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## **PBIS in Middle School: Did PBIS Implementation Have An Impact on Office Discipline Referrals?**

Patrice Peters

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Positive Behavioral Interventions Support in Middle School:  
Did PBIS Implementation Have an Impact on Office Discipline Referrals?

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Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Education

August 18, 2019

Sara Waring-Tiedeman

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....3

Introduction.....4-7

Review of the Literature .....7-18

Methods.....18-22

    Participants.....18-21

    Data Collection.....21-22

Results.....22-28

    Data Analysis.....23-28

Summary of Major Findings.....28-30

    Limitation of the Study.....30-31

    Further Study.....31

Conclusion.....31-32

References.....33-37

### Abstract

The benefits of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are being recognized in education for helping reduce misbehaviors. The PBIS program is a multi-tiered preventative approach to discipline that involves collecting data for decision-making and using evidence-based practices to address problem behaviors. The purpose of this study was to identify the impact PBIS implementation had on office discipline referrals. This paper includes data from three middle school grades: sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade. Data was collected over the course of ten months. Teachers recorded the number of office discipline referrals using a Behavior Referral Form. Data entered on the Behavior Referral Form was compiled into six areas: student, grade, location, time of day, day of week and specific problem behavior. Results indicated that PBIS did not have a significant impact on decreasing office referrals. Further study of PBIS looking at the factors that impact implementation would provide additional data regarding the success of PBIS at the middle school.

*Keywords:* Positive Behavior Interventions Support

## **Positive Behavioral Interventions Support in Middle School:**

### **Implementation Impact on Office Discipline Referrals**

Back in 2002, former President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, also known as NCLB. In this law, it played an effective role in increasing the federal government's role in guaranteeing the quality of public education for all students in the United States (No Child Left Behind - The New Rules | Testing Our Schools | Frontline | PBS, 2002). While NCLB law showed an increase in federal funding to poorer schools, new measures for holding schools accountable and positive student growth specifically in reading and math began to take place for all socio-economic backgrounds. No Child Left Behind had the goal of leveling the playing field for all student who might be disadvantaged by poverty, minorities, special education services, or limited English Language Learner proficiency (Lee, 2014). No Child Left Behind wanted to hold schools accountable for their students learning while establishing learning standards.

There has been a growing concern regarding behavior in schools today, especially the impact disruptive behavior may be having on student learning. In the classroom, disruptive behaviors can have a direct impact on the amount of instruction given and the quality of instruction. According to authors Simonsen, Sugai, and Negrón (2008) many school personnel are becoming increasingly frustrated with the impact of student behaviors on their schools. While schools have tried to intensify their expectations and use a zero-tolerance approach for handling behaviors, student behaviors are still on the rise. Simonsen et al. (2008) noted that school districts across the nation are making the notion towards implementing a more proactive, positive

behavior support system enabling schools to effectively and efficiently support both student and staff behaviors.

Most schools across the nation are on a static financial basis, and the ability to increase the number of staffs in school settings to monitor student behaviors is challenging. Making the budget cuts to mental health programs, counseling staff, and school resource officers inhibits and lessens the opportunities to limit those negative school behaviors. Author Sabrina Holcomb (2016), noted how schools across the country have seen an increase in school suspensions and expulsions, referrals to alternative schools and law enforcement, and school-based arrests, thus blurring the line between the education and criminal-justice systems. While there are many obstacles that hamper students learning in the school setting, Holcomb (2016) indicates many educators and schools today are leading the charge in adopting a less exclusionary practice for disciplinary actions.

While our main focus as educators is to ensure each student has successful academic learning opportunities, one of the challenges that can affect their success are the behaviors issues that may occur in the classroom setting. While the behaviors can fluctuate between minor behaviors to more severe, teachers have a fair share of behaviors that occur throughout each school day (Lester, 2018). Negative behaviors in the school setting are playing an important reason for the high volume of office discipline referrals. Teachers should be able to take their classroom time to focus on the primary reason for school, to extend students' learning. Many teachers are losing adequate learning time in the classroom to focus on these negative behaviors. When using an appropriate framework to address these behavioral issues, the use of positive behavioral approaches can be implemented to help minimize the severity and frequency of these behaviors.

When you look at a snapshot of the broad scope of a school, you know that it functions through a larger scope of rules and procedures. Rules and procedures are part of the foundation on which schools run effectively. While these rules and procedures maintain the constant expectations in the large school setting, teachers have their own rules and procedures for handling behaviors in their own individual classrooms. Effective rules and procedures need to be implemented and be classroom appropriate in order to meet the expected behaviors set forth by the teacher. Teacher classroom expectations set the foundation for how students should act and behave in the school setting.

Teacher classroom rules and procedures should link together with the larger scope of rules and procedures within the school setting. School wide management initiatives are rules and procedures that are implemented for all students in all areas in the school setting. Research by Baker and Ryan (2014), indicates one initiative, known as PBIS, that has now been used in more than 18,000 schools across the United States and in every school setting. As there is a growing concern for the negative behaviors that are arising in school settings, teachers, schools, and districts across the country are looking for answers to these problematic issues. These behavioral issues are now being looked at through the use of a pro-active reinforcement approach such as PBIS.

In a recent study cited by the author McIntosh (2008), it was the behavior that set up the student for academic problems. As noted by McIntosh (2008), “the relationship between academics and behavior exists and is powerful, and problems in either area are a risk factor for problems in the other, but in this study, problems in behavior seemed to have a greater impact on problems in academics” (p. 2). The presence of problem behavior nearly always interfered with academic learning (McIntosh, Brigid Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008, p. 245). The

author also stated that if teachers are to provide quality instruction without disruptions, behavior instruction might need to be provided to students to ensure direct understanding of behavior modification (McIntosh et al., 2008, p. 245).

