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## **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Student Behavior**

Taylor Ahlers

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**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports  
and Student Behavior**

Taylor Ahlers

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

### **Abstract**

In response to a growing number of behavior incidents and an overall increase in negative behavior, this school improvement plan has been developed in an effort to help support students, decrease negative student behavior, and create a positive school atmosphere. This school improvement plan is informed by an extensive literature review, current Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) interventions, and a district needs assessment. This school improvement plan consists of the development of a PBIS leadership team, professional development training sessions, weekly and bi-weekly meetings to assess data, and weekly school-wide assemblies to celebrate positive student behavior. The goal of this school improvement plan is to provide teachers at the Le Mars Community School District with strategies and resources that will help decrease negative student behavior.

*Keywords:* Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), fidelity, intervention, student behavior

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## **Improving Student Behavior: A School Improvement Project**

### **Background**

In the 1980s, a better way to select, implement, and document effective behavioral interventions was desired (Sugai and Simonsen, 2012). These behavioral interventions were intended for students with behavior disorders (BD). Researchers from the University of Oregon began implementing research studies and evaluation projects. During their studies, the researchers found that more attention should be placed on prevention strategies, research-based practices, decision-making based on data, school-wide structures, explicit instruction of social skills, professional development, team-based implementation, and the outcomes of students (Sugai and Simonsen, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997. It was during this time that a grant legislated a national Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The center was designed to distribute evidence-based practices to schools to improve the support given to students with BD (Sugai and Simonsen, 2012). The National Technical Assistance (TA) Center on PBIS has helped shape the PBIS framework into school-wide positive behavior supports and offers professional development to over 16,000 schools. The National TA Center has changed what PBIS hopes to achieve. Sugai and Simonsen (2012) state, “PBIS is defined as a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (p. 2).

### **Objective**

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to decrease negative student behaviors through the use of school-wide PBIS. The author’s goal is that this school improvement plan will provide guidance for the Le Mars Community School district and other districts facing similar

challenges. The intention of the school improvement plan is to provide insight into PBIS, its benefits, and ways to support all students and not just students that display challenging behaviors.

### **Scope**

Research for this paper was drawn from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool through DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar. All articles used in the literature review were peer-reviewed and published within the last ten years, with the exception of a few. The research focused on articles about the implementation of PBIS in rural, urban, suburban, and alternative schools. While the focus of the project is to decrease negative behaviors at the elementary level, studies of middle schools and high schools were included in the research process. Findings suggest the continued use of PBIS at the elementary grade level and the importance of using evidence-based practices.

### **Thesis**

The belief is that elementary students at Le Mars Community School district will decrease negative behaviors when teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration use evidence-based practices from PBIS to drive their classroom management practices. This change will occur because teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration will be using the same research-based practices in and out of classrooms to support students and their needs. Teachers will reflect on their practices and make changes as needed. When teachers look at data, they will identify students in need of a tier change that will better suit their individual needs. Evidence-based practices and regular check-ins on the effectiveness of their practices will lead to a decrease in negative behaviors at the elementary level.

**Overview**

Negative behaviors have been a concern for many years at countless schools, yet there has been a significant increase in recent years. This increase can be attributed to a lack of consistency in classroom management and student accountability. This problem is apparent at all grade levels in the Le Mars Community School district. The high number of negative behaviors impacts not only the students displaying the behaviors but also the students trying to learn in the classroom. The impact negative behaviors have on students is consequential; students are unable to learn and be in the classroom with their peers. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration are also affected by the increase in negative behaviors. Burnout due to negative behaviors is more apparent than ever before. It is crucial that teachers and administration examine the way behaviors are managed and how students are held accountable to improve student behaviors and student motivation to make positive choices.

Overall, the continued rise in negative student behaviors is negatively impacting students and staff. The use of PBIS can help teachers and staff support the needs of students in a consistent and motivating way. When students are held accountable, they are motivated to behave positively, and negative behaviors are reduced, the overall school climate will be positively impacted.

**Review of the Literature**

There is much professional literature to help educators understand the relationship between PBIS and student behavior. While most of the literature discusses the positive outcomes of PBIS, there is some literature that notes the struggles of implementing PBIS. This review includes articles covering the following areas of student behavior and PBIS: implementation of PBIS, challenges of addressing student behaviors, outcomes expected with PBIS



implementation, and PBIS practices. This literature review will also address gaps in the research on PBIS and its possible impact on student behavior.

### **Implementation of PBIS**

PBIS has been implemented in a variety of school settings, from a traditional elementary, middle, or high school to an alternative school setting. Additionally, PBIS has been implemented in a variety of locations such as urban, suburban, or rural areas. Each research summary below notes the school setting or location. School setting and location can affect PBIS implementation. Garbacz et al. (2022) examined the implementation of PBIS in a rural Wisconsin school well as in town, suburban, and city schools. Garbacz et al. (2022) found that larger districts and elementary schools were more likely to have sustained PBIS fidelity than smaller districts and high schools. Similarly, smaller districts were less likely to assess consistently compared to medium and larger districts. In addition, rural schools were identified to have less sustained fidelity in comparison to city schools (Garbacz et al., 2022).

Fitzgerald et al. (2014) identified that rural schools found success in using PBIS whereas Garbacz et al. (2022) noted that rural schools did not have as high of fidelity with PBIS. PBIS can be used for a variety of reasons, one being as a prevention model of negative behaviors. Fitzgerald et al. (2014) identified ways that PBIS could be used as a prevention model to reduce disruptive behaviors in rural schools. It was found that collaboration and commitment to the fidelity of PBIS supported a rural school's climate and culture. Likewise, student attendance was improved and negative disciplinary referrals were decreased (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). With PBIS as a prevention model in place, an accommodating, inclusive, and safe environment was created. Additionally, each student's strengths were identified as well as celebrated (Fitzgerald et al.,

2014). With a welcoming and inclusive environment, students are more likely willing to be engaged in the classroom.

Classroom management practices such as the use of PBIS can have an impact on student behavior. Gage et al. (2018) studied the relationship between these practices and student behavior. It was found that when teachers implemented classroom management practices, students were more engaged (Gage et al., 2018). When students were more engaged, they had a higher rate of learning in the classroom. The study was completed with individual teachers whereas Cressey et al. (2015) studied how schools can implement the practice of PBIS in a school-wide setting rather than at a specific grade level. School-wide implementation of PBIS was possible as long as there was appropriate leadership (Cressey et al., 2015). School-wide implementation of PBIS will lead to a more consistent method of classroom management practices and accountability of negative student behaviors.

