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Running head: PBIS SOCIAL CULTURE: WHAT DO STUDENTS KNOW?

“PBIS Social Culture in an Alternative Education Setting:
What Do Students Know About Their Language, Experiences and Values?”

Arcadia University
Ed.D. Program in Special Education

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A DISSERTATION
IN
EDUCATION

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Abstract

School discipline and safety has been an ongoing concern in the United States, as well as statistics about the students that are affected by these concerns. Extreme programming such as zero tolerance has created a pathway for students with safety concerns and disruptive behaviors toward alternative education programs. Unfortunately, simply removing students from public schools has not extinguished the undesired behaviors, but may actually increase more severe and frequent discipline problems, as well as restricted these students from needed and accessible programs. While PBIS in Alternative Education (AE) settings has encouraging outcomes, little research is available in these settings where the most severe behavioral needs exist. More specifically, the nature of these schools is to support students who have generally failed in traditional settings because of their mental health or disability, aggressive behavior, and low academic achievement.

This exploratory qualitative study examined the approach used to develop a pro-social culture in an alternative special education school for children with emotional and severe behavioral disabilities. A secondary purpose was to understand the student perspective of their social culture and social competence, identifying what students know about their common language, experiences, and values in the PBIS approach.

The tentative findings of this study describe that a PBIS approach is a complex system and when implemented with fidelity, can be effective in developing a prosocial culture and school climate that reflects norms, values, perceptions of safety, and interpersonal relationships in an alternative special education setting. Additional findings may suggest that in a PBIS approach, social competence is the knowledge that all students know the rules and expectations and adherence to those conditions may affect

the relationships between students and teachers. Students in this setting have demonstrated social competence, meaning they can learn the knowledge and skills to value the common language and behaviors across school settings. While students learn the language and behaviors to access extrinsic rewards, developing moral character also appears to have importance, as students' feelings of self-fulfillment shift the focus from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic motivation of valuing the PBIS social culture. As an indicator of the prosocial culture and school climate, students appear to create deep meaning of the PBIS social culture by means of their impression of themselves in the school community.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Positive behavior support (PBS) is an approach for enhancing quality of life and reducing problem behaviors that detract from a preferred lifestyles and improve the adaptive, prosocial behaviors that are critical for realizing a satisfying quality of life (Dunlap, Kincaid, Horner, Knoster, & Bradshaw, 2014; Kincaid et al., 2016). PBS has experienced considerable growth over three decades and has evolved into an effective and preferred approach for addressing behavioral adaptations, with expansive populations, and at multiple levels of implementation from classrooms and individual levels to larger contexts such as schools, preschools, and residential programs (Dunlap et al., 2014; Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Freeman, 2015). Through changes in federal legislation and trends in education, the field generally moved away from concepts focused on “management of behavior” approaches to those of “support;” as professionals worked to define what they valued rather than what they rejected, the term “positive behavior support” became popular (Dunlap et al., 2014).

Trends in PBS led educators to turn to schoolwide prevention models that promote a positive school climate and reduce discipline problems, partly because they are believed to foster an optimal learning environment and encourage the use of additional supports for students with greater social-emotional and behavioral needs (Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010). School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an approach that follows a risk prevention logic, operates within a multi-tiered system, and establishes behaviors matched to student needs in the context of environments in which the behaviors are observed (Dunlap et al., 2014; Horner & Sugai, 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

In typical school settings, PBIS is characteristically successful for 80% of students at the Tier I level (PBIS.org), so secondary prevention practices (Tier II supports) are intended to

address common needs of students with ongoing problem behaviors. These additional supports are added to the social culture expectations of Tier I and designed for the 10%-15% of students who may benefit from additional structure, more overt and frequent antecedent prompts, a higher rate of positive recognition, and elevated training in both behavioral expectations and self-regulation skills (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010; Sugai, et al., 2012). About 5% or fewer of students that struggle with Tier II interventions may need even more individualized assessments and support plans at a tertiary prevention level (Tier III, PBIS.org). Highly individualized, Tier III supports may include behavioral, academic, mental health, and physical, social and contextual variables (Crone et al. 2010). The elevated support intensity for Tiers II and III is always layered atop of the social culture expectations of Tier I, and is also matched by added frequency and specificity for the interventions with collected data.

When youth, such as the 15%-20% of students who fail to respond to typical interventions, a common reflex is that school systems become reactive and punitive, including zero tolerance policies and law enforcement responses to punish or control youth behavior (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). These students may find their way to alternative education (AE) settings for a number of reasons, including disciplinary infractions, maladaptive behaviors, safety concerns, hospitalizations, inability to conform to school norms, and behavioral and emotional disabilities that cannot be managed in less restrictive settings (Carver et al., 2010; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). These youths are frequently associated with emotional and behavioral disorders and may require multi-tiered systems of support that allow for behavioral interventions and treatment of mental and physical health, so that the students and staff can focus on developing skills that allow youth to return to their home communities and schools (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013; Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). Potentially effective proactive strategies include

supportive school climates and preventative and positive practices within PBIS framework in alternative education settings (Jolivette, McDaniel, Sprague, Swain-Bradway, & Ennis, 2012; Jolivette & Nelson, 2010; Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, & Tobin, 2009; Read & Lampron, 2012; Simonsen, Pearsall, Sugai, & McCurdy, 2011).

On a broad scale, school climate reform has been widely discussed as reducing occurrences of student maladaptive misbehaviors such as drug use, aggression, antisocial behavior, absences, suspensions, school violence, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and student delinquency (Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, & Bolton, 2008). More specifically, PBIS is particularly relevant in changing school and social climate in settings that require attention to the student populations needing prosocial skills training and consideration of school environment design to discourage problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Because the PBIS approach focuses on establishing a clear, consistent, and positive social culture, social norms ambiguity can be reduced, as students will know what being respectful at school looks like and adults are clear in their behavioral expectations of students (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, Smolkowski, & Sugai, 2014).

Introduced in early literature, a PBIS social culture is established through group behaviors and peer-related social rules and norms with commonalities in language, experience, and values (Horner, 2000; Sugai and Horner (2002). Founded in the intentions of PBS, a PBIS positive school social culture is believed to improve social behavior, effectiveness of behavioral interventions, and the quality of a school as a learning environment by improving overall quality of life through strategies that develop appropriate social behaviors to help achieve learning outcomes (Dunlap et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Warren, Bohanon, Turnbull, Sailor, Greegs, & Beech, 2006). As part of peer norms and behavioral expectations, students learn as

much or more from each other as they do from the adults, establishing a positive social culture as part of the social learning theory in the theoretical framework of PBIS (Horner et al., 2009).

In setting up a PBIS system, adults develop expectations that define the social culture and socially acceptable behaviors for their school. Some students may be successful with these expectations, and some may not. Although students have some involvement in PBIS programs in their schools (e.g., input on rewards preferences, feedback surveys, incentive for underachieving students; PBIS.org) students are not commonly included in the development of school expectations; and so their values are not generally included in the social culture development process in a PBIS school. Regardless of the consistency of language and experiences in the educational environment, an inconsistency in values could be a significant variable that could determine a student's success or failure in a PBIS system. Perhaps the 20% of students needing additional supports (i.e., Tier II or Tier III) have an inconsistency in regard to what is of worth to them (values) regarding social norms, as compared to the values of the 80% of students that appear to successfully navigate the social waters in a school system. It is reasonable to believe that students' values could be inconsistent with the values put forth by the staff members who developed the expectations for the social culture, and the values of the students that are successful in a school system, meaning, they may not place value on the expectations within a school culture. This potential value inconsistency could account for why students who may not have the skills, historical school experience, or emotional and behavioral regulation to be successful in a less restrictive school environment may be placed in AE settings.

Similar to the breakdown of student population PBIS systems in traditional schools, students that have been unsuccessful in less restrictive settings have been largely successful (80% of students) in AE settings implementing PBIS (Nelson, Sprague, & Martin, 2007). In

addition to a range of disabilities, students removed from typical school settings are more likely to have been victims of physical abuse and have intensive mental health issues, which require more intensive support as well as a sense of belonging, security, and assistance in coping with emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs (Scott & Cooper, 2013). Perhaps the PBIS approach in an AE setting influences the “buy-in” of the social culture for the students placed in these settings and their acceptance and social competence in the school.

To date, research lacks the student perspective of values or values inconsistencies in the PBIS social culture. The purpose of this study was to explore and discover important themes of what is the PBIS approach in an alternative special education school, how the expectations of the approach are cultivated, what students understand about their school’s social culture, and most importantly, to document these themes for future PBIS researchers.

This chapter will provide an overview of laws and trends that affected the development of PBIS in relation to safe schools’ mandates. PBIS has been formally evaluated in a number of descriptive, evaluative, and experimental studies in public schools. The specific context of this proposal will focus on examining the background and evolution of federal laws that have influenced school-based disciplinary decisions for students that have extreme undesired school behaviors; in other words, the onset of recent research of PBIS applications in AE settings for students that have been traditionally unsuccessful navigating their school, social culture, and school expectations in public schools. Information provided will trace the influences and unintended adverse societal trends of the federal ESEA (1965) and the effect on at-risk youth, minorities, and students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (ED) in relation to safe school mandates. The author will briefly discuss the advent of PBIS in response to these influences; the effects of improved school climate, behavior and social culture in public schools; and the more

recent emergence of PBIS in alternative education settings. The population of alternative education settings and the need for intensified PBIS interventions will be briefly described. Last, the author will pose a research problem and questions to explore the nature of the PBIS approach in the AE setting, what students understand about their social culture, and seek to understand consistencies or inconsistencies in the social cultural values.

Background of the Study

In an era where school violence and academic accountability are continuing paramount concerns for schools, educators across the country are required to develop positive school climates, improve school discipline policies, and establish safety practices, all of which are intended to lead to improved academic achievement and student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). As school systems adopted zero tolerance policies and the procedures of prematurely expelling students to restrictive settings, the school-to-prison pipeline became an unintentional provocation for schools serving at-risk and minority students, as well as students having emotional and behavioral disorders (ED) National Council on Disability, 2015). The need for proactive approaches for managing challenging behaviors in schools (e.g. PBIS) became provisional in federal laws No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), legislation that defined school safety mandates. A detailed account of these federal mandates, the subsequent research about school climate and culture, and the considerations for positive interventions in alternative education settings is described in Chapter 2, Review of the Literature.