The purpose of this research was to determine if the implementation of PBIS impacted office discipline referrals for middle school students. The research question of focus was, did the implementation of PBIS have an impact on office discipline referrals in middle school students? George Sugai and Robert Horner (2001) the creators of Positive Behavior Intervention Support, also known as PBIS, used the PBIS framework approach to look at the higher percentage of office discipline referrals and student behavior expectations in schools to improve school safety and promote positive behavior. PBIS uses important guiding principles along with the PBIS framework to identify appropriate behavior to reduce the amount of Office Discipline Referrals. Instructional strategies can be developed through the implementation of PBIS, in hopes of lessening the percentage of office referrals in middle school students.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Behaviors in the Schools**

In many school districts today, there are a variety of different methods and strategies used to handle inappropriate behaviors, however clear expectations and rules have been found to be the essential components for all students. Over the years, there have been countless minutes spent by adults on handling negative behaviors by students in the classroom setting. Students need to have direct feedback along with clear expectations to allow them a better understanding of what appropriate behaviors are. As teachers, we need to start spending more time on praising positive, appropriate behaviors rather than criticizing negative, unaccepted behavior. One system

that has shown to be an asset to promoting positive behaviors is Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, known as PBIS.

### *School-Wide Negative Behaviors and Behavior Expectations*

When we first look at behaviors, we must first understand the definition of what behavior means. Back in 1913, psychologist B.F. Skinner, who is considered one of the fathers of behaviorism, developed the theory that all behaviors are the result of some experience (Cherry, 2018). Skinner was a firm believer in people having behaviors for a pre-determined reason or motive. According to McLeod (2013), Skinner noted three main behavior-shaping techniques for behaviors: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment. While there are many other psychologists out there today who propose different theories on behaviors across many school settings, we know that behaviors play a large role in the structure of a school day.

Back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychologist B.F. Skinner had a goal to have psychology be placed on a firmer foundation. Skinner wanted to be able to look at human behavior and explain it in a context of cause and effect (Boyd, 2016). To do this, both psychologists B.F. Skinner along with the help of John B. Watson identified a specific theory of behaviorism known as radical behaviorism. Noted speaker, Tabia Tietz (2015) indicated in her speech that in radical behaviorism, Skinner noted operant conditioning, known for two basic purposes, increasing or decreasing the probability that a specific behavior will occur in the future. If the probability of the behavior is increased due to a consequence of the demonstration of the stimulus, the stimulus is a positive reinforce. The same can be said to be true of the behavior being increased as a consequence of the withdrawal of a stimulus.

The research and observations documented in B.F. Skinner's radical behaviorism theory can be correlated with Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). As Moore quotes

Skinner, “the philosophy of a science of behavior treated as a subject matter in its own right apart from internal explanations, mental or physiological.” (Moore, 2011 p. 122). Both Skinner and the PBIS framework used the concept of operant conditioning to identify its framework. The PBIS framework is used to identify the stimulus, consequences, and reinforces of the behavior first proposed through Skinner’s radical behaviorism theory. Skinner’s theory is still being implemented widely across the country today.

Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) found that behaviors that most often led to office referrals were disrespect and noncompliance. Another study found that common minor misbehaviors or disruptive behaviors include defiance, disrespectful actions towards the teacher and peers, disruptive talking, avoiding work, and having a bad attitude (Sun & Shek, 2011).

Ward and Gersten (2013) conducted a study in which PBIS was implemented in several classrooms for the first time. The effects of the PBIS model showed extremely positive trends, even within just the first year of implementation. There was a reported 32% decrease in frequent bullying, a 67% decrease in widespread classroom disorder, and a 21% decrease in staff-perceived defiance among their students (Ward & Gersten, 2013).

Qualities of students who do well at school and succeed are those that are engaged in school learning. When students are engaged in their learning, they might be possibly participating in all areas of school, such as academics, social, and extracurricular (Victoria State Government, 2019). Behaviors can be stemmed from a multitude of reasons, while there a variety of risk factors that can be intertwined. Victoria State Government (2019) indicates four main factors that may play a role in negative student behavior risks factors; family and community, personal health, and school-related factors. While each of these factors may have

their own sub-factors, these four categories can be interlinked and correlated together for students to be demonstrating negative behaviors in the classroom.

For teachers to have the ability to instruct in their classrooms, there needs to be classroom expectations put in place. Not only does there need to be academic expectations, there must be a need for behavioral expectations in the classroom. These expectations should be mainstreamed across different settings throughout the school. While there are behavior expectations in the school setting, there are also behavior rules. As Vanderbilt University Iris Center (2007) states, behavior expectations can be defined as broad goals for behaviors or the general ways that teachers would like children to act. They serve as guidelines for behaviors and apply to all students across all settings. In addition, behavior expectations apply to the adults in these settings. Ideally, behavior expectations are used as a framework for helping teachers establish rules along with providing guidance to students. Correlated with behavior expectations, behavior rules are the behaviors that the classroom teachers want the students to demonstrate. Rules are seen as the ideal evidence that is concrete, measured, and observed.

***PBIS framework and expectations.*** Positive Behavior Intervention Support, commonly known as PBIS, has been on the rise of use in schools across the country throughout the years.

According to *National Education Association* (NEA, 2014), PBIS was first developed for those students with significant disabilities who were engaging in extreme forms of self-injury or aggression. PBIS is not to be seen as a new theory of handling behaviors, but a new systems approach for handling behaviors to enhance students learning and safety throughout school systems. The NEA (2014) sees PBIS as a general education initiative, which was derived from special education through the IDEA Act passed in 2004. The goal and expectation of PBIS is to

improve social cultures and behavior climates of classrooms and schools, which will in turn improve academic success.

The PBIS system is broken down into a three-tiered pyramid approach with the three systems being primary, secondary, and tertiary. In the primary zone, also known as the universal zone, this consists of 80% of all students, staff, in all settings. These areas of concern can have interventions being implemented at a universal level with a larger majority of the student population. General academic and behavior instruction and support are provided to all students in all settings. The primary tier focuses on clearly defining expectations for all students, teaching those expectations providing consistent and meaningful consequences, both positive and negative, then using behavior data to monitor the school climate and adjust supports to meet specific student needs (Sugai, 2018).

While Sugai (2018) indicates that 80% of all students are generally in the primary tier of the PBIS framework, 10-15% of students may fall into the secondary tier of the framework pyramid. In the secondary tier, the primary focus is on additional interventions to a smaller percentage of students who may be displaying behaviors beyond the tier one interventions. Students that are considered to be in the secondary tier are identified from office referral data, which is collected through the online School-Wide Information Systems (SWIS) documentation form. As research from Vartanian (2018) states, students who are in the secondary level of the pyramid may be at risk for developing chronic problem behaviors do not need the high intensity interventions of those students who are in the tertiary zone. Normally in the secondary zone, students are placed into small groups for identified behavior interventions.