Not only can PBIS be used in elementary, middle, and high schools to address classroom management practices and the accountability of negative student behaviors, but it can also be used in an alternative school setting. A case study by Griffiths et al. (2019) found that a California alternative school was able to increase students' on-task behavior and decrease the amount of incident and defiance reports over a one-year time period (Griffiths et al., 2019). However, Griffiths et al. (2019) noted that delinquent behavior, physical altercations, and threats increased over the course of the case study. School-wide PBIS can be used at all grade levels, including alternative school settings.

### **Challenges of Addressing Student Behaviors**

A challenge Grasley-Boy et al. (2019) sought to determine was if there are fewer exclusionary discipline incidents in schools implementing school-wide PBIS (SWPBIS)

compared to those schools not implementing SWPBIS. Another question this group researched is if there were differences in exclusionary discipline incidents for students of different subgroups (Grasley-Boy et al., 2019). They determined that the number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for all students was drastically reduced with the implementation of universal SWPBIS. Grasley-Boy et al. (2019) also determined that if a school is implementing SWPBIS, the number of Hispanic students given an OSS and the number of Black students receiving more than one OSS was lower than in schools not implementing. However, further research is needed to evaluate all school discipline policies.

Reno et al. (2017) also researched teacher perspectives on specific demographic groups based on race, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), individualized education program status, and limited English proficiency status often targeted for behavioral interventions. An open-ended survey question showed that some teachers sought “punishments” for inappropriate behaviors rather than positive interventions and support (Reno et al., 2017). Teachers also noted the importance of having a positive relationship with students, regardless of demographic characteristics. Additionally, teachers found that it is important to support all students and create an inclusive culture that does not target specific groups of students.

Students with disabilities often display challenging behaviors, resulting in discipline outcomes that many other students may not receive. These challenging behaviors are often looked at as a negative attribute of the student. Simonsen et al. (2022) researched the relationship between PBIS and discipline outcomes for students with disabilities. Exclusionary discipline is a tactic that some teachers may resort to when dealing with challenging behaviors from students with disabilities. However, a relationship between PBIS implementation and the occurrence of exclusionary discipline needs to be studied. Schools using the PBIS model were more likely to

have at least one student with a disability experience exclusionary discipline outcomes when compared to other schools (Simonsen et al., 2022). However, schools using the PBIS model were less likely than other schools to expel one or more students with a disability. Likewise, students with disabilities attending schools exposed to PBIS practices were less likely to experience in-school and out-of-school suspensions. In contrast, students with disabilities experienced physical restraint or seclusion, even at schools using PBIS (Simonsen et al., 2022). Therefore, even when using PBIS with fidelity, there is inconsistency when reacting to behaviors from students with disabilities. The majority of instances were positive, but a few still resulted in negative outcomes.

Realizing that some schools have inconsistencies with behavior management and challenges with student behaviors, Cho et al. (2021) researched and compared schoolwide behavior management technologies. These technologies were designed to help organize problem-solving and school discipline. One challenge with addressing student behaviors is communicating with families. Therefore, electronic behavior management platforms (eBMPs) were used to facilitate problem-solving and collaborate with families. While some schools in the study prioritized eBMP data, others did not and only looked at the data during special circumstances. Cho et al. (2021) noted that Stark School focused on classroom management while Compass School focused on equity problems within their school discipline system. In contrast to both of these schools, Riverside School was not invested in looking at data to address behavioral management or organization (Cho et al., 2021). Families with students attending Stark School received automated and instantaneous notifications about their students. Families with students attending Compass School received information about their child's behavior if they visited the school or asked via a phone call. Riverside School families received weekly printouts.

Cho et al. (2021) determined that the method of instant messages and qualitative notes boosted family and educator collaboration the most.

### **Outcomes Expected with PBIS Implementation**

When starting the journey of PBIS implementation, many teachers may not know what to expect. With the help of proper PBIS team communication and research, the expected outcomes of PBIS implementation can be determined. Elrod et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study of secondary schools and their school climate, student discipline, and PBIS implementation fidelity. They determined that there was greater fidelity and a stronger school climate when a school has more years of PBIS implementation (Elrod et al., 2022). There was also a positive substantial change to the school climate over time. It can also be expected that there will be a positive relationship between PBIS fidelity and a school's climate during the first two years but not necessarily the third year. Elrod et al. (2022) also determined that when a school has multiple years of PBIS implementation, the school can expect positive and lasting effects on behavioral outcomes.

Similar to Elrod et al. (2022), James et al. (2019) studied longitudinal disciplinary and achievement outcomes related to SWPBIS. The 85 schools in Ohio included in this two-year study were able to raise Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) scores by 14.67 points, gave out 4.05 fewer suspensions, and raised their score on the performance index (James et al., 2019). Additionally, when changes were made to fidelity implementation, there were also changes to behavioral problems such as out-of-school suspensions. These are linked to the reduction in negative student behaviors as well as the ability to prevent problematic behaviors. However, changes in implementation were unrelated to academic outcomes (James et al., 2019). In fact, PBIS implementation is not consistent with increasing academic achievement. Simply because

negative behaviors are improved does not mean staff can expect students to perform better academically.

In contrast to the study above, Palmer et al. (2019) also found different results when researching disciplinary and achievement outcomes related to SWPBIS. Using the TFI, they found that 77 of the 153 schools used in the study scored less than 70% while 76 of the 153 schools scored greater than or equal to 70% (Palmer et al., 2019). The TFI showed an average score of 66.08%, which equals 18.54 suspensions per 100 students. Additionally, schools scored approximately 63.04 on the performance index. Palmer et al. (2019) found that schools with a higher level of PBIS implementation could expect a lower number of out-of-school suspensions compared to schools with a lower level of PBIS implementation. In addition, there is a significant association with positive student outcomes for schools that have a high Tier 1 PBIS implementation (Palmer et al., 2019). Therefore, a gap presents itself because some studies show positive outcomes related to student performance while some do not. For example, Ryoo et al. (2018) note in their study that SWPBIS had a negative regression in the area of mathematics but a positive regression in the area of reading. In contrast, middle schools that implemented PBIS showed a negative regression in reading and positive regression in mathematics. Ryoo et al. (2018) mention that overall, elementary schools had a greater chance of seeing a decrease in student achievement compared to middle schools.