Historically, trends in educational research and evidence-based practices suggest that educators could increase student achievement and safeguard all students' opportunities to learn by more accurately assessing school improvement efforts and focusing on academic interventions of accountability, restorative practices, school climate, and procedures for student

reintegration from juvenile detention facilities (Advancement Project, 2005; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Given the emphasis on accountability for academic achievement and discipline problems resulting from NCLB (2002), schools and educators are increasingly turning to schoolwide prevention models (e.g., PBIS) to promote a positive school climate and reduce discipline problems (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Coupled with provisions in IDEA (2004) for positive interventions and supports, whole-school programs are believed to foster an optimal learning environment for all students and encourage the use of additional resources for children with greater social, emotional, and behavioral needs (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

The most recent revision of NCLB (2002) is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). The intent of ESSA (2015) is to address the ways in which schools use excessive and discriminatory discipline practices, broad zero-tolerance policies, and exclusionary discipline, and instead take into account for the individual circumstances and needs of the students for whom such policies and practices should have been designed to protect. ESSA (2015) is written to shape schools as responsive, inclusive, and rigorous places for the education of all children, strengthening school climates and creating nurturing environments with school-based mental health services, behavioral interventions, violence and bully prevention, and pro-social supports such as counseling, mentoring, and conflict resolution (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). With a fresh focus on improving pro-social climate and addressing individual needs of challenging students, the hope is ESSA (2015) will perhaps drive promising approaches to improving student outcomes and promoting emotional and mental health supports in various educational settings.

Alternative Education (AE)

Prior to ESSA (2015), punitive zero tolerance disciplinary policies resulted in procedures that often shunted the most vulnerable students (those at risk youth, minorities, and students with ED) into non-public, highly restrictive AE settings (Skiba et al., 2014). These specialized school settings serve heterogeneous groups who can exhibit multiple comorbid academic, behavioral, and mental health needs, and who require more specialized programming than is typically offered within public school settings (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010). Unfortunately, AE settings have historically lacked innovative and rigorous academic standards and opportunities for individual successes (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005), leading a pathway toward future delinquent behaviors and the debilitating, life-long effect of the school-to-prison pipeline (Wagner, Newman, & Cameto, 2004).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that students may be transferred to AE schools for safety risk reasons, including physical attacks or fights, drug possession, disruptive behaviors, academic failure, truancy, and weapons violations (Carver et al., 2010). Typical AE settings include public and private alternative schools, special day and residential treatment facilities, hospital and clinical schools, and other settings that serve students whose behaviors are not responsive to practices and supports delivered in typical general education settings (Simonsen, Jeffrey-Pearsall, Sugai, & McCurdy, 2011). The populations of AE settings typically include a varied but highly transitional group of students with intensive educational and behavioral needs, learning and other disabilities, and severe mental health needs (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke., 2009). Approximately 2% of all students are served in alternative settings, although trends suggest an increase in enrollment over time (Lehr et al., 2009). Carver & Lewis (2010) recently estimated that from national statistics, there are now over 10,000 AE schools in the country, considerably more than the estimated 460 similar schools of 30 years ago.

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (ED) typically experience negative school and post-school outcomes related to academic and social achievement as compared to their peers with and without other disabilities (Jolivette et al., 2014). Because of the frequency, intensity, and severity of maladaptive behaviors, some students with ED may receive educational services delivered in restrictive AE settings: self-contained classrooms or schools, residential facilities, and secure juvenile justice settings (Jolivette et al., 2014). In early literature, Lehr (2004) found that most states rely on these types of AE settings to serve students with ED and other types of challenging behaviors. Specifically, relevant to students with ED, the U.S. Department of Education (2002) reported a 13% increase in the number of students with ED served in residential schools from previous years reported. More recently, Stagman & Cooper (2010) report that youth in residential treatment centers 69% whom are placed in juvenile justice and child welfare systems, have extremely high rates of mental and behavioral health disorders compared to the general population. In the face of the apparent trend that students with challenging behaviors, mental health needs, and ED are more frequently placed in AE settings, a clear reason exists for AE schools to develop programs and interventions for assisting these at-risk youth toward pro-social outcomes and promising futures.

School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (PBIS)

As part of the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), schools were asked to create sustainable and effective behavioral interventions to support students with externalizing problem behaviors (e.g., aggression) (Sugai et al., 2000). In response to school safety and positive intervention mandates of these laws, an increasing number of schools (23,363 in 2017) have adopted School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in hopes of improving overall social culture and academic opportunities for all students (Horner et al., 2009; OSEP Technical

Assistance Center on PBIS, 2017). PBIS is a proactive schoolwide disciplinary approach composed of a “broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviors in all students” (Sugai et al., 2000, p 133).

In the development of a whole-school PBIS system, the adults create a 1) multi-tiered prevention approach, 2) define the school’s most highly valued outcomes and 3) select a set of procedures needed to achieve the outcomes with a goal of at least 80% of the target population (Horner et al., 2009). This universal, or Tier I level of support focuses on the establishment of a school-wide positive social culture. The adults develop the common language, expectations and consequences, which are a reflection of the staff’s values of appropriate and desired behaviors in a school. This approach includes methods for the adults to define and teach a small set of behavioral expectations (e.g., be respectful, be responsible, and be safe), establish a system for consistent reinforcement of the expectations, implement a system for correcting undesired behaviors, and collect and use data to make future decisions to improve student outcomes (Horner et al., 2009). The experiences in the school environment are shared among students and staff, modeled by school staff members, and consistent with the behavioral expectations and language set by the adults.

Due to the severity of disruptive behaviors in AE schools, a clear and compelling rationale exists for AE settings to adopt and implement a PBIS framework for universal (school-wide) prevention, and include additional levels of intense tiered supports to address behaviors of at risk youth (Scott & Cooper, 2013). The development and implementation of PBIS in AE settings mirrors the process in traditional schools, where the staff define the behavioral and social-cultural expectations for the school, and use multi levels of interventions and supports to

monitor across all three PBIS tiers: Tier I or Universal (school-wide expectations and social culture); Tier II (interventions for students needing more support than the universal level); and Tier III (individualized interventions for students who do not respond to other tiers of support) (Nelson et al., 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Given the nature of AE and the intense support needs of all students in these settings, researchers suggest intensifying the systemic structure (Scott & Cooper, 2013) and strategies across the three-tiered continuum of support (Simonsen et al., 2011). Intensifying the tiered supports would then result in a greater probability that the universal tier of support will be effective for 80% of students in the AE setting.

Experimental studies in AE settings have demonstrated schools implementing the PBIS framework with fidelity have experienced positive outcomes at the Universal (Tier I) level resulting in reductions of physical restraints (Miller, George, & Fogt, 2005; Miller, Hunt, & Georges, 2006), sustained reduction of physical restraints and suspensions over time (George, George, Kern, & Fogt, 2013), reduction of physical aggression, physical restraints, and improved student behavior (Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010), decreased discipline referrals (Jolivet, McDaniel, Sprague, Swain-Bradway, & Ennis, 2012), and improved student behavior, social validity, and student outcomes (Farkas et al., 2011). The Farkas et al (2011) study is unique among other investigations for its focus on fidelity and social validity in addition to student outcomes—measures of social validity in that study indicated satisfaction among student and staff with the overall model. A comprehensive discussion of the history and development of social culture and PBIS in alternative education settings will be presented in Chapter 2, Review of the Literature.

Research Problem

Students with challenging behaviors, mental health needs, and ED, whose behaviors interfere with their own learning and the learning of others, are often removed from public

schools and placed in AE settings to remedy behavior problems and develop pro-social behaviors for success in school and in life (Jolivette et al, 2014). AE settings are almost exclusively made up of children and youth who, in the typical environment, would be considered to be the most challenging and identified as requiring the highest level of intervention. PBIS is a multi-tiered, prevention systems framework and relational approach establishing social culture, behavioral supports, and a safe, caring learning environment for students in need of such unique support structures (Lynass, & Berkowitz, 2016; Scott & Cooper, 2013). It is reasonable to believe that PBIS in these settings, with intensified levels of multi-tiered support, will lead to a greater probability that the establishment of a school-wide positive social culture will be effective for at least 80% of the student population (Nelson et al., 2007).

Regardless of the intensity of the program, a foundational component of the PBIS model defines pro-social expectations that are then explicitly taught, practiced, and rewarded in specific environments, (Sugai & Horner, 2002). In terms of social climate, stakeholder participation is fundamental to the success of PBIS in establishing itself as a collaborative system, and its inclusive function as a support network has undoubtedly contributed to its success with systems level change (Carr et al., 2002; Sugai et al., 2000). In early research, social validity was described as the value society places on a product (Wolf, 1998), an attempt derived from applied behavior analysis to “go beyond ‘clinical judgment’ to derive information from the broader social environment of the individuals whose behavior is being changed (Kennedy, 1992, p. 147); and in response to consumers’ concerns, informed consumer choices reported increased satisfaction, which improved a program’s viability (Schwartz, 1991).

The current literature pertaining to PBIS and assessment of social validity is not without limitations; despite the repeated recommendations of the early definitions of social validity

founded in applied behavior analysis interventions: to assess social validity in terms of the social significance of intervention goals, the social appropriateness of procedures, and the social importance of effects and outcomes, researchers continue to omit reporting or even evaluating, this important data (Miramontes, Marchant, Heath, & Fisher, 2011). To date, few studies have examined social validity in PBIS or assess the social validity of PBIS implementation, which merits further research in both traditional and alternative education settings (Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2011). To date, no studies use a qualitative methods lens to examine social validity to the extent which students embrace or reject the core values and social expectations. These gaps in social validity from the student perspective open the door for an exploratory study of this nature.

Considering the intensified needs of students with ED and mental health issues in alternative education settings, understanding how to cultivate a PBIS social culture where at least 80% of the student population are socially competent, as well as identifying what students value or do not value as part of the social culture would certainly contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of the PBIS program in the school. Further, identifying themes in student “buy-in” would also give educators in these settings insight as to why students who previously were unsuccessful in their traditional former educational settings find success at the universal tier of PBIS in an alternative education school. Last, as PBIS allows school staff to define prosocial expectations to foster a safe, caring learning environment for their students, and these students are successful in this environment, educators may gain awareness as to why students are changing their former behaviors to behaviors that are socially acceptable in their AE setting, for potential new research to determine quality of life factors for these students with such significant needs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand what is the PBIS approach in an alternative special education setting and how were those conditions cultivated. The researcher also sought to understand what students know about their social culture. A secondary purpose was to examine students' understanding of the shared language, experiences, and values in this approach, and document what makes them accept or "buy-in" to the school's PBIS social culture.