For a smaller three-to-five percentage of students who are in the tertiary level of the PBIS framework pyramid, these are identified as intensive, individualized, and students in the most

need of interventions. Students who continue to demonstrate on-going behaviors that have not been handled through the primary or secondary tiers will require high intensity intervention at the tertiary level. Through the use of data collection and assessments of those students displaying chronic, highly disruptive behaviors, interventions and supports can then be built. These interventions and supports are specifically designed for the individual student with the goal being to diminish the students' problematic behavior. Examples of these supports might include looking at a Functional Behavior Assessment plan, counseling, or determining the need for special education services.

While the PBIS system has a three-tiered pyramid approach to it, there are also three critical features that need to be incorporated to ensure desired outcomes are met. The U.S. Office of Special Education (2019) identifies classroom practices, data, and systems as critical components. Each component is intertwined to accommodate the other to implement and support behaviors. While these three outcomes are vital for successful PBIS implementation, the Office of Special Education (2019) notes that all individuals involved with student learning, including parents and administration, need to be taught the web connection of these three components and how they can be used throughout the PBIS approach.

***Characteristics of pbis.*** PBIS is based upon using a positive behavior re-enforcement approach to help diminish unwanted behaviors in students. While understanding the reasons for negative student behaviors, having an appropriate and corrective approach to handling the misbehaviors are the challenges for the adults. As adults involved in the school setting, there needs to be accountability and reliability that adults and staff are on board with the PBIS framework and approach to handling negative behaviors. According to Fixsen et al. (2005), buy-in from the stakeholders is important for the successful adoption, full implementation, and sustainability of

any school-based initiative. Fixsen (2005) and his colleagues go on to note that there are three important characteristics that influence the implementation of the PBIS framework; school size, development level of students, and the organizational culture.

When looking at the size of a school, its important to look at how you are going to use the size of your school to implement the PBIS approach effectively and efficiently so you have effective data tracking methods. Fixsen et al. (2005) recommend a critical method for establishing a flexible, efficient, and effective communication systems. Those schools that are in the smaller district setting may have more flexibility with how they effectively manage the student discipline. In most cases, students' display less disruptive behavior in small classes, and teachers spend less time on discipline, leaving more time for instruction. Research also suggests that smaller class sizes can help students develop greater ability to adapt to intellectual and educational challenges (Bedard & Kuhn, 2006; Dee & West, 2011; Fleming, Toutant, & Raptis, 2002). The way that schools set up their class sizes today in both small and large districts plays a big role in the risk for increased behaviors.

In the implementation phase of the PBIS approach, adults and staff need to take into consideration of the developmental level of students that you will be working with. There are many varying behaviors that happen amongst elementary to high school levels. School teams need to be thinking creatively on how they are going to implement the PBIS approach, so it connects to the students, promoting a positive peer learning culture. Adults and other staff throughout the school district are looking for ways to promote readily independent students who understand the implications of appropriate and positive behaviors. According to Kim, Schwartz, Cappella, and Seidman (2014) there is evidence to suggest that the school climate at the middle school level plays a significant role in young adolescents' social-emotional and academic

adjustment. There needs to be a continuous learning path taken for students to learn and manage their self-control when deal with behaviors.

One of the hardest issues that school districts may have with the successful implementation of PBIS is the staff buy-in. Author Horner et al., (2005) indicates that PBIS requires the buy-in of at least 80% of staff and the participation of all staff in program implementation. While you need a large percentage of staff to be in involved with the buy-in, the other 20% are not left alone. They are still involved with the learning of the PBIS implementation and in hopes, may eventually become participants in the PBIS strategy. Robert Horner, co-director of PBIS, noted that there's a balance that he and other PBIS trainers must navigate when schools and districts are learning about positive behavioral support strategies. "If you are not clear, they think they'll just use the word 'PBIS' and do whatever they want. If you're too prescriptive, you'll find something that works for those schools in which those prescriptions are a nice fit—and it'll be a flop everywhere else" (Samuels, 2013, p. 3). Getting buy-in may be a challenging task for schools with a larger staff, more departmentalization by subject, and a bigger student population. Additionally, buy-in must be obtained from faculty and staff at the school and as students (Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, Fenning, 2013).

### ***Instructional strategies for reducing office discipline referrals with pbis.***

Negative behaviors are on the increasing trends amongst schools across the nation today. Looking and listening to school media, you are finding more violent threats, attacks, and problematic behaviors occurring in school settings. While these behaviors may arise and be stemmed from conflicts outside the school setting or out of adults control while at school, PBIS uses a variety of instructional strategies for reducing the amount of Office Discipline Referrals, commonly known as ODR's. Rather than telling students what not to do, the school staff focus

on teaching and rewarding preferred, positive behaviors (Peterson and Martin Rogers, 2016). PBIS has been proven to reduce the overall number of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) in a school setting when implemented with fidelity (Horner et al., 2009).

Among the PBIS strategy of promoting positive behaviors, data is continually collected to help track progress and identify the target areas for intervention. While data is the essence of ensuring the fidelity of PBIS, having consistent and useful school-wide expectations and rules where students are taught the appropriate behaviors, helps lessen the chance for the office discipline referrals. When students are aware of the expectations and know the rules where staff is continually demonstrating the appropriate behavior, students do not feel the negativity of punishment and the wrath of verbal discipline. Using a reward system that encourages and models appropriate behavior is a high precedence in the PBIS system. Students need to have something to drive for when following the rules and expectations set forth. Without receiving any acknowledgment or notice of satisfaction, students begin to lose the importance and value of continually demonstrating positive, appropriate behavior. When those desires to demonstrate appropriate behavior lessen, then schools need to revisit their PBIS implementation strategy to avoid the increase of office discipline referrals. According to authors Baker and Ryan (2014), schools that use the PBIS framework see a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions and an increase in academic achievement. When there is an effective behavior management system in place, teachers have more time to teach, students have more time to learn, and administration has more time to run all of the school, rather than spending their time dealing with inappropriate behaviors.

***Effective pbis data-based decision making.*** To determine whether the implementation of PBIS is effective, there needs to be effective ways to collect data and use the data to make databased

decisions. Authors Baker and Ryan (2014) indicate that schools generally decide to pursue PBIS for reasons. Without a clear outcome for what teachers want to data to display, there holds no real importance for collecting the data. Teachers must first have a mission, value, or plan of outcomes for their data collection. Schools that have a clear mission and plan for your data outcomes can then move on to identifying the current status of their schools' data.