While some schools use only one tier of the PBIS model, some schools seek to use more advanced tiers of SWPBIS. Grasley-Boy et al. (2022) researched the effects of using advanced tiers on disciplinary exclusions. Schools that use Tier one and Tier three with fidelity had fewer students qualify for free and reduced lunches while schools that use all three tiers with fidelity had more (Grasley-Boy et al., 2022). Another outcome associated with PBIS implementation is

the rate of discipline outcomes. Schools that implemented all three tiers with fidelity had lower rates of discipline outcomes. While controlling student and community demographics is not always possible, it was determined that if demographics can be controlled, the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions or law enforcement referrals was decreased (Grasley-Boy et al., 2022). Like many other studies, the use of PBIS and all three tiers was related to a lower number of students who received out-of-school suspensions whereas using one tier did not show this result.

Unlike other research, Lloyd et al. (2023) looked to gather insight from students about the implementation of PBIS. Students involved in the study felt that PBIS was used as a way to improve their behavior, school climate, and attitudes toward school (Lloyd et al., 2023). Additionally, students noted that PBIS helped them to encourage others and improve their academics while encouraging friendly competition. Unfortunately, students felt that they could not share their voices as much as they wanted to and did not fully understand the goal behind their school's PBIS plan (Lloyd et al., 2023). Students also gave recommendations on how to improve PBIS in their school, including ideas such as adjusting ground rules for points and rewards, increasing the involvement of students, and increasing the communication between students and staff members.

### **PBIS Practices**

Studies revealed the importance of exercising best practices when implementing PBIS. Meyer et al. (2021) researched how to support students with disabilities using PBIS practices with lessons learned from using those practices. When using PBIS, foundational practices must be established early in the school year. Similarly, classroom routines that are going to be used should be predictable and taught (Meyer et al., 2021). In addition to routines being predictable,

the routines need to teach positive expectations. The physical environment of the classroom should be effectively designed to prevent problematic behaviors from occurring. Meyer et al. (2021) also note that prevention is the best intervention. Proactive and preventative strategies such as prompting desired behavior should be used. When reacting to difficult behaviors, teachers should state the proper behavior, correct the inappropriate behavior, and provide positive feedback (Meyer et al., 2021). When these practices are put in place, student academic and behavioral success will occur.

In addition to the practices mentioned above, behavioral logs are another practice that can be used as an intervention to manage classroom behaviors (Krach et al., 2017). When positive behavior is displayed, tokens can be awarded and traded in for something desirable at a later date. When a student displays negative behaviors, they will give a token back. Tokens can be used for individual students or the whole class (Krach et al., 2017). Krach et al. (2017) mention the use of several other PBIS practices such as behavioral report cards (BRC) and a check-in/check-out system (CICO). BRCs give feedback to individual students and parents regarding the student's behavior. However, BRCs might be avoided because they can be time-consuming and are usually used in Tier three (Krach et al., 2017). The CICO system lessens the number of office referrals and the overall number of negative behaviors. Krach et al. (2017) state that a CICO system provides students with a daily goal, structured prompt, and direct teacher feedback, which will then be brought home as a way to communicate the student's day.

Many pieces of literature mention preventative PBIS practices, but Hollands et al. (2022) describe restorative practices and how they might reduce racial disparities in disciplinary actions. In addition to the examination of racial disparities, this study compares discipline referrals, suspensions, school culture, and school climate between schools that integrate restorative



practices and those that do not (Hollands et al., 2022). When comparing the first and second years of behavior outcomes, there was a decrease in referrals but a slight increase in suspensions in schools that use restorative practices. In regard to racial disparities between the first and second years, the number of referrals and suspensions for black students increased (Hollands et al., 2022). When comparing the number of referrals and suspensions for non-black students, there is great significance. For example, the number of non-black students who were referred was 1.42 while the number of black students was 4.68 (Hollands et al., 2022). Therefore, a gap in the usage of restorative practices is present and needs to be addressed.

Teaming, Tier two, and Tier three practices were additional practices studied by Nese et al. (2023). An average of 2.91 PBIS teams per school were evident in the 702 participating schools. Of these teams, the most common was a Tier-one behavior support team with Tier-two behavior support teams and Tier-one academic support teams following (Nese et al., 2023). Tier one teams at the middle and high school level typically met monthly while elementary Tier one teams met weekly. Nese et al. (2023) mention that middle school Tier two teams met every other week while Tier three teams met monthly. When it comes to Tier two interventions, the most commonly used intervention was a check-in/check-out system with social-emotional behavioral small groups, modified check-in/check-out systems, and group counseling following (Nese et al., 2023). Similar to Hollands et al. (2022) research, restorative practices were also used during the study but were not as frequently used. The most commonly used Tier-three intervention was behavior support plans with individualized counseling, safety plans, and individualized point cards following (Nese et al., 2023). The practices used in this study show support for PBIS implementation fidelity but not necessarily student outcomes.

For everything school-related, educators are to use best practices. Hannigan and Hannigan (2020) explore the best practices in PBIS implementation in each tier. Within Tier one, a school should have its desired behavior outcomes stated within its school mission statement. To set up a PBIS program for success, a PBIS team and coach need to be established (Hannigan and Hannigan, 2020). Once the team and coach are established, SMART goals can be determined and presented to the entire staff. Hannigan and Hannigan (2020) state that classroom expectations, rules, and routines need to be posted, practiced, and reinforced with positive language. Similar to Tier one, Tier two needs to have a lead and behavior specialist. Additionally, the purpose of Tier two needs to be specified (Hannigan and Hannigan, 2020). Tier two is more specific to particular students; therefore, a function of behavior lessons is aligned with the specific intervention the student is receiving. Students should receive awards and incentives in multiple ways and in a timely manner. Unlike Tier one, Tier two reinforcements are based on student feedback (Hannigan and Hannigan, 2020). Like the other two tiers, a lead and a behavior specialist are on the Tier three team and goals are established. There is a timely process for entering data in the third tier and is always updated before any meetings (Hannigan and Hannigan, 2020). For any of the tiers to be successful, all members must understand their roles and responsibilities and how they are to implement any interventions regardless of the tier.