Central Questions:

- What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an alternative special education school implementing PBIS?
- How are those conditions cultivated?
- What do students know about this PBIS social culture?

Sub-Questions:

- What do students know about the common language of their school's PBIS social culture, and how do they use it?
- What are the students' common experiences and how do they contribute to the social culture?
- What do students know about the social culture that makes them socially competent?
- What do students understand about how their own behaviors affect the school's social culture; in other words, do they buy into shared values?
 - What do students need from adults?
 - What do students need from each other?
 - What are students' obligations to each other?
 - What are students' obligations to everyone else?

Operational Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

Alternative Education Setting: a broadly defined program governed by public or private entities, such as day treatment facilities, 24/7 residential facilities, secure juvenile justice schools, charter schools, and specialized private schools, designed for students at risk or experiencing educational failure within the public school setting, usually for students with significant behavioral challenges.

Alternative Special Education School: an alternative education setting specializing in serving students with documented needs for special education, who have been identified as needing more intense educational, emotional, and behavioral support than the public school can offer.

Culture: The extent to which a group of individuals engage in overt and verbal behavior reflecting shared behavioral learning histories, serving to differentiate the group from other groups, and predicting how individuals within the group act in specific setting conditions.

That is, “culture” reflects a collection of common verbal and overt behaviors that are learned and maintained by a set of similar social and environmental contingences (i.e., learning history), and are occasioned or not by actions and objects (i.e., stimuli) that define a given setting or context (Sugai, O’Keeffe, & Fallon, 2012, p. 200).

Emotional Disturbance (ED): an emotional disability that interferes significantly with educational performance (to the degree that provision of special educational service is necessary) characterized by one or more excessive or deficit characteristics, such as an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and/or teachers; an inability to learn which cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; a consistent or

chronic inappropriate type of behavior or feelings under normal conditions; a displayed pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; a displayed tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or unreasonable fears associated with personal or school problems. ED is defined by IDEA (2004) under “emotional disturbance” as a condition exhibiting one or more specific emotional and behavioral difficulties over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4)(i)(A – E)]

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): terminology taken directly from the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA (2004) and is used interchangeably with School-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports. PBIS is a three-tiered framework for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. PBIS is based on principles of applied behavior analysis and the prevention approach and values of positive behavior support. PBIS is a prevention-oriented way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, and (c) maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students (www.pbis.org, 2016).

Residential Treatment Facility (RTF): an intensive out of home treatment service that provides self-contained, 24-hour supervision. Children are referred for clinical, psychological, mental and behavioral health treatment, and are provided with individual, group and family therapy and medication monitoring to address their treatment goals.

School Climate: a phenomenon based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (National School Climate Council, 2007).

Student Social Climate: the social rules that govern the prompting, rewarding, punishing, or extinction of student behavior (Cushing, 2000).

Social Competence: a set of learned skills and behaviors demonstrating adherence to the social cultural values in a PBIS approach. From a social learning perspective, students are part of the social learning theory in the theoretical framework of PBIS; that is, they learn as much from other students as they do from adults by means of a common language (words that define the expectation), common vision (the transfer of words into behaviors), and common experiences in various locations in the school environment (Horner, 2014).

Social Culture: theoretical foundation that all students as members of said social culture share a common knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and share common language, experience, and values creating a level playing field, where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, can be held to the same behavioral standards (Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001).

Context of the Study

The study design called for an exploratory qualitative method to 1) inform the research questions, 2) describe the complexity of the social culture in an alternative setting, and 3) interpret the problem based on the discussion of student participants.

To explore this phenomenon, the site was an AE school specializing in behavioral interventions for students with challenging behaviors that implements PBIS. Since the majority of PBIS experimental literature has been for elementary schools, the selected site had also an elementary and middle school population to further the existing literature. The selected AE setting had implemented PBIS for at least two years with fidelity and had a documented history of the PBIS framework for review.

The School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) is a research-validated instrument that is designed to assess and evaluate the critical features of PBIS across an academic school year (Todd et al., 2012). Having a school with at least two years of fidelity with the SET supported rigorous attention to implementing the program faithfully and evidentially. Purposeful sampling and selection procedures were used as part of the site selection, as students of the selected school were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. The general population of the AE school was determined by a thorough examination of student demographics, including but not limited to the percentage of students with ED, mental health conditions, documented behavior (disciplinary, incident reports), ages and grade range of the school, referral origin (public schools, other AE settings, hospitals), history of juvenile justice incidents, academic levels, regular and special education status, and socio-economic status (home schools in urban, suburban settings). Such information was considered useful in determining the cultural and contextual setting of the study.

Participants who contributed to the study voluntarily with all parental consents. Students were offered to voluntarily drop from participation at any time, and every precaution was made to protect student identity in the study, including using pseudo names, extreme security of confidential information (locking access and passcodes to technology-based data), and limiting contact among participating students or between focus groups.

A detailed description of the setting, participants, and data collection will be presented in Chapter 3, Methodology.

Implications for Practice

The main focus of this study was to explore the PBIS approach cultivated in an AE setting, and to document what students understand about their social culture. Regarding the reciprocity of the study site, information and conclusions from the study can be used to help the school's educators glean insight into their students' values of the social culture for continuous

improvement and effectiveness of the PBIS program in their school. Additionally, the information may help identify unanticipated behavioral outcomes of the PBIS program. The direct responses of students may also assist school personnel in understanding what students in that particular setting value as part of the school program and confirm why they are finding success from the student perspective. A final, but important implication may be that success in the PBIS program in an alternative special education school may lead to determining quality of life outcomes for students identified with ED and serious mental health issues.

As an educational administrator as well as researcher, the information provided in this study will help inform my practice as an educational leader: gaining insight into building a positive school culture has been documented not only in terms of student achievement, but also in the efficiency of school staffing and teaming, staff development, adult learning, instructional efficacy, and improved staff morale. An examination of potential biases, personal experiences as an administrator in a PBIS setting, and ethical considerations as part of the role of the researcher will be examined in Chapter 3.

More broadly, the outcome of this exploratory study will bring information to the emergent literature of PBIS interventions in other alternative education settings, and begin cataloging student values as part of the social culture. Educators in other alternative education settings can use this information to examine their assumptions about social culture in their own unique settings and implement practices for improved climate, safety, and adult interactions. Future researchers can quantify these values on a broad scale once they have been identified by students.

Conclusion

Safe school mandates to improve schools' discipline issues has led to a decades-long history of zero-tolerance policies that influenced the enrollment of students with emotional

disabilities and problematic behaviors to restrictive, alternative education placements. To protect the rights of these students, NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) paved a growing adoption of PBIS into schools nationwide. When implemented with fidelity, PBIS can show dramatic decreases in disciplinary referrals and improved school climate in traditional and alternative education schools (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Scott & Cooper, 2013). The PBIS framework designed to establish core social values and expectations that everyone in the school can be a part, regardless of cultural backgrounds, remains the same for traditional and alternative education settings. Although PBIS in AE settings is emergent in the literature, and shows encouraging outcomes, educators' understanding of how and why students accept or do not accept PBIS values is unknown.

Chapter 2 will present information about the current state of school safety and alternative education settings, as well as research about school climate issues. A description of operational terms defined in Chapter 1 and studies relevant to student social culture will be presented. Last, a summary about the widely documented effects of PBIS in public schools and AE settings will be presented, as well as research and methods in the literature.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter is organized as an introduction to legislation that influenced school safety for the past few decades and the outcomes of how students are educated in non-traditional, alternative education settings as a result of zero-tolerance policies for student with aggressive and challenging behaviors. Policies and practices about school safety mandates leads to a discussion about school culture and climate, followed by a brief description of PBIS research in traditional then alternative education settings. The introduction is an overview of school discipline and safety issues that have led to the implementation of PBIS programs in schools nationwide, including the essence of school climate pertaining to safety, norms and values, and student and teacher perceptions as a starting point for the deeper investigation of student social climate. An examination of PBIS research in AE settings is included, as well as implications for research into the social culture established through PBIS in AE settings. A positive social culture has been described in PBIS research (Sugai & Horner, 2006); and understanding of how and why students buy into (find success) or do not accept the language, values, and common experiences associated with this social culture is virtually unknown. Understanding students' acceptance of these values in a PBIS system could guide future educators toward a deeper understanding of the emotional and social needs of students needing the most intensive interventions in PBIS.

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, school personnel nationwide are challenged to develop positive school climates and improve school discipline and safety to improve student outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The need for proactive approaches for managing challenging behaviors (e.g. PBIS) became provisional in federal laws No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002)

and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), legislation that defined school safety mandates. The evolution of this legislation shows a shift in the way school systems respond to safety mandates and eventual supports for students with mental health challenges associated with aggression and emotional disabilities. This discussion evolves into an understanding of school safety statistics, school climate and school culture research, and the demand for positive interventions for difficult behaviors.

The Evolution of Federal Legislation and School Safety

Table A1 depicts the chronology of legislation in the United States that influenced specific nationwide concerns about how educators manage violence, gangs, and drugs in and near schools. An examination of the sequence of legislative acts in Table A1 suggests a shift in focus from provision of funds in relation to school safety to improvement of school safety measures by means of prevention. Changes in society at large originally meant that funding was used as a panacea for improving school safety, and became a means for schools to adopt exclusionary practices such as zero tolerance. Eliminating troublesome behaviors from schools only shifted the population of low income, minority, and students with behavioral disabilities to more restrictive settings, as disparate populations were removed from public schools to more restrictive alternative education settings.