When you are working with data, you need to have pre-data collection before collecting your tested data to determine if there is a growth. There must be a baseline of data before you put in your strategy or interventions to know your outcomes. Things that you can keep in mind for your baseline data collection are attendance records, tardies, detentions, suspensions, and office discipline referrals. Once you have the baseline data; you can then look at the data that has been collected while using PBIS. You can also include any data collection that you have done completed by staff or adults also known as the SAS, self-assessment survey, to determine the percentage of adult buy-in for PBIS implementation. Baker and Ryan (2014) note that the school-wide portion of the SAS is especially helpful for comparing and assessing progress.

Using the data sources can reveal which direction you want to focus on when implementing PBIS strategies. When the whole school understands the goals and sees progress from the efforts, everyone is more likely to embrace the interventions implemented to meet those goals (University of Oregon, 2018). One thing to remember that Baker and Ryan (2014) point out is that a school does not have to be in dire straits to seek change. Whenever you see data that is discrepant than what you are hoping for, exploration needs to be done to begin action planning for designing successful PBIS strategies. With so many ways to collect data, there needs to be a reliable documentation source school wide.

The Michigan Department of Education (2011) suggests a district office referral form to be designed to gather the essential information needed to guide the PBIS process. They indicate that the form should contain the following information: Staff making referral, type of problem behavior, location of incident, time of incident, others involved in incident, teacher actions, administrative actions, and possible motivation for the behavior. Noting these areas in the form and ensuring that all staff receives training to complete an office discipline referral, interpretation of the data can take place. The data collection needs to be meaningful and make all staff feel valued and important. All staff need to have easy access to data referral forms where data can be interpreted and summarized quickly.

One reliable, confidential, web-based information system for the collection and summarization of school student behavior data is the SWIS Suite (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, 2019). When we as educators have the right data distributed to us in a readable, easily understood manner, effective and efficient decisions can be made. One benefit of the SWIS Suite is that it provides school personnel with information they need to be successful decision makers. Throughout the SWIS Suite, there are three SWIS applications, SWIS, CICO-SWIS, and I-SWIS, which align with a PBIS framework and provide the needed data for both universal screening as well as progress monitoring (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, 2019).

There is a continued need for handling inappropriate behaviors in the school settings. School personnel are reaching out for different means of tracking and handling these behaviors in an appropriate manner. Created and organized by the American Council for School Social Work (American Council for School Social Work, 2019), a list of data tracking tools are made readily available. Data tracking forms are broken down into three different Tier levels, providing

multiple data tracking opportunities dependent on what specific behavior you are looking for. Studies done by Belfiore, Browder, & Lin (1993) note that the direct methods of assessment involving observation and recording of antecedents and consequences have been shown to lead to hypotheses regarding the function of problem behaviors.

Going through the data collection, schools can then begin developing a student focused action plan. This action plan is primarily focused on the student behaviors that were recorded in the data systems. Data based decisions are implemented through a cycle, which can be used for prevention and can be applied to any classroom setting. One of the largest goals of the PBIS implementation is the fidelity of PBIS. Continuous data collection is done through the action plan process. Research from Hanover (2017) indicates that districts should compare school-level ODR trends and district-level ODR trends with state and national ODR trends. By benchmarking discipline data against peer districts, educators can better assess if and by how much district and school trends are cause for concern. By using the data collection and evaluating the action plan, you can revise your action plan. Data can continually be updated from your school's progress and fidelity or office discipline referrals.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Adrian Middle School is comprised of 135 students in grades six through eight. Staff and administration at Adrian Middle School have noticed an increase in disruptive behaviors, ranging from classroom distractions such as talking without permission to more intense behaviors of defiance and disrespect. These misbehaviors detract from the learning of other students. Teachers at Adrian Middle School addressed disruptive classroom behaviors by sending students to the

office. In order to change behaviors and provide a classroom environment conducive to learning, the school selected the Positive Behavior Interventions Support program.

The middle school began implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions Support in 2017 in response to teachers concerns regarding student behaviors. Teachers were beginning to notice more inappropriate behaviors happening more regularly throughout the school year. As the school year progressed, repeated behaviors were happening, while the general re-direction approach of the behavior was ineffective. The management of behaviors was beginning to rise, with the size numbers of classes increasing. Teachers were seeking to administration for support and a different means of handling inappropriate behaviors.

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports is defined as “a general term that refers to the application of positive behavioral interventions and systems to achieve socially important behavior change” (Sugai & Horner, 1999, p. 6). Implementation of the PBS system has been shown to be most effective at elementary and middle school levels because children are still learning how to behave in a school setting (Bohanon et al., 2006, p. 133). PBIS uses its four basic elements of structure to promote its foundation: supporting social competence and academic achievement, supporting decision making, supporting student behavior, and supporting staff behavior (Sugai & Horner, 1999, p. 6).

This study focused on how initial implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions Support (PBIS) program impacted office discipline referrals at Adrian Middle School. The outcome of this action research will assist in determining what changes need to be made to make the PBIS program more successful. The PBIS program is being done through the implementation of the school. Implementation of the PBIS program is a year round process with continued learning done by the PBIS leadership team. The PBIS team continues year round

training where information is learned and taught to the rest of the school staff. School staff are expected to implement these training ideas and strategies into their own classroom.

The purpose of this study was to examine how implementation of PBIS impacted office discipline referrals at Adrian Middle School, located in Southwest Minnesota. Student behavior can be measured through discipline referral rates. Office Discipline Referrals (ODR) were obtained from the Minnesota State-level School-Wide Information System (SWIS). All schools within the state of Minnesota submit student discipline data reports to SWIS. This database tracks the number and type of discipline referrals for every student within the state. All teachers on the PBIS leadership team are provided access to view this data.

The participants in this action research were students in the 6th through eighth grades. There are 135 students at the middle school in grades six through eighth. Of the 135 students, 54 were in the eighth grade, 44 were in seventh grade and 37 were in sixth grade. At the time the data was collected, 82% of the students were Caucasian, 11 % were Latino, 3% were Asian, 1% were Black and the remaining 3% were multi-racial. The percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced was 11%.