### **School Profile**

#### **Community Characteristics**

Le Mars Community School is a public school district in the city of Le Mars, Iowa. As of 2022, the population of Le Mars is approximately 10,605 people. The majority of the population, 91.2%, is white whereas 88.1% of the population is white, not Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Hispanic or Latino individuals make up 7% of the population while 3.4% of the population is made up of Black or African American individuals. The median household

income for individuals in Le Mars was \$69,476; however, the percentage of people in poverty is 7.7% (United States Census Bureau, 2022). The community of Le Mars also has a private Catholic school, Gehlen Catholic. Le Mars provides families with several preschool options as well.

### **School District Characteristics**

The Le Mars Community School District has several core beliefs. The first belief is that all people can learn and thus the school needs to serve all children and their unique needs. The district believes that each school must “nurture honesty, integrity, and interpersonal skills necessary for productive citizenship” (Le Mars Community Schools, 2023). Teaching skills and attitudes that are needed for life-long learning are also important to the school. The school looks to promote respect for all individuals as well as advocate for quality education. Le Mars Community Schools (2023) “must emphasize basic skills in reading, writing, calculating, speaking, listening, thinking, and utilizing technology.” Finally, the district seeks to create, inform, and maintain high standards for all people involved in the district’s educational system.

The vision for the district is to raise and hold high achievement expectations for all students and staff. The district states that it will give the time and dollars needed to develop the necessary skills, methods, curriculum, classroom space, and technology to meet these expectations (Le Mars Community Schools, 2023). Additionally, all student activities will be used to create life-long learners and mature decision-makers. To accomplish these visions, the district states that it will maintain smaller class sizes, employ the most qualified individuals, give staff time for collaboration, create diversified learning experiences, and be a data-driven district (Le Mars Community Schools, 2023). The district also looks to make decisions that are evidence-based.

The Le Mars Community School is comprised of one high school and middle school and three elementary buildings. One elementary building contains a Transitional Kindergarten program while another contains a preschool program. The district has approximately 2,182 students ranging from grades TK-12. Le Mars Community School is predominantly white at 71.8% whereas 15.4% of students are Hispanic and 5.2% of students are Black/African American (Iowa School Performance, 2022a). Other smaller subgroups in the district are Native American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, and Multi-Racial. Males support the majority of the population at 52.5% while the population is 47.5% female (Iowa School Performance, 2022a). The Iowa School Performance (2022a) data states that 13.1% of students have an individualized education program (IEP), 7.4% of students are English Language Learners (ELL), and 33% are in the low socioeconomic status category.

### **School Building Characteristics**

Kluckhohn Elementary is the main building where the school improvement plan will take place. Kluckhohn has approximately 437 students spanning grades TK-5. Kluckhohn Elementary is 76.7% White, 8% Hispanic, and 7.6% Black/African American (Iowa School Performance, 2022b). As with the rest of the district, there are other smaller subgroups such as Native American, Multi-Racial, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Asian. Male students comprise 53.5% while the rest are female. The Iowa School Performance (2022b) reports that 10.8% of students are on an IEP, 7.6% of students are ELL, and 30% of students are in the low socioeconomic status category.

Kluckhohn has a semi-open concept building where the classrooms on the outside circle have a real outside wall but the walls separating the classrooms are portable walls. These classrooms do not have doors. The classrooms on the inner circle have doors but portable walls

separating them. However, two of the three kindergarten classrooms, the TK classroom, and the level three classroom are part of a new addition built as typical classrooms (with real walls and doors). Kluckhohn has three sections for each grade with the exception of Transitional Kindergarten. There are two special education teachers, one ELL teacher, and one Behavior Disorder teacher employed at Kluckhohn.

### **Student Portfolio & Performance**

The district has a goal for each building to have all students reach a proficiency of 80% in math and literacy. In terms of student performance, students take part in the ISASP testing, a state-wide test starting in third grade. According to the Iowa School Performance (2022b) site, 77.5% of students were proficient in Mathematics and English Language Arts during the 2022 school year. However, the average scale score for students in Mathematics was 50.82% and 51.9% in English Language Arts (Iowa School Performance, 2022b). The state average for science proficiency is 62.57%, but students at Kluckhohn Elementary scored 72.13% in 2022 (Iowa School Performance, 2022b). Students in kindergarten through second grade are not tested with the ISASP but rather through weekly common formative assessments and quarterly report cards. Weekly common formative assessments provide teachers with valuable information about student performance. These assessments track student performance on essential standards. For example, at the kindergarten level, students are given a plus or minus depending on their abilities. The kindergarten team also tracks math progress with a beginning-of-the-year and end-of-the-year assessment.

In terms of evaluating student behavior, students are given a letter marking (E-exemplary, S-satisfactory, I-improving, N-needs improvement) on the quarterly report cards. In addition to report cards, students on a behavior plan will show their performance with graphs based on daily

data. For example, a recent student worked on respecting others, respecting school property, and staying in his assigned seat. Regardless of the goals, each student on a behavior plan gets a green, yellow, or red marking for a chunk of time. These are totaled up out of 100 and recorded on a chart that tracks progress over time.

### **Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment**

Students within the Le Mars Community School district, specifically at the elementary level, participate in Eureka Math, the Center for the Collaborative Classroom (CCC) for Language Arts curriculum, and the Harcourt Social Studies curriculum. Teachers use the Mystery Science curriculum for science instruction. Within the CCC program, there is a vocabulary and comprehension component. In addition to curriculum and instruction, each teacher administers weekly common formative assessments for all subject areas. As mentioned above, teachers also give end-of-quarter assessments but also administer beginning and end-of-module math assessments to measure growth. The end-of-quarter assessments typically consist of tests and questions that come directly from the curriculum. For example, at the kindergarten level, the essential standards have been identified, and questions that test student knowledge about those standards are asked. The results are then used for the report card.

In addition to giving assessments and reporting, teachers at the Le Mars Community School district engage in weekly professional learning communities with their grade-level teachers within their specific building. During these practices, the teachers discuss student progress, assessment data, interventions, and more. Using this information, teachers determine what route instruction needs to be directed such as progressing forward or re-teaching certain information.