The IASA (1994) revision of ESEA (1965) identified common spheres of severe action accompanying policies and mandatory punishments toward students, out-of-school suspension and expulsion, and law enforcement referrals, (ABA Juvenile Justice Committee, 2001). Title IV, Part A of NCLB (2002)—the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (initiated by the earlier 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act)—requires states to be accountable for school safety by adapting appropriate and effective discipline policies, student codes of conduct, security

procedures, prevention activities, and crisis management plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Specific language requires states to establish, operate, and improve school violence prevention initiatives, improve school climate, and provide a mechanism for students to leave underperforming and chronically dangerous schools (NCLB, 2002). Although the language in NCLB (2002) clearly suggests a more centralized national mechanism of improvement and prevention, societal perceptions about school violence and safety threats regionally swayed hasty disciplinary actions, policies, and zero tolerance philosophies in response to several national high profile and serious acts of school firearms violence (Center for Children's Law and Policy, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2008). The heightened accountability required by the 2002 Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act created societal pressure for policy enforcement to remove challenging students from schools as opposed to prevention efforts for all students (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Zero tolerance. Zero tolerance is described as a trend coming out of school reform policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offences, and is intended to be applied universally, regardless of the seriousness of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (APA, 2006). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Safe and Responsive Schools, at least 75% of schools report having zero tolerance policies for such serious offenses as firearms (94%), weapons other than firearms (91%), alcohol (87%), drugs (88%), violence (79%), and tobacco (79%) (Skiba, Ritter, Simmons, Peterson & Miller, 2005). Over time, zero tolerance has been extended to apply to a wide range of common lesser offenses resembling attendance problems, disrespect and noncompliance to school rules (NASP, 2006). Argued from the early 2000's, the problem with zero tolerance policies is that the students most frequently involved in substance abuse, firearm

infringements, and violating school laws have been widely documented as overrepresentation of students of color, at-risk youth, and students with emotional disabilities (ABA Juvenile Justice Committee, 2001). Many commonly used strategies associated with zero tolerance—suspension, expulsion, and other reactive actions—are not effective for ameliorating discipline problems and may, in fact, make the situation worse than no intervention at all (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005).

Part of the zero tolerance policy appeal is the belief that school disciplinary decisions, consequences, and policies would be fair for students who obey school rules by removing subjective influences and contextual factors (Casella, 2003). Students with disabilities—especially those with emotional and behavioral disorders—appear to be suspended and expelled because of zero tolerance infractions at rates disproportionate to their representation in the population (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). While increased suspensions and expulsions may perceivably improve school climate by ridding school systems of troublesome students, these reactive responses tend to be the least effective practices for youth with long histories of chronic problem behaviors (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). Reactively displacing youth into alternative settings sets the stage for life-long increased problem behavior and facilitates the likelihood of school dropout (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

School-to-prison pipeline. In the years since NCLB (2002), the use of educational policies has pushed minority students and those with emotional disabilities and behavior disorders out of public schools and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems, making them more likely to drop out of school and lead them toward incarceration (Advancement Project, 2005). The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the national inclination of criminalizing (rather than educating) children as a result of zero-tolerance discipline policies and practices, out-of-school suspension and expulsion—thereby referring students to alternative schools that

have inferior educational programs, and failing to re-integrate students returning from expulsions and juvenile justice placements (American Civil Liberties Union, 2013). Zero tolerance policies for student disruption have resulted in a documented increase of juvenile justice system referrals for incidents that were once handled by school administrators (Reynolds et al., 2008) and for situations that would not previously have been considered dangerous or threatening (Casella, 2003). In other words, the practice of zero-tolerance school discipline practices and school safety infractions, once a responsibility of school systems, has steadily fallen to the police and juvenile courts (Hartney & Silva, 2007).

The devastating effect of the school-to-prison pipeline is one possible long-term outcome of zero tolerance practices feeding alternative education enrollments. However, recent trends in education law place an emphasis on promoting pro-social dynamics and acknowledging and treating emotional and mental health problems in schools. The reauthorization of NCLB (2002) may encourage positive behavioral interventions in settings that have traditionally struggled with building student skills for feeling safe, developing peer and adult relationships, and inviting a sense of community in the school, especially in alternative education settings.

School Discipline

School discipline has had a long history and continues to be a growing concern in the United States (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005). Negative societal perceptions about safe schools (regardless of the nature, circumstance, or situational context of school rule violations), punitive policies and zero tolerance philosophies (exclusionary punishment as often prescribed as a reflex to prevalent school violence incidents) are the normed cornerstone of disciplinary accountability and has proven to be insufficient for maintaining safe schools (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Reynolds, et al., 2008). Documenting through time, regarding school safety challenges, the American

Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth (1993) reported more than 50% of all crime in the United States was committed by 5-7% of youth between the ages of 10-20. A year later, a report stated 100,000 students in the United States brought weapons to school daily (Walker, 1994). The National Education Goals Report (1995) stated that lack of discipline was viewed as one of the most serious challenges facing public schools. Skiba and Peterson (2000) reported a perceived link between the general levels of disruptive behavior and more extreme acts of violence; teachers reported that uncivil behavior was on the increase and was a threat to effective learning.

Recently, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reports steady statistics on safety and violent crimes in schools: in the 2012-13 academic year, there were a total of 53 school-associated violent deaths in elementary and secondary schools in the United States, of which 41 were homicides, 11 suicides, and one legal intervention death. Regarding principal reports of violence and crime, during the 2013-14 school year, 65% of public schools reported that one or more violent incidents had taken place, amounting to an estimated 757,000 incidents; this figure translates to a rate of approximately 15 crimes per 1,000 students enrolled in 2013-14 (NCES, 2015). The percentage of teachers reporting that they had been physically attacked by a student from their school in 2011–12 (5%) was higher than in any previous survey year (ranging from 3%-4%), (NCES, 2015). Regarding student perceptions of personal safety at school, in 2013, about 3% of students ages 12-18 reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school or on the way to and from school during the school year (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). These statistics appear contrary to the federal laws NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004), which intended to impose guidelines for positive interventions to school safety and violence.

Historically, research reports were an outcry to reduce extreme reactive programming such as zero tolerance and intense secluded programs, suggesting these practices may actually increase the incidence and severity of the very problems they are designed to reduce (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Lewis, Sugai, & Garrison-Harrell, 1999; Sprague, Flannery & Szison, 1998; Turnbull, et al. 2002). Exclusion and punishment were reported as the most common, punitive and reactionary responses to conduct disorders in schools, and were noted as being ineffective at producing long-term reductions in problem behaviors (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). Sprick et al. (2002) stated that higher rates of school dropout and unimproved school outcomes were associated with exclusionary practices, and punishment was one of the least effective responses to school safety challenges and violence. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2016), of the 49 million students enrolled in public schools in 2011-12, 3.5 million students were suspended in school; 3.45 million students were suspended out-of-school; and 130,000 students were expelled. According to the Civil Rights Data Collection (2016) report from the 2013-14 academic year, black students were suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students, while students with disabilities were twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as their non-disabled peers. High rates of educational exclusion and dropouts have been cited as causes for juvenile injustice and the incarceration of nearly 65,000 youth annually in the United States; disproportionately, these students are Black, Latino and Southeast Asian boys (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Furthermore, effects of trauma such as extreme poverty, abuse, neglect, exposure to violence and lack of safety have been identified as factors having a direct influence on cognitive development and academic outcomes, and are associated with this minority youth at risk for exclusionary practices from schools (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014). It appears that despite a

decades-long awareness of school safety and punishments that support exclusionary practices, schools today may not feel any safer than when educational reform and school safety began, and systems improvements appear slow to change.

Drilling deeper into the issue from broad safety concerns to school discipline, educators are frequently faced with challenges ranging from infrequent but extreme problems (e.g., school shootings) to less critical problems that occur at high frequency (e.g., bullying, insubordination, tardiness, and fighting). In terms of noncompliance and disruptive behaviors, teachers have reported feeling ill-prepared to deal effectively with these types of repeated discipline occurrences (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005). In response to handling these discipline problems, school personnel often apply a reactive approach—implementing a consequence (verbal reprimand, office referral, detention, suspension, or loss of privilege) after a problem has occurred (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Decades past, the logic behind such consequences was that “by experiencing these consequences...students will learn the ‘right way’ of behaving and be motivated sufficiently to comply with expectations of the school” (Colvin, Kameenui, and Sugai, 1993, p.364).

Unfortunately, consequences such as removing a student from the learning environment may immediately stop the problem, but there is no likelihood that such problems would not occur again in the future (Sprague, Walker, Golly, White, Myers, & Shannon, 2001). Behaviorists believe schools and school personnel may be inadvertently reinforcing the same problem behavior they are trying to reduce: individualized attention, escape or avoidance after an undesired behavior becomes a desired consequence by the student (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005). Further research suggests, after years of trying to correct negative behaviors with strong discipline, punitive philosophies focused on control and coercion are not effective and do not

work to reduce recidivism in juvenile populations; and, may actually increase the behaviors they are trying to eliminate (Lipsey, 2009). When punitive methods are the main response from adults to undesired behavior, youth primarily learn that the main goal is not to get caught rather than understanding the reasons not to engage in the behavior altogether (Altschuler, 2008).

Consequence-based programs are also often ineffective in reducing problem behaviors because they do not teach children and youth who exhibit severe or repeated discipline violations more appropriate ways to behave; students who continue to exhibit problem behaviors are met with increased sanctions, and often are moved into more and more restrictive and segregated placements (e.g., behavior-disorder classrooms, special schools; Sugai & Horner, 2002). This ongoing practice is troubling, because previous research suggests that students who exhibit discipline problems and are placed in a restrictive setting often begin to exhibit more severe and frequent discipline problems (Dishion & Andrews, 1995). An unintended consequence of harsh disciplinary responses—such as isolationism—has more recently resulted in the removal of youth from needed and accessible programming in public schools, including both traditional and special education services (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013).

Large proportions of youth in restrictive settings have experienced abuse or neglect, poor and unsafe neighborhoods, homelessness, or have been in and out of the child welfare system (Leone & Weinberg, 2010; Sedlak & McPherson, 2010; Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, 2007). Adolescents in restrictive settings have been identified as disproportionately youth of color, who, given the risk factors, may have demonstrated inappropriate behaviors resulting in disciplinary actions that lead this youth into more restrictive settings or the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011). Among the most restrictive settings are residential treatment facilities. On any given

day, over 70,000 youth are held in residential placement outside their homes (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011).

The most recent reauthorization of NCLB (2002)—the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)—combined with mandates from IDEA (2004), promotes comprehensive disciplinary programming reform for improving pro-social climate, and addresses individual student needs for special education, mental health, trauma, and other support services. Specifically, attention is paid to formula funding to support students and schools in high need districts that include “comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports that are evidence-based and emphasize effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management” (ESSA, 2015, § 41080). Additionally, provisions in the law address “the techniques and supports needed to help educators understand when and how to refer student affected by trauma, and children with, or at risk of, mental illness (ESSA, 2015, § 2102 and 2103). These provisions address the description of students who find their way to residential facilities and alternative education schools, having exhibited challenging and at risk behaviors.