The data was derived throughout the annual school year calendar, with school breaks and holiday breaks taken into consideration. Teachers at the middle school level used the middle school online data tracking form to fill out their referral forms for inappropriate student behaviors. The same is done at the high school level for the referral form process.

During the time of implementation, students in the middle and high school levels were educated of our “PRIDE” expectations. These “PRIDE” expectations were broken down into components: preparation, respect, integrity, determination, and enthusiasm. Posters of these

expectations of each component were posted around the school building for high visibility. School staff also had customized t-shirts of “Dragon PRIDE” with the components on the shirts for easy viewing. Throughout anytime during the school day if students were seen by adult staff exhibiting one of these five component areas or any other exhibition of appropriate behaviors, students were given a “dragon dollar.” These dollars were small dollars that were given to students with the specific reason why these earned a dollar. Students could then be placed into either a middle school level or high school level drawing for small prizes drawn each month. At the end of the month, teachers would have both a middle school and high school assembly to draw for the prizes won for those students who earned “dragon dollars.”

### **Data Collection**

The intent of this study was to give the middle school administration and staff additional information regarding the impact of PBIS implementation on discipline referrals. The data would assist in identifying specific areas of concern. This data is to be used at the framework for identifying behavior areas. Through the use of this data, effective PBIS implementation could take place. Data collection tools need to be implemented to ensure that effective and efficient data is being reviewed.

This action research is a quantitative analysis of data from the School-Wide Information System (SWIS). The data collected compared discipline referrals from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2018-2019 school year. The data collection time frame consisted of ten months, from January 2018 to January 2019. The number and type of office discipline referrals measured student behaviors through discipline referrals where the data is tracked.

The middle school is in its second year of implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions Support program. In order to determine impact of implementation on discipline referrals this study compared the 2017-2018 data from the 6th and 7th grades to the 2018-2019 data from the 7th and 8th grades, as these students were involved in the initial implementation of PBIS.

Descriptive statistics provided the basic information needed for the analysis of data. A one-way analysis was used to compare the effects of PBIS on discipline referrals. The dependent variable was discipline referrals. Student discipline data was disaggregated by: grade, race/ethnicity, and location of behavior, time behavior occurred, day of week and problem behavior.