**Professional Development Practices**

Every month, and at times twice a month, grade-level teachers get together for a two-hour professional development session. During these meetings, the group discusses curriculum pacing, student progress, and assessment data for one of the two hours. For the other hour, new learning takes place. An example of new learning during these hours includes learning about the Science of Reading. This new learning was determined by the administration and our curriculum director because students were not making substantial growth in their learning based on reading scores. Therefore, teachers learned what the Science of Reading was and how we will change our literacy practices to reflect this new learning, such as how sight words are taught and how students learn how to decode words.

In addition to these meetings, about once a week, teachers meet at either 7 AM or 4 PM for a one-hour professional development. Recently, this professional development was on new math learning. Teachers learned the key elements of how a child learns math. Additionally, teachers learned how math learning builds on skills learned at a very young age. With this learning, teachers evaluated the current math curriculum to determine if it has essential elements within the lessons to effectively teach young minds. Individual teachers may engage in book studies as a small group whereas others participate only in district professional development opportunities. Book studies can be determined based on teacher preference; however, one example is a book study on the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process. Teachers decided that this professional development was worthwhile given that each grade participates in weekly PLC meetings.

### Needs Assessment

Le Mars Community School District is a district that prides itself in nurturing honesty, integrity, and interpersonal skills needed for productive citizenship (Le Mars Community Schools, 2023). The district states that it will teach skills and attitudes needed for life-long learning. However, the need for a more positive school climate and culture is visible within the district. Therefore, this school improvement plan will focus on the school climate and culture of the Le Mars Community School District. As mentioned before, the district is comprised of three elementary buildings, one middle school, one high school, and one alternative school setting. With such a widespread district, it has proven difficult to have a consistent method of handling challenging student behaviors. There is more consistency in some buildings than others, but certainly not one common system used across the district. With a lack of a standardized behavior management system, the climate and culture of the district are declining, some might even say rapidly.

Two of the three elementary buildings share one principal, leaving teachers to handle problematic behaviors without proper administrative support. At times, the Kluckhohn principal will be called upon to help another building, thus leaving its teachers alone. The climate of the building can be negative, especially when there is no support. However, if there was a plan in place such as PBIS, teachers can have a clear plan for how to handle problematic behaviors or even prevent those behaviors from happening. At the middle and high schools, teachers are reporting that physical fights have been increasing in addition to the typical bullying and disrespect toward others, specifically teachers and peers. While there are principals for both middle and high schools, the way situations are handled is not consistent and the same for all



students. PBIS can help teachers and administration handle situations in a more consistent and fair way.

The Le Mars Community School District, regardless of grade level, is in need of a program like PBIS because there is an increase in students who are not on a behavior IEP who are displaying problematic behaviors. PBIS can be used to create a more positive school climate and culture that would help prevent negative behaviors. Specifically, there are students at Kluckhohn Elementary who continuously use profanity toward other students and teachers. Teachers report that this is also an issue in other buildings, especially at the middle and high schools. Similarly, there are many students who are not motivated to be respectful individuals. With a program like PBIS, we can motivate students to make positive choices throughout the school day, behaviors that could create a more positive school environment.

### **School Data and Analysis**

#### **Data Summary**

Kluckhohn Elementary is the one elementary building that has a behavior program. Likewise, the middle school also has a behavior program. As of the 2022-2023 school year, Kluckhohn saw 10 students on a behavior IEP with an additional four students that receive Tier 2 social-emotional learning (SEL) support. At the middle school, there are currently 15 students on a behavior IEP, which focuses on SEL, life skills, and social skills. Throughout the year, Kluckhohn received two kindergarten students from one of the other two elementary buildings due to a lack of support and knowledge of how to handle the behaviors these students were displaying. These students were often sent home because the school staff simply could not handle the behaviors, and those behaviors were interfering with student learning. With a program

like PBIS in place, the schools that do and do not have a formal behavior program can prevent such behaviors from happening and have a plan in place to react to such behaviors.

While there are many students on a formal behavior IEP, there is an increase in students who are not on an IEP but are displaying behaviors such as being unmotivated, disobedient, and disrespectful. Teachers in the district, specifically at the elementary level, state they have at least three to four additional students who display these behaviors. In my short four years of teaching, I can attest that this statement is true. During my first year of teaching, I had two female students who were on a check-in/check-out (CICO) sheet. In addition to these students, there were three students who regularly struggled with following directions without some kind of pushback. During the second year behaviors were more manageable with only three students displaying problematic behaviors on a weekly basis. However, during my third year of teaching the number of disobedient and disrespectful students increased. I had two students on a check-in/check-out system with one of them in the process of data collection for a behavior IEP. An additional student, diagnosed with Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), struggled with defiance and disrespect. This student sought to attract negative attention with his behaviors. On top of these three students, there were an additional six students who showed disobedience. Finally, in year four, I had two students who were on a behavior IEP, who frequently used profanity, hit teachers, ran out of the classroom, and were defiant. In addition to these two students I had one student who was extremely unmotivated, and three more who simply would ignore any direction given to them.

The problem seems to be present in every classroom. Last year alone, the kindergarten team saw four students using the CICO system as a way to hold them accountable. Through conversation with other building teachers, almost every section in kindergarten through fifth

grade has multiple students on some type of accountability tracker. Some teachers note that they use anecdotal notes but the most frequently used system for tracking behaviors is the CICO system. Not all CICO charts are the same, making tracking a common theme challenging. Again, there is not one consistent way teachers are tracking student behaviors. A program like PBIS would give all teachers the same way to track and prevent behaviors.

### **District Strengths**

Each year, students who participate in the ISASP testing complete the Conditions for Learning survey. The survey shows that the Le Mars Community School District excels in student-student relationships, adult-student relationships, emotional safety, and physical safety (Iowa School Performance, 2022c). In contrast to the lack of one consistent behavior management program, a strength for the district is that each teacher can be seen using some form of behavior management that works best with their personal teaching styles. One teacher uses Whole Brain Teaching whereas one might use tickets or tokens. Another strength of the district is the willingness and support that other educators give each other if an administrator is not currently in the building.

### **District Challenges**

In contrast to these strengths, the Le Mars Community School District struggles with expectations and/or boundaries, something that could be solved with the implementation of PBIS (Iowa School Performance, 2022c). According to student perspectives, the state average for expectations/boundaries is 74.98 whereas the district scored 74.71 (Iowa School Performance, 2022c). Additionally, in almost every category, English Language Learners (ELL) and students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) fall below the state average with the exception of physical safety. In terms of adult-student relationships, ELL scored 69.23 and the state average is

74.46. Students on an IEP ranked their emotional safety as 10.61 whereas the state average is 16.97 (Iowa School Performance, 2022c). When looking at student-student relationships, ELL is 81.48 and the state average is 81.97. Students on an IEP scored the same category 80.88 when the average is 81.57 (Iowa School Performance, 2022c).

