasons that influence their decision-making experiences. This study also revealed the practical implication for school administrators to understand the role of staff buy-in in implementing school-wide programs. School administrators should involve staff in the process, work alongside teachers, and gather a collective vision regarding the school's needs. Once over, school administrators should consider the contextual fit of their respective schools before deciding whether to implement a SWBIP.

Though factors that influence elementary administrators' decisions to implement SWBIP were identified, one of the greatest take-aways from this study was the true passion and ownership that participants felt in supporting the behavioral needs of their students. Feelings of empathy and positive intent were evident. It was clear that elementary administrators understood the importance of developing relationships with their students. While not all administrators chose to implement a SWBIP, there was no doubt that they had their students' future outcomes at the

forefront of their decisions regarding school discipline and truly wanted to see their students

succeed.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 6, 2021

Meredith Welch
Sandra Battige

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-424 Factors that Influence Elementary Administrators' Decision-Making Experiences Regarding Implementation of School-Wide Behavior Improvement Programs: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Meredith Welch, Sandra Battige:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 46 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

APPENDIX B: Site Consent

From: ██

Sent: Thursday, December 10, 2020 8:55 AM

To: Welch, Meredith ████████████████████████████

Subject: Research in ████████

Morning,

I spoke to ████████ who was okay with you signing a confidentiality agreement. Please

read, sign, and return to me. After you submit, you are free to begin your study. You can use

that agreement or the below messaging when e-mailing principals.

The Office of Accountability and Quality Assurance has approved Meredith Welch's study,

"Factors that Influence Elementary Administrators' Decision-Making Experiences Regarding

Implementation of School-Wide Behavior Improvement Programs: A Phenomenological

Study. Participation is voluntary.

████████████████████████

Evaluation Specialist

Accountability & Quality Assurance

██

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: Factors that Influence Elementary Administrators' Decision-Making

Experiences Regarding Implementation of School-Wide Behavior Improvement Programs

Principal Investigator: Meredith Welch, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be at least 18

years old, possess a South Carolina School Administrator Certificate, and currently serving as an

elementary school administrator. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in

this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the factors that

influence elementary administrators' decisions whether or not to implement school-wide

behavior improvement programs. at a large southeastern school district. The study seeks to

describe the school-based contextual factors and beliefs that influence elementary administrators

choosing to or not to implement school-wide behavior improvement programs.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Demographic Survey, lasting approximately 5 minutes. A pseudonym will be assigned to your response.

2. Virtual writing prompt, lasting approximately 5 minutes. Digitally recorded typed response.

3. Interview, lasting approximately 1 hour. Audio recorded and transcribed.

4. Focus groups, last approximately 1 hour. Audio recorded and transcribed.

5. Review of your interview transcription for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include local school districts in their ability to identify the influences and barriers regarding implementation of behavior management programs in order to provide appropriate professional development and support for implementation of such programs.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. In the event that any of collected data is published, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Interviews will be conducted in a location where questions and responses are not easily overheard.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will be gifted a $10 gift card to either Starbucks or Amazon. E-mail address may be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your anonymity.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, school district, or your school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Meredith M. Welch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ████████ or ████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [name], at [email].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____   _____

Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX D: Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect data to ensure a diverse study population. It will not be used as an additional screening tool as participants invited to participate in the study already meet participant guidelines. This survey will be used for the study titled: Factors that Influence Elementary Administrators' Decision-Making Experiences Regarding Implementation of School Wide Behavior Improvement Programs: A Phenomenological Study

1.

    Participant's Name

2.

    Gender

    Mark only one oval.

        Male

        Female

3.

    Ethnicity

    Mark only one oval.

        White or Caucasian

        Black or African American

        Asian

        Hispanic or Latino

        Native American or Pacific Islander

4.

Are you an elementary school administrator? For this study,

elementary administrators are defined as principals, assistant

principals, and administrative assistants.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

5.

If you answered yes to being an elementary school administrator, in

what capacity do you serve?

Mark only one oval.

Principal

Assistant Principal

Administrative Assistant

6.

How many years have you served as an elementary school

administrator? *Mark only one oval.*

1-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

20+ years

7.

Select the response that best describes your current school's approach to

behavior management.

Mark only one oval.

My school consistently implements a school-wide approach to

behavior management (ex. PBIS).

My school suggests a school-wide approach to behavior management

but teachers still have autonomy in their individual classroom management

approach.

My school does not implement a school-wide approach to behavior management.

Forms

APPENDIX E: Virtual Writing Prompt

Directions: Use the provided t-chart to answer the following question.

What pros and cons did you consider when deciding whether or not to implement a school-wide behavior improvement program?

Pros	Cons