## **Findings**

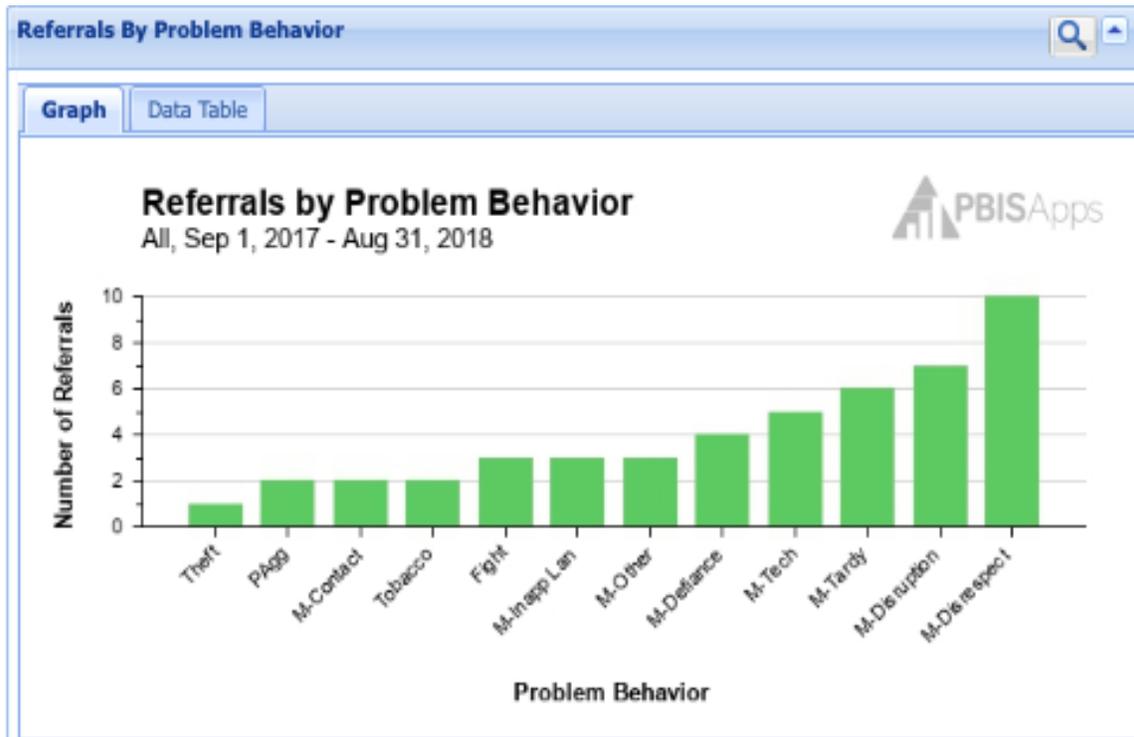
### **Data Analysis**

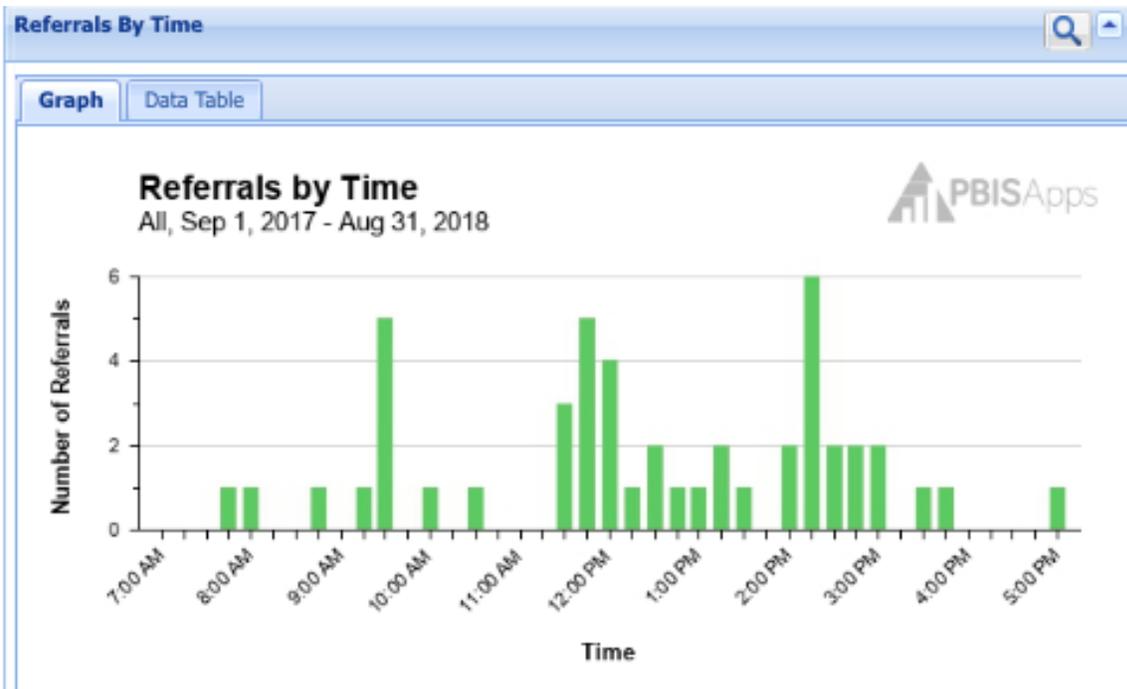
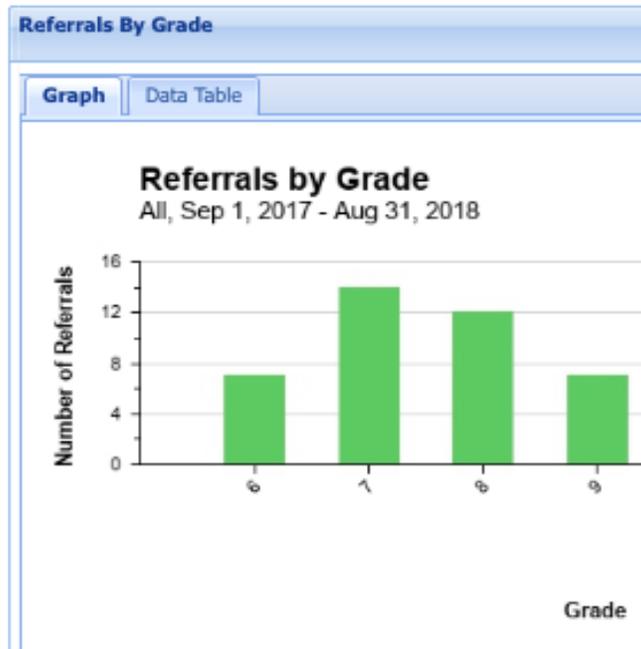
The purpose of this research was to study the impact of positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS) on behavior referrals. The school began a PBIS program two years ago through the Minnesota Department of Education. The goal of the PBIS implementation was to create a systematic, data-driven environment that focused on daily expectations and the removal of behavioral concerns.

The district is involved in the Minnesota State-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions Support initiative. The district is in the southern region, Cohort 13, which is comprised of twenty-seven schools. PBIS trainings are provided through the Southwest Service Central Cooperative. Educators involved in Tier 1 PBIS team training from the twenty-seven schools meet three times a year; Fall, Spring and Summer.

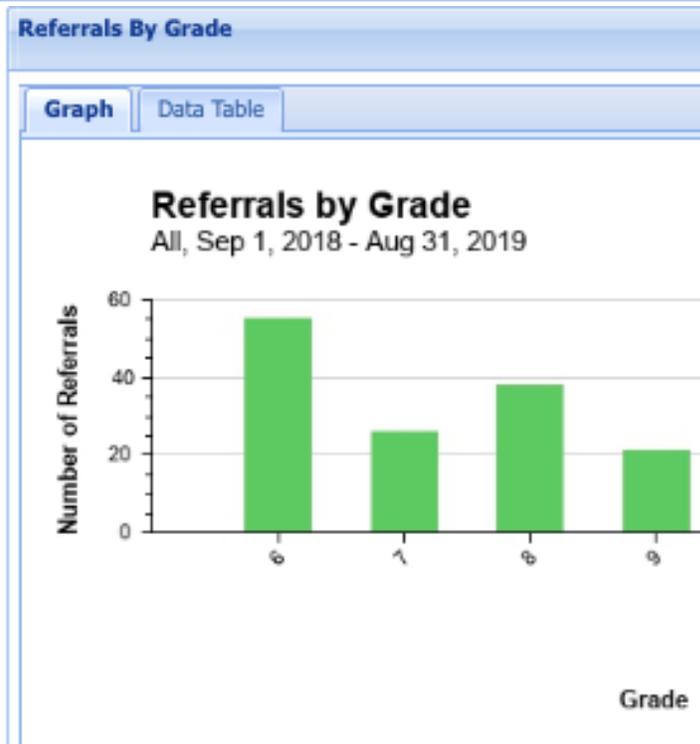
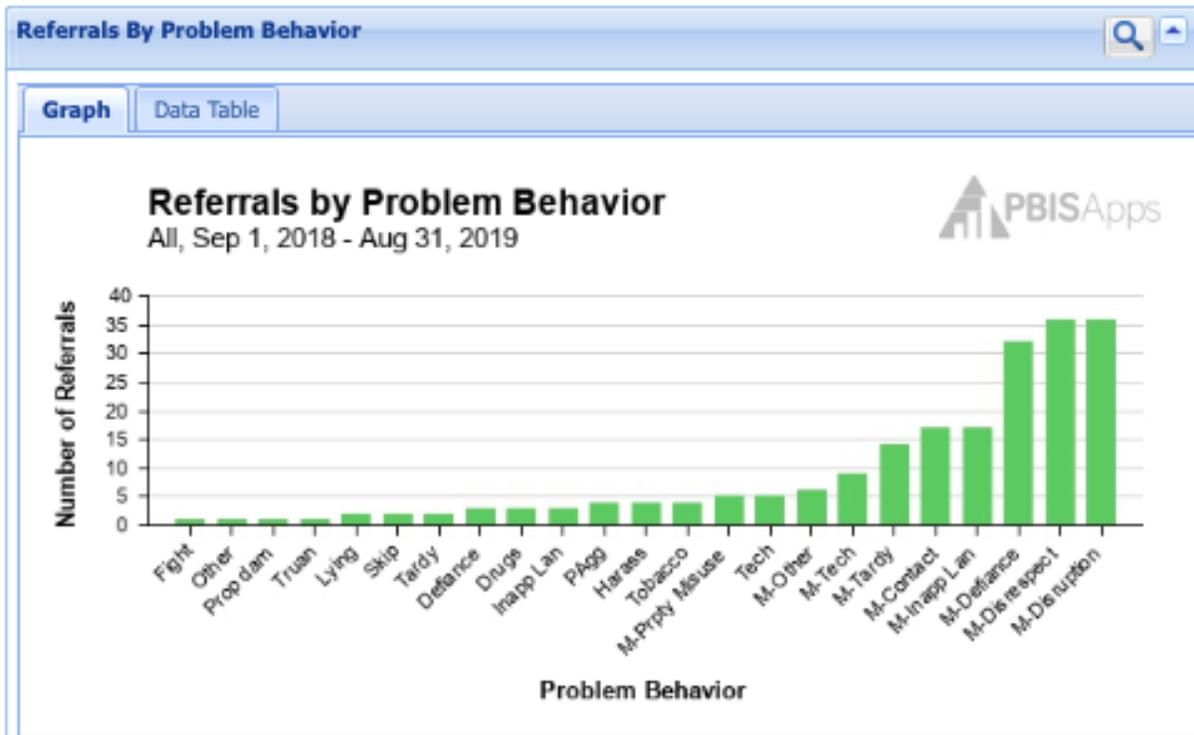
Presentations focus on information regarding implementation, evidence-based strategies and tools to assist in preventing problem behaviors. Adrian Middle School has 30 teachers and staff involved in implementation of PBIS. The administrator designated six teachers of those adults as the Tier 1 training team. That team attends regional trainings and disperses the information to the remaining staff.