Another challenge of the district is the lack of accountability for student actions. Teachers have reported frustration when seeing problematic behaviors brushed to the side. However, when the administration is not available due to being in another building, teachers are forced to handle the problem, but often there is no accountability from the administration. Teachers and the administration are very busy, and often the situation will get dismissed, resulting in increased frustration from teachers.

### **Assessment Options**

To create a better picture of behavior, specifically problematic behavior, the Le Mars Community School District needs to adopt an assessment model to help track specific behaviors. Currently, general education teachers do not use an assessment component to help track behaviors, making it difficult to gather formal data. The district should assess strategies used to prevent, manage, and respond to challenging student behaviors to determine which strategies are effective and which are not. If PBIS is chosen, one assessment option the district could implement is the Self-Assessment Survey (SAS). The SAS is completed by school staff at the beginning of PBIS implementation and then annually. The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (2023b) states that the SAS assesses effective behavior support systems used in the district and seeks to find areas of improvement such as school-wide discipline systems, non-classroom management systems, classroom management systems, and systems for individual students who display chronic problematic behaviors. In addition to the SAS, the

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (2023b) provides a facility-wide tiered fidelity inventory for Tiers one and two. This inventory can be used to score each tier in relation to PBIS teams, implementation, and evaluation.

### **Action Plan**

#### **Purposed Improvement Plan**

When determining an action plan for this school improvement plan, research-based strategies and practices should be used. According to the literature review and further research, there are several strategies that the Le Mars Community School District can use when implementing this plan. The first strategies that could be used are the self-assessment survey (SAS) and the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2023b). To use the SAS, staff members from the district will fill out the survey prior to the implementation of PBIS. Every year that the district implements PBIS, staff members will fill out the survey. Upon completion of the survey, the district, especially those on the PBIS team, can identify areas of improvement and thus create a plan to make those improvements (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2023b). In addition to the SAS, the district will use the TFI to look at each tier and how successfully school staff are implementing the main components of PBIS with fidelity. The district will administer the TFI at the end of each year PBIS is used to make these judgments.

One of the biggest challenges that the Le Mars Community School District faces is a cohesive behavior management system across the district. Therefore, as part of the action plan, the district will determine foundational practices that are a top priority. These foundational practices will be taught and reinforced with all teachers during the beginning weeks of each new school year. Foundational practices that will be taught and enforced will include teaching classroom

routines. While each teacher can have their own classroom routines that fit their needs, the structure needs to be consistent. All teachers will need to teach positive expectations of their classroom and of the school. To enhance consistency, the school expectations taught should be the same.

Another challenge that will be addressed with this action plan is how English Language Learners and students on an Individualized Education Plan feel about their adult and peer relationships as well as their emotional safety. A major part of the action plan will be to use PBIS as a prevention model rather than always reacting to behaviors (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). Teachers must collaborate and be committed to the fidelity of PBIS implementation for this part of the action plan to be successful. In the beginning, teachers will react to negative behaviors in their attempt to prevent them. When doing so, teachers will state the desired behavior, correct the inappropriate behavior, and then provide positive feedback.

Finally, to make an impact on the challenge of accountability for poor choices, teachers will use electronic behavior management platforms (eBMPs) to organize problem-solving and to collaborate with families (Cho et al., 2021). In addition, the district will use tokens for the whole class and individual needs. Tokens will be handed out to reinforce positive behaviors but taken away when negative behaviors are chosen (Krach et al., 2017). The use of behavioral report cards (BRC) will be the final part of the action plan. Teachers will complete a BRC for each student that can then be sent to families through the eBMPs (Krach et al., 2017). Should further action be needed, teachers can communicate with families and the student regarding the behaviors and consequences that were chosen.

**Impact on Teaching and Learning**

This action plan, if carried out with fidelity, can have a great impact on a teacher's ability to teach and a student's ability to learn. With the use of the SAS and TFI, teachers in the district can improve their teaching strategies and practices. The survey and inventory will help each teacher make the most of their instructional time by improving school-wide discipline systems and classroom management systems, therefore giving students a better chance of learning rather than being distracted by behaviors (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2023b). Likewise, teaching and positively enforcing foundational practices will optimize teaching and learning time (Meyer et al., 2021). Without having to stop instruction to reinforce foundational practices, teachers can spend most of their day teaching academic content. PBIS as a preventative model will positively impact student behavior. Students will become accustomed to making positive choices that will not interfere with their learning.

**Summary**

In summary, this action plan, should it be carried out with fidelity and positive attitudes, will be successful in making a positive impact on student behavior. This action plan will encourage and reinforce students to make positive behavioral choices. Each research-based strategy or practice (SAS, TFI, foundational practices, preventative measures, eBMPs, tokens, and BRCs) will be used by all teachers to the best of their abilities. If not, this action plan will not be successful. To maximize success, this action plan will be reviewed at the end of each year to determine what parts of the plan were successful and if needed, what parts need to be adjusted.

**Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

As the action plan is implemented, several factors are needed for success. A reasonable timeline (see Appendix A) and resources will be identified. Likewise, the PBIS team will assign

responsibilities during the implementation, develop an intervention monitoring plan, and identify any potential challenges and barriers. With the inclusion of visuals, it will be clear how this school improvement plan will be implemented using the necessary materials, tools, and resources.

### **Timeline**

By June 2023, the district will develop a PBIS leadership team. This team will consist of teachers from multiple grade levels who want to lead their school to be better. The team will routinely look at data to make informed decisions regarding school-wide systems and practices. In early August 2023, the leadership team will participate in training requirements so they are able to help with future professional development sessions. Also in August 2023, the administration will provide a detailed list of members, their roles, and their responsibilities.