Many youths who experience mental health issues or have been diagnosed with ED have found it difficult to succeed in school and are disconnected from their community schools and/or families (Burrell & Warboys, 2000; Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005). Lampron & Gonsoulin (2013) argue that positive evidence-based interventions, such as PBIS, can promote goals within restrictive settings that meet the needs of those youth needing (1) safety and security for those youth and their staff, (2) social, behavioral, educational, and other skill acquisition, and (3) a forum for creating youth responsibility and desire to connect with and become contributing members of their communities as adults (pp.161, 170). Clearly, prosocial evidence-based interventions like PBIS coupled with programming for students with ED needing

special education and mental health and support services could conceivably help youth with skill attainment, social competence, and develop a sense of community belonging.

To develop those skills, school climate has been a target of school improvement initiatives and studied for decades in research and programming aimed at positive student outcomes such as educational achievement and reduced discipline problems (Hoy, Hannum & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). PBIS is not so much an intervention or practice designed for behavioral management, but rather a framework or approach to providing feedback on the accuracy of students' social skills and behaviors that represent the expectations for safe and predictable environments set by the adults (Sugai and Simonsen, 2012). In order to get to the heart of the matter of what drives pro-social interventions like PBIS, especially in restrictive settings, it is important to first understand the historical evolution of research surrounding school climate, fundamental social consequences, and social rules that govern student behavior on a day-to-day basis (Cushing, Horner, & Barrier, 2003).

School Climate

School climate is defined in early school research as the atmosphere resulting from the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators: these implied rules delineate the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school (Anderson, 1982; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997). Over time, and due to the complex nature of schools, it has been historically difficult to narrow an agreed-upon definition for school climate. The National School Climate Council (2007) recommends the following definition:

School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and

organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment (NSCC, 2007, p. 4).

School climate stems from organizational and business climate as well as school improvement and effectiveness research (Anderson, 1982; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Over the past three decades, researchers and educators have increasingly recognized the importance of school climate, data-driven improvement, and reform strategies that promote safe, responsive school environments. Anderson (1982) conducted an extensive review of descriptive research articles relating to school climate, summarized in four key points: (a) schools possess unique climates; (b), differences are complex and influenced by unique school-specific characteristics (i.e., student population), (c) climate affects student outcomes in such areas as academic, behavior, values, and satisfaction, and (d) the study of school climates will improve the understanding of student behavior. Furthermore, within school climate, student behavior is seen as a function of the social processes of the school: norms, expectations, evaluations, and relationships (Anderson, 1982; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Early research appears to have identified an important connection between physical environment characteristics of school settings, (e.g., population, socioeconomic setting, faculty turnover) and social behaviors (relationships between teachers and students) (Cushing et al, 2003).

Decades later, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral (2009) proposed that school climate “refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (p .182). Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, Higgins, & D’Alessandro (2013) conducted an extensive review of school climate articles (5% experimental, 45% correlational studies, 25% literature reviews, and 25% descriptive studies) and identified prosocial factors regarding school climate reform efforts. Specifically, the authors suggest empirical research supports the notion that the school climate context matters: group trends, norms, expectations and belief systems shape individual experience and learning as well as influencing all levels of relationships and perceptions about safety in the teaching and learning environment. Specific dimensions have arisen from behaviors and characteristics of school settings: perceptions about safety, rules and norms, relationships, the teaching and learning environment, and school climate reform through an improvement process (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 357). Relating directly to the societal concerns about school violence, feeling unsafe at school represents a significant barrier to learning (Geitz & McIntosh, 2014).

This research supports school climate elements referring to the quality of the physical environment and relationships (how students or students and staff relate to each other). In thinking forward about school climate improvement efforts such as PBIS, it is important to understand the physical characteristics of school, related to school climate, as well as what research says about the relationships, norms, values, and expectations between students and among students and staff. Identified aspects of school climate in the literature include safety, rules and norms, teacher and student perceptions, the learning environment, and school improvement efforts.

Safety. In school environments, feeling physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually safe powerfully promotes student learning and healthy development (Devine & Cohen, 2007). Thapa et al, (2013) state that a great deal of research has shown that many students do not feel safe, largely as a result of breakdowns in the interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school's climate. In schools without supportive norms, structures, and relationships, students are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization, and punitive disciplinary actions, often accompanied by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010).

Wilson (2004) revealed the association between school climate and level of aggression and victimization is dependent upon each student's feelings of connectedness to the school. Students who feel unsafe at school are more likely to stay home or skip classes due to concerns about their safety, and when they do attend school are less likely to participate in the classroom to expand their learning (Boyd, 2004; Hernandez & Seem, 2004). Initiatives targeting the creation of a positive school climate has been associated with reduced environmental behaviors such as aggression and violence (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Karcher, 2002). Gregory et al. (2010) used a quantitative hierarchical linear model and statewide sample of over 7,300 ninth-grade students and 2,900 teachers randomly selected from 290 high schools, showing consistent enforcement of school discipline (physical environment) and availability of caring adults (relationships) were associated with school safety. Thapa et al, (2013) findings suggest because violence in schools is documented as a continual problem, future research needs to critically examine the complex set of individual, group, and organizational factors (physical environment) that shape and predict undesired behaviors in schools in order to better prevent them.

Rules and norms. Schools in which rules are effectively enforced or schools with better discipline management (physical conditions) have lower rates of student victimization and student delinquency (behaviors) (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne & Gottfredson, 2005). Consistent enforcement of school rules and availability of caring adults is the structure and support linked to lower suspension rates (Gregory et al., 2010). Nesdale and Lawson (2011) conducted a study on a total of 383 children between 7 and 10 years old about behavior norms. The authors identified children's in-group attitudes reflected their group's norm, but with increasing age, they liked their in-group less and their out-group more if the in-group had an exclusion norm, suggesting as students get older, they are more likely to be swayed by the acceptable norms of their peer groups. Cash, Bradshaw, & Leaf (2015) conducted a study to examine associations between rates and types of observed rule violations in "hot spots" (e.g., physical, non-classroom environments) in schools. This research has important implications for both educators and researchers interested in school climate improvements and drills further the concept about student perceptions about behavior. Their research raises questions about norms that may be established in the physical structure and later affects perceptions and behavior.

Teacher and student perceptions. Perceptions of school climate and safety revealed teachers' viewed a greater sensitivity to classroom-level factors, such as poor classroom management and proportion of students with disruptive behaviors, whereas students' perceptions were more sensitive to school-level factors, such as student mobility, student-teacher relationships, and principal turnover (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). Johnson and Stevens (2006) found a positive relationship between the mean teachers' perceptions of school climate and mean student achievement, meaning, a more structured physical environment was perceived as a factor for positive student learning behaviors. Conversely, studies have also demonstrated

that individual-level predictors, such as having behavior problems at school, being held back a grade, coming from a single-parent family, lower level of parental education, gender, age, and students' ethnic background play significant roles in student perceptions of school climate (Fan, Williams & Corkin, 2011; Schneider & Duran, 2010.) These differences show that it is important to assess both sets of perceptions in relation to understanding perceptions of school climate. These results may suggest ethical judgements about how peer behavior and social norms affect students' perceptions about their preferences about socially-acceptable behaviors.

School improvement efforts. Regarding school climate improvement efforts, Felner et al. (2001) states “whole school change efforts, when implemented comprehensively and with appropriate intensity and fidelity, may powerfully influence the prevention of socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties, as well as promotion of the acquisition of the full range of developmental competencies necessary for life success, well-being, and resilience” (p. 177). Interventions that focus on school climate center on school-wide practices and policies aimed at addressing the social culture across grade levels, improving the tone for how students, teachers, and the administration interact with each other, and creating an environment that promotes supportive relationships, a collective sense of school belonging, and structures and supports that protect against peer victimization (Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013). School climate approaches can span universal, selected, and targeted tiers of intervention and tend to fit within the PBIS framework (Bradshaw, 2013; Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010; Ross & Horner, 2014).

Limitations and recommendations of school climate research. In an early review of the literature on school climate research, a number of solitary definitions, methodologies, theories and models have been developed (Cushing et al, 2003). In a recent examination of the literature between 2000-2012, Thapa et al, (2013) identified a similar wide range of school

climate definitions and models, making comparisons about outcomes inconsistent.

Recommendations for future research included measurement tools and strategies that assess how students and school community members perceive school life regarding safety, relationships, and the institutional teaching and learning environment (Thapa et al., 2013). According to an assessment of school climate measures, although a considerable number of school climate measures exist, it is difficult to find appropriate, well-validated or reliable tools in the literature (Ramelow, Currie, & Felder-Puig, 2015). According to the authors, theory-grounding for measurement development is often missing, and all instruments reviewed that included items addressing the relationship among students and between students and teachers while the environmental-structural area was considered the least. This is noteworthy, because as PBIS has been determined to be an effective evidence-based practice founded in the notion of students' adherence to common language, experiences, and values set by the adults in the school, and that social competence is the knowledge that all students know the rules and expectations and adherence to those conditions may affect relationships between students and teachers as an indicator of the school climate.

Thapa et al, (2013) suggested using the NSCC's 2007 definition of sustainable school climate because it would assist researchers and educators with comparable information to inform school climate and improvement processes. Furthermore, their findings indicate the majority of studies do not examine the effects of school climate within multilevel or hierarchical frameworks, such as PBIS, and very few examine school change over time to understand school improvement efforts. They further suggest new studies examine school climate from multiple perspectives, as well as qualitative analysis for rigorous, empirically sound research.

This summary of school climate introduces the concepts of safety, norms and values, relationships, and perceptions in the teaching and learning environment regarding overall school initiatives aimed at improving school culture. Of particular interest is the importance of assessing student and teacher perceptions in order to better understand school climate, especially when monitoring the outcomes of school improvement initiatives. Programs such as PBIS have been shown to be effective at altering the school climate as perceived among students and staff. Therefore, additional work is needed to identify how and under what circumstances PBIS is able to improve the school environment, social climate, and social culture (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010).