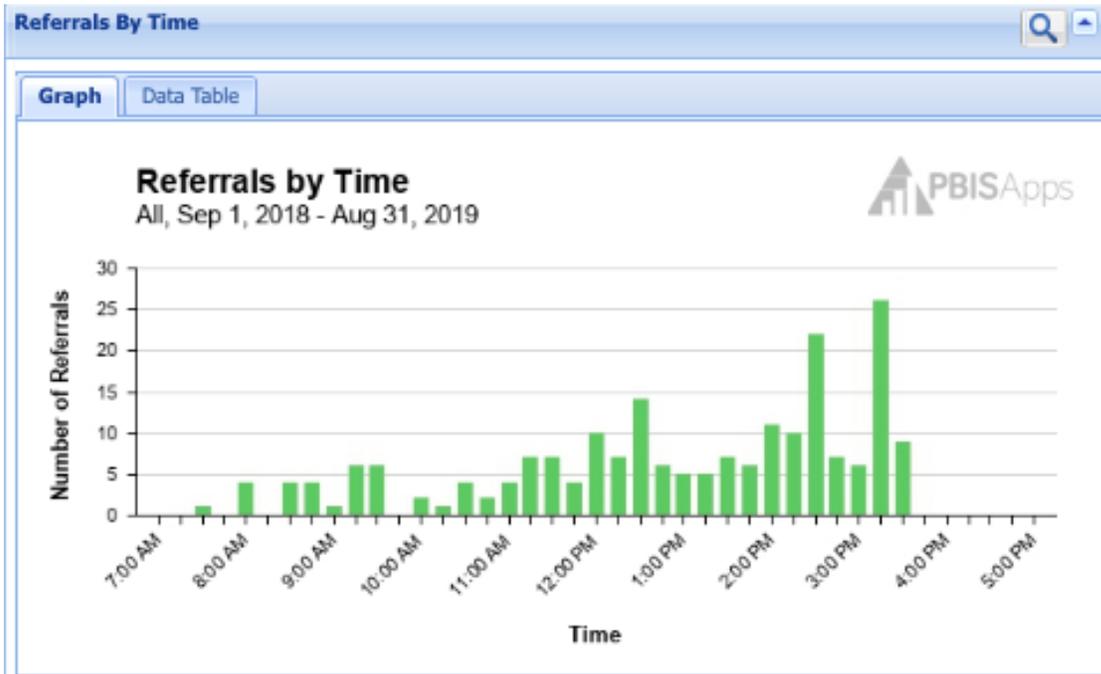
### 2017-2018 PBIS DATA





### 2018-2019 PBIS DATA





The main findings of this study indicated that the top three problem areas listed by discipline referrals in the 2017-2018 school year, from September 1 to August 31, 2018, were disrespect (9), disruption (5) and defiance (4). For the first five months in the 2018-2019 school year, the number of disrespect referrals increased to 20, disruption to 22, and defiance to 12.

Referrals by grade in the 2017-2018 school year were 6th grade 6 referrals and 7th grade 12 referrals. Following these students into the first five months of the 2018-2019 school year, the number of referrals was up in 7th grade to 20 and 8th to 34.

The top two location areas listed by discipline referrals in the 2017-2018 school year, from January to May, were classroom (12) and hallway (6). For the first five months in the 2018-2019 school year, the number of classroom referrals increased to 40 and hallway referrals increased to 14.

In 2017-2018, the four times behaviors were documented from most occurrences to least occurrences were: 2:15 PM; 9:30 AM; 11:45 AM and 12:00 PM. In 2018-2019, behavior occurrences were: 3:15 PM; 2:30 PM; 12:30 PM and 2:00 PM.

The data indicates that the majority of discipline referrals occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday in 2017-2018 and on Thursday and Tuesday in 2018-2019. Office discipline referrals by ethnicity were 80% Caucasian, 10% Latino and less than 5% Native, Asian, Black and multi-racial.

The findings of this action research could be shared through the district's Professional Development meetings upon approval of administration and curriculum director. The district is in the early stages of implementation of PBIS and review of office discipline referral (ODR) data provides an overview of implementation effectiveness. Discussions regarding the data would generate suggestions and feedback toward on-going improvement of PBIS at the middle school. As the district moves forward with PBIS, it will be important to identify best practices needed, as well as the monitoring of program effectiveness.