During three of the four professional development days prior to the start of the new school year, teachers in the Le Mars Community School District will participate in professional development sessions. To be a “trained” school, a state trainer will conduct the sessions. These professional development sessions will take place over the course of three days for a total of one and a half days of learning. However, because the district wants to value teacher work time before the start of the year, the professional development sessions will be only half-day sessions. The sessions will be split by grade level to optimize the level of knowledge teachers can apply to their particular grades (kindergarten through second, third through fifth, sixth through eighth, and high school). The first two sessions will be learning about PBIS implementation while the third session will allow elementary, middle, and high schools to gather separately to determine their main PBIS goals to ensure consistency across the district. During this time, the groups will



focus on the five major elements of PBIS—equity, systems, data, practices, and outcomes—and how each exhibits at their specific level.

Every week the PBIS leadership team will look at the data and make informed decisions about practices if needed. The data and proposed decisions will be reported to the administration and other teachers. Then, every other week during the school year, grade-level teams will meet to discuss their personal student data and determine what is going well and what could be improved. Once a month, during the two-hour professional development workdays, part of the two hours will be spent discussing the district's PBIS implementation. During this time, the teachers will spend time discussing each of the five elements of PBIS and determine if student behaviors are positively changing, remaining the same, or negatively changing.

During each week, as decided by the district, teachers will recognize students who have remained respectful, responsible, and ready to learn (3Rs) by handing out red tickets (see Appendix B). These red tickets will then be placed in a bucket. Each class is to have its own bucket. At the end of the week, at the elementary level, the classes will meet for a brief 3Rs assembly in the gym. During the assembly, the principal will walk around to each class, choose two tickets from the bucket and read the names. These students will have the chance to choose a prize and be recognized for their positive behavior during the week. At the end of the month, students with at least twenty red tickets will be awarded a pencil and certificate.

At the conclusion of the school year, the PBIS team will gather the remaining data from the end of the year and compile it with data from the whole school year. With this data, the team will determine the average number of office referrals, the type of office referral, common behavior seen, and which "R" (respect, responsibility, or ready to learn) the students struggled with the most. This information will be passed on to the administration and teachers. From there,

during one of the final teacher work days at the end of the year, the PBIS team will present and explain the information as well as answer any questions that may arise. The building will determine what went well during the year and what should be improved for the next school year.

### **Resources**

To have a successful school improvement plan, the district needs to use local and state-wide resources. These resources can vary from professional development sessions, general support, modeling, and more. Locally, the Northwest Area Education Agency (AEA) provides local professional development sessions and pieces of training in many areas of education. The AEA also advocates for educators, students, and their families. In regard to PBIS, Theresa Dehn is the local AEA contact who can address any questions and provide any needed support. At the state level, Barb Anderson will be the contact for questions about PBIS, implementation, or general support.

In addition to these two representatives, all teachers should use their PBIS leadership team as a resource. During the year, teachers will be asked to fill out weekly forms via Google Forms (see Appendix C) as a way of tracking data. The PBIS leadership team will use that information and compile it into an Excel sheet (see Appendix D). At the conclusion of the year, the PBIS team will use the data from the Excel sheet to create a visual via PowerPoint to share the data with teachers and administration. Another resource used by all teachers will be the Playbook (see Appendix E), which is created by the PBIS leadership team. The Playbook consists of interventions that can be used by teachers. Finally, teachers are welcome to use anecdotal notes via Google Docs that can be shared with the administration, their grade-level partners, or the PBIS team. These notes can be specific to a single student who needs more support or general notes about the whole class.

**Responsibilities for Implementation**

During the implementation of PBIS, the district will assign qualified teachers to the PBIS team. These teachers will have applied for the positions and be chosen by the administration based on their qualifications. All teachers will be assigned to distribute red tickets to students in their class who are displaying positive behaviors that align with the district's chosen desired student behaviors of being respectful, responsible, and ready to learn. The guidance counselor will be assigned to keep track of the total number of red tickets that each student receives at the end of the week. This running total will be important as students with at least twenty tickets per month will be awarded a pencil and a certificate. The district administration will be responsible for interviewing and determining candidates for the PBIS leadership team. In addition, the administration will oversee and review data received from the PBIS team. The administration should be prepared to delegate other tasks as necessary to the PBIS team, the guidance counselor, or willing teachers. Most importantly, the administration is responsible for being supportive of the PBIS team and all teachers involved in the PBIS implementation process.

Like the administration, families are responsible for being supportive of the new behavior management process, especially in the first year. Families should also expect to be responsible for discussing positive choices with their children, discussions that will hopefully help the children make positive choices at school. The students in the district are responsible for making positive choices each day. Should students make a poor choice, the students should respond in a positive manner if an adult positively redirects them because of a negative choice. Finally, the PBIS team will be responsible for collecting class and school-wide data, determining areas of improvement, and creating slideshows to present data and other information at monthly professional development sessions.

### **Intervention Monitoring Plan**

In order to monitor the success or failure of PBIS interventions, the PBIS team will create a playbook for all interventions and strategies that will be used during the district's implementation of PBIS. This playbook will be available to teachers as a reminder of what can and should be used by teachers. The playbook is recommended because the PBIS Leadership team has conducted research to find research-based strategies that align with PBIS strategies. If other strategies are used, it will be challenging to determine the effectiveness of PBIS.

To monitor these interventions and strategies, teachers will complete a Google Form every Friday that will then be sent to the PBIS team. The form will ask teachers to select the strategies that were used and provide a written dialogue about how they felt they worked during the week. For example, if teachers distributed red tickets, they would select "red tickets" and state what worked well and what did not during the week. This data will be inputted into an Excel sheet where averages can be determined and dialogue can be in one location. This information will help the PBIS team determine any successes and failures of the program.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

One challenge that the district may face is a fading of implementation fidelity. There are many veteran teachers within the district and a monumental change such as the implementation of PBIS may strike them as unnecessary and/or burdensome. Fidelity may be high as the school year starts and staff is excited, but fidelity may decrease as the school year progresses and teachers fall into their routines. For example, there may be teachers that use PBIS strategies with fidelity at the start of the year but slowly decrease the usage of the strategies and resort to the strategies they used to use prior to PBIS.

Another challenge that the district may face is not being able to collect and analyze data for their weekly meetings due to teachers not submitting their classroom data in a timely manner. Should teachers forget to submit their data, the PBIS leadership team will then fall behind on their data analysis and not have the chance to make informed decisions in a timely manner. Teachers are very busy individuals, and filling out a form could be something that slips their minds. There could also be teachers that do not remember to fill out their data completely and then have nothing to submit to the team.