Social Climate

An early component of school climate research is the construct of how students relate to each other—the student social climate—meaning the social rules that govern the prompting, rewarding, punishing, or extinction of student behavior (Cushing, 2000). Cushing, Horner & Barrier (2003) studied the fundamental variables that make up student-peer interactions in schools prior to developing interventions focused on changing behavior. Understanding these variables (e.g., social response to frequency and intensity of rule violations) provides researchers involved with school-wide behavior support interventions with information on the types of behaviors that are problematic within a particular school, as well as the social consequences that serve to maintain such behaviors (Cushing et al., 2003). The authors suggest that, to institute proactive programs, researchers must gain a clearer understanding of school climate and of the fundamental social consequences and social rules that govern student behavior on a day to day basis (Cushing et al., 2003). In order to institute successful proactive programs, researchers must understand a school's climate and the social rules that govern student behavior.

Regarding measurement of social climate, Cushing et al, (2003) discovered that the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET, Horner et al., 2004) may be “too far removed from the day-to-day interactions that make up students’ social climate” (p. 236). This research documented and validated the use of the Student Interaction in Specific Settings (SISS) tool to directly assess student social climate in quantitative methods. The SISS was a direct observation measure of student interaction patterns designed for use by researchers studying the development of and changes in student social climate. The SISS was found to be reliable, efficient, sensitive to and valid for targeted behaviors (e.g., teasing, verbal disruption, profanity, physical disruption and physical aggression) that occur only often, not infrequently. Limitations of the study include that the SISS data was constructed from unstructured settings and a more complete description of schools’ social climate would require similar analyses in classrooms. Potential results of future quantitative and qualitative studies would aid the understanding of school and student social climate in the creation of school-wide systems of support that are student-body specific.

Contextual Consideration of Culture and PBIS

Much of the discussion thus far relates to school climate and social climate regarding student behaviors and perceptions in typical schools. Before we examine the social culture in schools that serve youth with extreme challenging behaviors, or the influence of students understanding the acceptable behaviors described as the crux of PBIS, it is important to understand the contextual considerations of culture on an intervention such as PBIS. Given that PBIS is conceptually focused on changing the environment, an important component in understanding students’ awareness of a shared language, experience, and values system would heed necessity in understanding the dimensions of cultural differences collectively as a school, and individually, as relevant to students (Vincent et al., 2011).

Culture is defined as the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize an institution or organization, or social forms of characteristic groups (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Upon reviewing literature on cultural context in schools, Fallon, O’Keefe, & Sugai (2011) found little empirical research that considered culture with student behavior, and concluded the term culture had been difficult to define due to purpose and perspective of the researchers. Later, Sugai, O’Keefe, & Fallon (2012) stated if researchers and educators could develop a concrete understanding and definition of culture, the definition could guide recommendations and implementation of PBIS in culturally diverse settings, as well as inform practices for schools with diverse demographics, achievement measures, concerns about schools safety and student problem behavior. Even if a specific definition of culture is amiss, the context and description of a specific school culture could help facilitate an understanding of what students in diverse schools (such as alternative education settings) value as part of their PBIS norms.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been described as disproportionately placed in restrictive settings, and restrictive special education settings (National Research Council, 2002). Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) noted that regarding research literature examining disproportionality of students from historically underserved groups in special education, “attention to culture...is discontinuous, ranging from simplistic to sophisticated perspectives” (p.288). The authors noted that researchers have not adequately specified how culture plays a role in disproportionality. Stated earlier in the introduction of this chapter, culturally diverse students have been placed in more restrictive settings as outcomes from exclusionary practices. It is clear that interventions that are culturally and contextually relevant consider variables that affect academic or social behaviors, such as

ethnicity, exceptionality or disability, race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and geography (urban, suburban, rural) (Sugai, et al., 2012). Some researchers are beginning to adapt measurement tools and strategies for measuring adult “buy-in” of PBIS programs in juvenile justice settings, as perceptions of these adults have been documented historically as believing students in this environment would not respond to PBIS (Sprague et al., 2013).

Research seems to lack any discussion about why students with extreme behaviors coming from diverse cultures that have been removed from a school for disciplinary reasons had not been successful adhering to the norms and expectations in their traditional school settings, let alone their buy-in into values set by adults in AE settings.

In working toward a definition of social culture in PBIS, which is rooted in applied behavior analysis, Sugai et al, (2012) define culture as

The extent to which a group of individuals engage in overt and verbal behavior reflecting shared behavioral learning histories, serving to differentiate the group from other groups, and predicting how individuals within the group act in specific setting conditions. That is, “culture” reflects a collection of common verbal and overt behaviors that are learned and maintained by a set of similar social and environmental contingences (i.e., learning history), and are occasioned or not by actions and objects (i.e., stimuli) that define a given setting or context (p.200).

PBIS provides best-practice guidelines for enhancing school climate; however, the actual look, feel and sound of what is understood, taught, and interpreted varies based on contexts and cultures (Sugai et al., 2012). Culture is a reflection of a collection of common verbal and overt behaviors that are learned and maintained by a set of similar social and environmental contingencies and actions that define a given setting or context (Sugai et al., 2012). Using these

guidelines for describing and understanding culture can help researchers interpret and describe individual behaviors in an observed context within a specific setting (Sugai et al., 2012).

Upon further examination of the term culture, Sugai et al, (2012) identified themes in divergent definitions of culture in social science disciplines. Common themes include what individuals “do” (e.g., organized practices, patterns relative to behavior, products of human action, learned behavior, habits activities, and overt behavior). A few definitions regarded what individuals “believe” (e.g., customs, social forms, thoughts languages values, perspectives, and interpretations). Across the social sciences, “culture” is defined broadly to encompass shared characteristics and/or behaviors within a group context that serves to maintain the identity of the group (Sugai et al., 2012, p.199). Considering these themes, PBIS and cultural responsiveness appear to be derived from different theoretical foundations: PBIS implies sameness of behaviors and beliefs, and cultural responsiveness emphasizes acknowledging the differences in diversity (Vincent et al., 2011). Therefore, this research study intends to understand how and why the core features (language, experiences, and values) of the PBIS approach in an AE setting achieve the intended goals of supporting students in their successful attainment of social competence, and inform the adults who developed the behavioral expectations for that specific setting of the consistencies or inconsistencies of their values and those of the students attending their AE school for future program improvement.

As stated earlier, the summary of school climate introduces the concepts of safety, norms and values, relationships, and perceptions in the teaching and learning environment. The contextual understanding of culture also has worth in that understanding social climate and social culture plays in the values that drive the social culture. Horner and Sugai (2015) state that universal or Tier I expectations of a PBIS system focus on school-wide proactive supports and

are designed to support the majority of students by teaching behavioral expectations while correcting behavioral errors. However, these common school-wide social behaviors often support an assumption of healthy normality in a traditional public school, whereas mental and psychological health needs demonstrated in AE settings may be vastly different in understanding the social norms of such students. When considering alternative education settings that serve students with ED, extreme challenging behaviors, trauma and other factors that prohibit mental health, an examination of the degree to which students buy into the values and vision set by the adults for the expectations of the school could be a factor in the successful outcomes of students in an alternative education setting using PBIS to improve behavioral outcomes. Perhaps students who engage in maladaptive behaviors may not be able to relate to the behavioral expectations set by the adults of an AE setting, who do not consider the needs of students needing access to mental health services in their creation of school-wide expectations. Perhaps these students are moved to more intense levels of support in the PBIS system as a result of not being able to be successful in a universal behavior system that is not designed to meet their needs. Since no positive behavior data has been collected, such as psychological health or overall well-being in study participants in the documented achievements of a pro-social culture, a qualitative study of how or why students needing emotional, behavioral, and mental health support comply or do not comply with PBIS social expectations at the Tier I level may help researchers of PBIS in these settings better understand a contextual and cultural fit in AE schools.

School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

It is widely documented that thousands of schools—public, private, and AE settings—across the country are implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) (www.pbis.org, 2016). The definition of PBIS has evolved over the past decade, but has had a consistent emphasis on the tiered intervention framework, unifying cultural implication

about safety, creating an environment optimal for teaching and learning, and developing a social culture for success of all students. According to Sugai & Horner (2002), PBIS is a tiered system of prevention (Tier I) and intervention (Tier I, with the addition of layering Tiers II, and III) in which support services are based on demonstrated needs, identifying PBIS as a multi-leveled framework accessible to all students in all classroom settings (Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2004). Sugai & Horner (2009) and Horner et al, (2009) added an emphasis on predictability: creating a safe school environment in which effective teaching can occur to promote academic and social success for all students. With a decade of extant literature on school reform for safety and solving for difficult behaviors, PBIS is also considered an Evidence-based Practice (EBP) that incorporates systems-level problem solving to improve behavior across the school. The established social culture layered with individualized behavioral supports sets up an effective learning environment for all students (Horner et al., 2009; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010).

Social Culture

As PBIS systems are designed to establish a social culture to increase academic and social success, the evidence-based features of PBIS include prevention, teaching and acknowledging social expectations, consistent consequences for problem behavior, data decision-making, intensive and individual interventions, and team-based implementation (Horner & Sugai, 2002). As stated earlier, regarding the influence of school culture on behavioral improvement initiatives, an important part of school-wide systems is the creation of a positive school environment for all students in all settings at all times. Defining school-wide expectations for the potential success of all students is a core feature in establishing a social culture.

In a PBIS system, students should experience the school context as socially predictable, consistent, safe, and positive (Horner et al., 2009). A social culture is predictable when all students and staff share a common language, common vision or understanding of expectations, and common experiences (Horner & Sugai, 2002). The components of predictability in a school environment include expectations stated in positive language, expectations of safety—where violent and disruptive behaviors are not tolerated—and where expectations are modeled and rewarded with consistency (Horner & Sugai, 2002). Figure B1 illustrates how a common language, common experience, and common vision or values contribute to the social culture.

The benefit of PBIS begins with the emphasis on prevention of problem behaviors and setting social expectations by teaching appropriate social behavior and skills. To be effective, these expectations need to be taught overtly so students are able to label the social expectations and define what that label means for real behavior in school settings (Blonigan et al., 2008). Theoretically, when all students in the school are taught the same social expectations, a social culture is established where students have both personal knowledge about social behaviors expected in the school and the knowledge that everyone else in the school knows the same social expectations (Blonigan et al., 2008). The goal of primary prevention is to establish a culture of competence (social culture), in which students expect and support appropriate behavior from each other (social learning theory) by effectively adhering to and demonstrating the school's expectations and adults maximize opportunities for teaching and learning (Horner et al., 2009).