One technology-based communication tool that could be utilized in sharing the findings of this action research is the educational blog Teacher Tube. Teacher Tube is an education for teachers by teachers' blog. The comments section of a blog allows for interaction with readers regarding this action research. Readers interested in the topic can hear about the findings of this study to get another perspective of PBIS in the school.

Twitter is an open social media platform that could serve as another communication tool in sharing the findings of this action research. This tool is openly accessible to all persons globally and can offer collaboration and sharing of resources and information.

The findings of this action research could consider publication in *The Journal of Teacher Action Research*, which is an international journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles and lesson plans written by teachers and researchers to inform classroom practice. The journal serves as a practical medium to read and publish classroom-based research.

The *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions (JPBI)* would be another journal to share findings of this study. This journal offers sound, research-based principles of positive behavior support for use in school. Regular features include empirical research; discussion, literature reviews, and conceptual papers; programs, practices, and innovations; forum; and media reviews.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary of Major Findings**

As stated in the results section of this document, descriptive statistics were used to investigate the relationship between PBIS and its effect on discipline referrals. The research question is: what impact did implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports have on office discipline referral? The research identified the number of office referrals in each of the identified areas. The overall quantitative results showed that the implementation of PBIS was not successful in decreasing office referrals. The data showed a poor effective rate on the office referrals.

The number of referrals in the 2017-2018 school year for students in grades 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> was 18 and tracking those grades into the 2018-2019 school year, the number of referrals increased to 54. This increase raises concerns on why the referrals did not decline after PBIS was

implemented in the school. There are several questions that need further investigation. These questions must address the main concerns created through the implementation of PBIS.

First, did students have a clear understanding of the expectations? Students need to know the expectations. Knowing and understanding the expectations will increase student acceptance of the PBIS process. The PBIS concepts of assume nothing and teach everything ensures that all students know and understand the process and the expectations. Teachers need to be sure that expectations are taught.

Since Positive Behavior Interventions Support stands for positive behavioral support, it is critical to have a plan in place to emphasize and reward the positive behavior of students. Thereafter, did the teachers implement the program with fidelity by accurately addressing the behaviors and demonstrating a clear understanding of the implementation process? In year one of implementation teachers were building their understanding of PBIS, which may have impacted the number of office discipline referrals. In the second year of PBIS implementation, teachers had deepened their knowledge of PBIS, which could account for the increase in office discipline referrals.

According to a study done by Bradshaw and her colleagues in 2008, schools without formal training in PBIS will more than likely implement components of the model that are consistent with traditional discipline approaches and less likely to teach positive behavioral expectations. The implementation of PBIS in schools and classrooms has demonstrated positive outcomes for students time and again in the area of growth in behavioral management (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2009, pg 140).

Lastly, did teachers utilize SWIS data to identify areas of concern? The teachers had access to the SWIS program, which provides a compellation of graphs that address occurrences of referrals by student, location, date, time, and problem behavior. SWIS data should be used to plan how to address specific needs. Without using the SWIS data to analyze the areas of concerns, teachers had no indication of where to focus their needs. Data is collected for these reasons, not just for good measures.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several issues or factors that might influence the results of this proposed action research. First, the reliability of this action research is not strong as only one source of data was used, office discipline referrals, and there was only one measurement instrument; Office Discipline Referral forms. These forms are done on the online documentation system. The limitation of only one referral form limits the sustainability of the data. The time frame for data collection was limited to a review of data over a period of ten months from two school years (end of one school year and beginning of another school year). Review of data over a period of three to five years would perhaps change the outcome of this study.

Another issue is that surveys and interviews from staff and students were not utilized to obtain various perspectives on implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Support. Designing surveys and conducting individual interviews would assist in getting input or feedback on PBIS. There may be staff members and students who do not complete the survey or want to take part in the interview. Finding time to interview teachers and students could be an issue. With the variety of schedules throughout the school buildings, teachers have a hard time finding the time to complete the interviews.

The perspective of the building administrator regarding PBIS could also be a limiting factor. Being sure the building principal actively supports all aspects of PBIS is important to successful implementation. In addition, teacher bias between certain staff and students in the building could be a factor, so there must be a need to try to implement steps to reduce bias. Conducting this study and being an educator in the school is a potential limitation due to potential influence as a middle school teacher and coach.

### **Further Study**

For there to be continuous studying and data collection to happen, PBIS cannot stop within these first two years of implementation. PBIS is a program that was built to be sustained over longer periods of years. Adjustments are to be made as the years progress to best meet the areas of concerns and high needs. Both quantitative and qualitative data that looks at all areas on the PBIS spectrum from a range of three to five years would provide better data to determine effectiveness of PBIS.

### **Conclusion**

Anytime that you are working with student behaviors, there can be many different roles that you may be as an adult. Whether you are a teacher, administration, or parents, inappropriate behaviors are affecting students learning. With the variety of data tracking tools made readily available for adults, identifying and pin pointing the breakdown of the behaviors can give a better approach to effectively addressing the problem.

PBIS has the main idea of implementing the positive behaviors and avoiding the use of negative words and actions for inappropriate behaviors. We must remember to avoid using the negative and reactive consequences, which is a culture shift in our school systems today. Like

any school district, educators are always seeking for more success both academically and behaviorally. PBIS provides a great opportunity to make that first step in shining bright in behavior management.

Administration plays a large role in ensuring that educators continue to be trained and taught how to effectively manage negative behaviors in a positive manner. We as adults hold the key to unlocking the doors to setting our students up for academic success as a well rounded, behaviorally appropriate student. We need to make the foundational imprint of modeling to our students high expectations both behavioral and academic. In schools we don't need to lower our expectations, we just need to use the right approach in teaching our expectations. PBIS is a great resource and tool for providing these opportunities for success. PBIS ensures that as adults we don't know everything and that we need to teach everything we can. As the famous philosopher Plato (Plato Quotes, BC 429), once said, "human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge." Let us adults be the leaders of Plato's words and use our knowledge to reach our destined desires with positive emotions through PBIS implementation!

The Minnesota PBIS regional facilitator is also a resource in providing training and technical assistance to schools for the implementation and sustainability of PBIS. The middle school PBIS team needs to utilize this resource in collecting additional data, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative measures, that provide input from both staff and students. PBIS is an effective program and with appropriate staff training and support for implementation it can make a positive impact on behaviors in schools.

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