In addition, some teachers may have a challenge with continuously handing out red tickets to students, defeating the purpose of PBIS implementation. For example, teachers have stated that they have their own way of managing classroom behavior. Teachers may have created their own versions of tickets that they use in their classrooms. However, these tickets are not consistent with the district and will not show the accuracy of PBIS. Additionally, teachers are simply busy and may not take time out of their day to continuously hand out tickets for positive behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Negative student behavior at the Le Mars Community School district has become an increasingly negative attribute of the district. Therefore, looking at student behavior was an obvious choice for this school improvement plan. The literature review addressed the implementation of PBIS, the challenges of addressing student behavior, outcomes expected with PBIS implementation, and PBIS practices. It was determined that implementing PBIS with fidelity was key to addressing student behavior challenges in the Le Mars Community School district. Additionally, PBIS can be used not only as a way to change behaviors but to prevent them from happening.

Challenges are likely to occur with implementing something new. With PBIS, it is crucial that all students are treated fairly during implementation and not shown different disciplinary outcomes based on a subgroup. In terms of outcomes, PBIS implementation can lead to a more positive school climate and culture and a reduction of negative student behaviors. To reach these successes, PBIS practices such as setting predictable classroom procedures and the use of behavioral logs, tokens, check-in/check-out sheets, and positive feedback are needed for positive results.

The purpose of this school improvement plan was to implement PBIS to decrease the occurrence of negative student behaviors becoming more prevalent in the Le Mars Community School District. These negative behaviors stem from a variety of reasons, but it is noted that there is not a consistent district-wide classroom management system. This problem was studied because of the negative impacts that poor behavior causes on the students and teachers in the district. There are several findings from this school improvement plan that can positively impact the work being done in the district.

It was determined that with a combination of collaboration and commitment to the fidelity of PBIS implementation, a school's climate and culture can be improved, something that the district struggles with. Additionally, Fitzgerald et al. (2014) noted that with PBIS, student attendance is likely to improve and disciplinary referrals are likely to decrease. There are many different subgroups in schools, something that is true for the Le Mars Community School district. Simonsen et al. (2022) found that with the implementation of PBIS, students of different subgroups, specifically those with a disability, are excluded less in terms of discipline. Positive outcomes were found with the implementation of PBIS, such as a decrease in negative behaviors and an increase in positive school culture and climate (Elrod et al., 2022). These outcomes were

associated with those schools that had sustained efforts with implementation fidelity. These outcomes can be associated with different PBIS practices such as establishing foundational practices early in the school year and creating predictable classroom routines (Meyer et al., 2021). Likewise, tokens and behavioral logs can be used in the classroom as a way to manage classroom behaviors.

These findings can greatly impact work in the district going forward. For example, with sustained fidelity, collaboration among teachers, and commitment to the program, the district can see a decrease in negative student behaviors. With the findings, teachers can improve their individual classroom practices. With an improvement in practices, students can carry their knowledge from one grade to the next, creating an overall positive environment for the district. Tokens and behavioral logs are additional tools teachers can use to help manage classroom behaviors. These findings can provide valuable information to the district in a way that improves the student learning and teaching environment.

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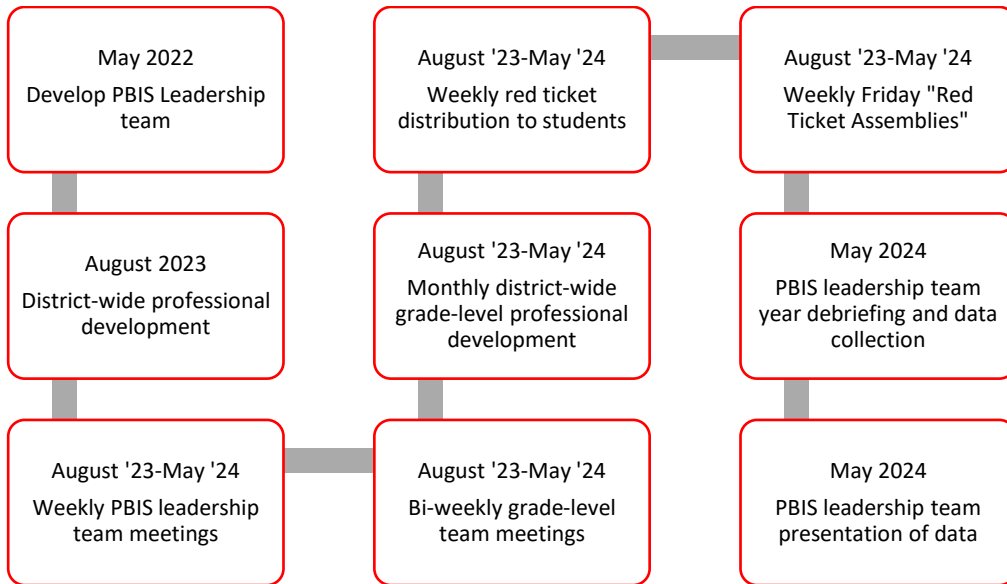
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### Appendix A

#### Timeline of School Improvement Plan



**Appendix B**

**Red Tickets**

**Bulldogs are...**

\_\_\_\_\_ Respectful

\_\_\_\_\_ Responsible

\_\_\_\_\_ Ready to Learn

Student Name:

Teacher:

## Appendix C

### Google Form

The image shows a Google Form titled "Interventions used (example)". The form is divided into several sections:

- Title:** Interventions used (example)
- Text:** Please select all the interventions used this week and provide a short paragraph about the successes and struggles for the week.
- Section 1:** Select all that apply \*
  - Check-in/Check-out
  - Tokens
  - Restate expectations
  - Redirection
  - Red Tickets
  - Other...
- Section 2:** Successes/struggles of the week
  - Long answer text
- Section 3:** Feedback/Suggestions
  - Paragraph (dropdown menu)
  - Long answer text
  - Required (toggle switch)

**Appendix D**

**Excel sheet**

<b>Interventions Used</b>	<b>Clark</b>	<b>Kluckhohn</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	
	# of students	# of students	# of students	
<b>Tokens</b>				
<b>Red Tickets</b>				
<b>Check-In/Check-out</b>				
<b>Redirection</b>				
<b>Restate Expectations</b>				



**Appendix E**

**PBIS Intervention Playbook**

Tokens	
Redirection	
Red Tickets	
Restate expectations	
Check-in/Check-out	