In a randomized, control trial demonstration, Horner et al, (2009) concluded that PBIS implemented with fidelity is effective at altering the social culture of the school and improving perception of the safety and quality of the social environment. Blonigan et al, (2008) encouraged the continual examination of social behavior—such studies may translate into greater and

unknown educational benefits, cost benefit analysis of overall school safety and student academic achievement, as well as the long term detriments of suspension and expulsion rates.

Tiered Framework

Figure B2 describes the PBIS framework as a three-tiered continuum of support. The first tier is the primary prevention or Universal (Tier I), which focuses on school-wide systems across all settings where all students and staff in a building are exposed to school-wide practices intended to prevent problematic and disruptive behavior from occurring. Tier I (Primary Tier) is the core of establishing the social culture of the school environment. Tiers II (Secondary) and III (Tertiary) describe additional interventions in addition to those provided in the universal support tier.

Universal tier. The first tier is an agreed-upon, established set of behavioral expectations for all students across non-classroom and classroom settings, with a clearly defined and consistently implemented continuum of consequences and supports (Horner et al., 2009). After defining core expectations, adults teach, model, monitor, and reward appropriate behavior, provide corrective consequences for behavioral errors, and problem-solve from data (Horner & Sugai, 2009). This level of prevention includes explicit teaching and practice of prosocial behaviors and adherence to rules and routines in every school environment coupled with systemic reinforcements of these behaviors. The universal tier is generally effective for about 80% of the student population, who master success with the expectations and expected behaviors (Horner & Sugai, 2002). However, because children come to school with widely differing understanding of what is socially acceptable, school personnel bear the obligation to define the core social expectations (e.g., be safe, be respectful, be responsible) that will lead to a positive

environment for all students in that setting (Blonigan et al., 2008). Students' inability to comply with these behavioral expectations may require more intensive interventions at Tier II.

Secondary tier. While PBIS is effective for the vast majority of students, some students still require additional supports to be successful in school. Approximately 12%-18% of all students will respond positively to SWPBIS plus an additional layer of supports, termed Tier II interventions (Horner & Sugai, 2002). These strategic interventions typically take the form of supplemental behavioral interventions and supports (March & Horner, 2002; Sugai et al., 2000). Some of these supports include First Step to Success (Walker et al., 2009), Check-in/Check Out (Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2010), Check and Connect (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004), Social Skills Clubs (Lane et al., 2003), or interventions tailored from brief functional behavioral assessments. The second tier emphasizes secondary prevention and includes specialized group systems for students with at-risk behaviors, which are determined by the school-based team. Approximately 15% of students in a school need Tier II support to succeed (Horner & Sugai, 2002).

Tertiary tier. Approximately 2%-8% of all students still do not respond to universal PBIS and strategic Tier II interventions (Horner & Sugai, 2002). These students exhibit chronic externalizing and or internalizing problem behaviors. Some of these students are frequently removed from the learning environment due to recurrent, challenging overt behavior while other students exhibit symptoms associated with social isolation, depression, and other indicators of mental illness. These students require highly individualized and intensive supports (Tier III) in conjunction with the Tier I and II supports. Positive behavior support plans (PBSP) and intensive wrap-around mental health services are typically implemented across multiple life domains (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002). Tertiary preventions (Tier III) are the most

intensive and specialized supports for students with high-risk behaviors, such as medical assessments, behavioral disorders, and mental health disorders (Crone & Horner, 2003; Scott, Anderson & Alter, 2011). Due to the students' extreme behaviors, this tertiary level of intervention (Tier III) is student-centered and family oriented in that supports are implemented not only for the student, but also for the family, given that there are often significant needs that extend across all the student's ecologies. Approximately 5% of students fall in this category needing the most intensive support (Horner & Sugai, 2002).

PBIS Outcomes in Public Schools

The efficacy of PBIS, when implemented with fidelity, dramatically reduces disruptive behaviors across all school settings (Bradshaw et al., 2010). To date, there are several case and quasi-experimental studies demonstrating the positive effects of PBIS (Horner et al., 2010). Recently, two randomized controlled studies have been added to the literature that provides evidence linking PBIS to reductions in office discipline referrals and suspensions and improvements in school-wide organizational health (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horen et al., 2009). There is also evidence that PBIS may lead to improved academic achievement, particularly in reading (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009). However, in their findings, Bradshaw et al. (2010) recommend additional research to identify means for researchers to determine for whom and under what conditions PBIS is most effective, as well as understanding sustainability of PBIS in systems change as a result of high quality implementation (p.147). It appears this study opens the door to investigate social validity (whether or not PBIS achieves student acceptability and satisfaction) and implementation constructs about social culture in the school.

Studies in public school settings have identified specific reductions in undesirable school behaviors including out-of-school suspensions (Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008), problematic and dangerous behavior during recess and other unstructured settings (Franzen & Kamps, 2008), and antisocial behavior on school campuses (i.e., assaults; McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003). Additionally, Tyre, Feurborn & Pierce, (2011) identified an improvement in and reduction of student tardiness as a result of PBIS implementation.

Along with decreases in undesirable student behaviors, PBIS has also increased organizational health and staff affiliation (Bradshaw, et al., 2009) and improved student attendance rates (Wells, Malloy & Cormier (2006). PBIS is associated with increased positive school climate (Bradshaw, et al., 2009). A last beneficial outcome of PBIS is a more inclusive school culture accepting of students with significant disabilities (Freeman, Eber, Anderson, Irvin, Horner, Bounds, & Dunlap, 2006; Medley, Little, & Akin-Little, 2008).

An underlying assumption is that by improving social behavior, schools have more time and ability to deliver effective curriculum and instruction (Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine, 2006). Teachers have reported the ability to spend more time delivering instruction aided by principal supervision (Scott & Barrett, 2004) and having a greater sense of self-efficacy as instructors (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Ross & Horner, 2007). Gage et al, (2015), in an extensive literature review and longitudinal analysis of state academics, determined that PBIS alone cannot solve academic achievement challenges, but is a part of the condition of a positive school climate. The authors state PBIS has been associated with improved school climate, reduction of reactive disciplinary practices, enhancement of social skill development and in promoting the social culture of classrooms and schools and behaviors and values that are important in later success in career, postsecondary and community activities and responsibilities. Also, PBIS has the

potential to contribute to more comprehensive efforts addressing antisocial behavior and school violence, bullying behavior prevention, safe schools, and equity issues for disproportionate youth (Gage et al., 2015). Similar to Bradshaw et al, (2010), it appears this recent study also encourages investigation about social constructs and social culture in the school. It is clear that PBIS has been widely documented as having varied successful outcomes for the majority of students in traditional school settings. Due to these successes, PBIS has been recently of interest to researchers investigating behavioral intervention models in alternative education (AE) settings.

PBIS in Alternative Education Settings

While the majority of research on PBIS has been in traditional public schools and at the elementary (K-8) level in particular, increased attention has recently been given to PBIS research in alternative education (AE) because of the extreme maladaptive behaviors of students in these settings (Scott & Cooper, 2013). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), AE is designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. AE settings (residential and juvenile justice facilities and other academic schools) serve heterogeneous groups who present with multiple and comorbid academic, behavioral, and mental health needs requiring more specialized programming than typically offered within traditional school settings (Carver et al., 2010). Self-contained special education schools are being used with increasing frequency to serve students receiving special education services, in particular students with emotional and behavioral disorders (McDaniel, Jolivet, & Ennis, 2012).

NCES (Carver, et al., 2010) reported students could be transferred to AE schools for safety risk reasons, including physical attacks or fights, drug possession, disruptive behaviors, academic failure, truancy, and weapons violations. Key entry points into AE settings include

school disciplinary policies that mandate suspension or expulsion from police involvement from the aforementioned violations, plus referral to more restrictive placements for an increasing array of classroom rule infractions (McDaniel et al. 2010; Weissman, Cregor, Gainsborough, Kief, Leone, & Sullivan, 2008). According to Wilson (2015), an overlooked component as to how students are also referred to these settings is the way that school personnel are trained to collect and report the types of data reflective of maladaptive problem behaviors and discipline patterns, such as instances of office referrals and suspensions. Rather than examining functional outcomes: escape from the classroom and access to social attention (either from peers, educators, or both) which may or may not reflect a manifestation of an emotional or behavioral disability, students may be hastily referred to AE settings for these behaviors. Regardless of the many reasons students are referred to AE settings, it is clear their needs are not successfully met in their public schools.

Considering the complex needs of students in restrictive and alternative education settings, a clear and compelling need exists for school-wide systems for prevention efforts of inappropriate, dangerous and violent behaviors. PBIS promotes a safe school environment, establishes a social culture that reinforces positive expectations consistently with predictable consequences for behavioral infractions, and provides opportunities to demonstrate the skills associated with social competencies (Sugai & Horner, 2002). While PBIS emphasizes whole-school implementation with a focus on all students in all settings, at present, there is little research examining the use of a multi-tiered approach exclusively serving student populations with ED (McCurdy et al, 2016).

PBIS characteristics in AE settings. Unique by the nature of their population, AE settings are exclusively comprised of children and youth in need of the highest interventions in

typical settings. The systemic structure is similar in both traditional and AE settings, (Scott & Cooper, 2013) and strategies development and implementation across all three tiers (Simonsen, et al., 2011) (see Figure B3). The most notable aspect of PBIS in AE schools is the breakdown of students identified in each of the tiers, which does not differ from traditional or AE settings, and in fact, the majority of students are largely successful with expectations at the Tier I or universal level (Nelson et al., 2007).

Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) conducted a review of 29 AE studies that identified some universal programmatic characteristics, however, an explicit alignment with a PBIS framework was not articulated. To date, it has not been empirically validated how many of these universal characteristics are required to produce meaningful change in student outcomes (Flower et al., 2011). In fact, within AE settings, it is common to observe the absence of an articulated universal tier of prevention used with all students instead of reliance solely on more intensive forms of intervention (Jolivette et al., 2012). The outcome of this study is noteworthy because as students are referred to AE school settings due to behaviors, does PBIS facilitate a social culture in that setting, and why do the students buy in to the program?

Reduction of physical restraints. In a 2005 descriptive case study, Miller et al. described a process for reducing the number of physical restraints at Centennial School, a self-contained school for children ages 6-12 with emotional disturbance or autism referred because the district could not adequately or effectively support the students in the traditional setting. In response to aggressive and disruptive student behaviors, the systemic change process of (1) assessing the educational environment, (2) introducing research-based practices, (3), evaluating implementation, and (4) making adjustments for improving outcomes showed encouraging results (p. 555). The authors identified research-based practices, including: using school-wide

behavior support and leveled rewards for reinforcement, matching student skills with outcomes, using social skills curriculum, increasing parent involvement, and following professional development with fidelity. Results included a significant near-zero reduction of physical restraints and seclusionary time-out procedures.

Miller et al. (2006) demonstrated a similar, but not statistically significant positive effect, when they conducted a quasi-experimental field study using a two-phase physical restraint reduction intervention in a multisite residential treatment center with on-site, self-contained special education schools. Their data-driven approach (staff development and modified behavioral interventions) implemented a system-wide intervention for children and adolescents diagnosed with at least one emotional or behavioral disorder. The results provided support for the effectiveness of organizational-level and milieu interventions for restraint reductions, reduced by 59%, adding to the body of literature that schoolwide intervention approaches appear to show promise in AE settings.

Reduction of physical aggression and discipline referrals. Simonsen et al. (2010) conducted a descriptive, non-experimental single-subject case study documenting the impact of introducing a schoolwide approach and primary-level intervention into a non-public special education school setting that was already implementing individualized secondary- and tertiary-level interventions. Students, ages 3-22, had a range of intellectual and emotional disabilities, orthopedic impairments, or autism, and were typically referred to the school because of physically aggressive and dangerous behaviors. In the results of the AB design, climate data and the index and distribution of serious incidents showed an overall decrease in serious incidents and an increase in the percentage of students who refrained from serious physical aggression. In a similar study, Jolivette et al., (2012) implemented PBIS within an AE school for students with

severe ED, having secondary- and tertiary-level interventions already in place. Using an AB design, they found that student discipline referrals decreased over 2 years within the school setting.

Implementation and outcomes. The adoption and adaptation of PBIS across the tiers into AE settings with existing universal-tier behavioral management programs are an “empirical unknown, and a difficult and complex process,” as little research exists to inform PBIS implementation in AE settings (McDaniel, Jolivette, and Ennis, 2012, p.248). Strategies and interventions that have been validated as effective in traditional schools require modification to meet the specific needs of the students served in specific AE settings to compensate for data that it is not sensitive to slow progress typical of AE settings (Simonsen et al., 2011). In their study, George et al. (2013) described a PBIS program in an AE setting—a self-contained school—and discussed the effectiveness of the practices over time positively affecting the outcomes of youth with ED. The school studied was considered a university partnership school (laboratory school) that described the sustained implementation fidelity over 10 years, with decreases in physical restraints, suspensions, police involvement, and truancy. The authors noted future researchers should continue to explore the feasibility, social validity, and adaptation of PBIS in AE settings as a form of prevention.

Even with limited empirical data on the effectiveness and feasibility of PBIS, and in AE settings in particular, surprising little research has examined the use of a multi-tiered approach in schools or systems for children with emotional or behavioral disorders in self-contained schools (SCS). The nature of these schools is to support students who have generally failed in a traditional school setting due to inappropriate and aggressive behaviors and low academic achievement, as a result of their mental health or disability (McCurdy et al., 2003).

Social validity. Perhaps the most relevant study regarding implementation fidelity, outcomes and student perception of social validity is Farkas, et al, (2011), who conducted a first-of-its-kind non-experimental, quantitative descriptive case study investigating the effectiveness of PBIS Tier 1 implementation on student outcome measures in school, focusing on implementation fidelity and social validity from the perspectives of students and staff. In this descriptive, non-experimental case study, PBIS was implemented at a private, therapeutic junior-senior high school (grades 5-12), designed to provide students with emotional disturbance or other health impairments with a supportive service in a safe learning environment. Farkas et al, (2011) interest in social validity in addition to fidelity stemmed from the belief that (a) interventions, including PBIS, result in socially significant behavior change and (b) implementers (e.g., teachers and other school staff) and consumers (e.g., students) of the intervention value the methods used to achieve the behavior change (e.g., Horner, 2000; Sugai et al., 2000 in Farkas et al., 2012, p.276). Data was collected on implementation fidelity, student outcomes, and social validity.

Regarding social validity, the authors measured staff and student perceptions of PBIS components using internally developed survey instruments (4-point Likert Scale) regarding their satisfaction (e.g., experience of lessons as helpful or effective: “I find the system clear/user friendly”) and felt competence (e.g., belief in knowledge of how to earn points and tickets: “How effective do you find the use of tickets in changing the attitudes of the student/changing your own attitude and focus?” and “How important is it for you to get tickets?”) as participants in the PBIS program (pp.282-3). The findings showed student behavior improved and both students and staff found the program to be socially valid (helpful and effective), supporting emerging

literature in favor of PBIS in alternative settings. The authors suggested further research on the best ways to assess fidelity and social validity in AE settings.

From early research, one of the fundamental philosophies of PBIS is that although humanistic values should not replace empiricism, these values should certainly inform empiricism (Carr, Dunlap, Horner, Koegel, Turnbull, Sailor...& Fox, 2002). As stated earlier, PBIS research on social validity is limited and descriptive in nature (Farkas et al., 2011) and a call for future studies in social validity should be explored (Miramontes, et al., 2011).

Investigating the student perspective of the social culture will increase understanding of the social learning theory associated with PBIS social culture.

Research Methods in the Literature

There is preliminary evidence that PBIS is effective in decreasing inappropriate student behaviors within AE settings. The focus of these investigations was based on universal-level interventions (Farkas et al., 2012; George et al., 2013; Jolivette, Patterson, et al., 2012; D. Miller et al., 2005; J. Miller et al., 2006; and Simonsen et al., 2010;) and resulted in reduced physical restraints and aggressive behaviors. The majority of PBIS studies in AE settings have been descriptive in nature, and McDaniel et al. (2012) expanded the literature with a qualitative multi-focus group study identifying barriers to integrating PBIS in AE settings with existing behavior management systems. Their findings were consistent with other literature informing preparation for PBIS practices in traditional settings, including staff buy-in, building teams, commitment to the program, data transparency, and improvements through assessment. Additionally, the researchers concluded that school policies tied to local and state policy recommendations to improve services in these settings and better meet the needs of students were to include “(a) gathering useful data and practicing data-based decision making, (b) securing initial and

continued buy-in and support for PBIS, (c) adapting PBIS for complex AE settings, and (d) providing professional development and assistance for AE school staff to implement PBIS with fidelity,” (p. 254).

Implications for future research from these studies indicated a need for alternative schools to continue developing, contextualizing, and implementing PBIS as an approach to effect positive change, and to monitor fidelity, outcomes, and social validity. Limitations of these and previous studies included encouragement of more research in both quantitative and qualitative designs. However, shocking little attention has been paid to examining the cultural nuances of the alternative education setting, or understanding the school climate or social culture.

Conclusion

School discipline and safety has been an ongoing concern in the United States, as well as statistics about the students that are affected by these concerns. Extreme programming such as zero tolerance has created a pathway for students with safety concerns and disruptive behaviors toward alternative education programs. Unfortunately, simply removing students from public schools has not extinguished the undesired behaviors, but may actually increase more severe and frequent discipline problems, as well as restricted these students from needed and accessible programs.

Researchers need to understand broad issues surrounding school climate to then better understand the nuances that social climate and social culture plays in the values that drive the social culture. However, research studies have been conducted over time without a singular definition of school climate. Some themes have been consistent: perceptions about safety, relationships, norms and values, the teaching and learning environment, and strategies for school improvement efforts. In order to better understand the nuances and values that drive social competence, especially in restrictive settings, it is important to first understand context

surrounding school climate, fundamental social consequences, and social rules that govern student behavior on a day-to-day basis (Cushing, Horner, & Barrier, 2003). PBIS is founded in the notion of expectations as part of the school's social culture: the expectations and rules, language, and experiences.

PBIS in AE settings has encouraging outcomes, but surprisingly little research has been conducted in settings where students with the most severe behavioral needs exist. Due to the specific characteristics of AE schools, there is an urgent need to continue studies about PBIS in these settings. More specifically, the nature of these schools is to support students who have generally failed in traditional settings as a result of their mental health or disability, aggressive behavior, and low academic achievement. What appears even more important is conducting further research in these settings to understand social validity in PBIS beyond "helpful and effective" (Farkas et al., 2012) as well as the cultural nuances in these settings about the school climate and social culture. This study will attempt to identify if and how PBIS cultivates a social culture in an AE setting, considering what students know about the common language, their common experiences as they relate to the social culture, and how their behaviors affect the shared culture; in other words, do they buy into shared values of the PBIS expectations?

Chapter 3 describes the intended methodology of this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will describe the general design and methods of the study. It summarizes the context of the study, site and participant selection processes, and role of the researcher. It also describes the procedures for data collection including a description on consent and confidentiality procedures. Data analysis includes procedures and strategies for trustworthiness in a qualitative study. A detailed timeline is included to explain the data collection and data analysis timeline.

As described in Chapter 1, students find their way to AE settings for a number of disciplinary, behavioral, safety, and mental health reasons that cannot be managed in less restrictive settings such as public schools. A multi-tiered system of support (e.g., PBIS) is intensified and the population breakdown in each level of support is similar in traditional and alternative education schools and settings (Nelson et al., 2007). A growing body of empirical research shows that sustainable, positive school climate reduces drop-out rates of these challenging youth and fosters social development and academic achievement, and increases the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for students to be responsible and productive members of society (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; National School Climate Council, 2007; Stagman & Cooper, 2010). As part of the PBIS approach, adults in AE settings develop the school-wide expectations and socially acceptable behaviors for their school. The research problem clearly states that documenting student perspective of their social culture can assist educators in improving the quality and effectiveness of their PBIS program.

Chapter 2 included a review of the literature about school climate and culture in recent decades, and identified specific and consistent outcomes of PBIS in AE settings (reduction in restraints, office referrals, and physical aggression). A gap in the literature identified little

attention paid to examining the student perspective and cultural nuances of the alternative education setting as well as a lack of a clear understanding about universal (Tier I) characteristics underlying the established social culture of a school. Although PBIS in AE settings is emergent in the literature, and shows encouraging outcomes, educators' understanding of how and why students buy into or do not buy into PBIS values in this environment is neither known nor documented.

Research Questions

Central Questions:

- What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an alternative special education school implementing PBIS?
- How are those conditions cultivated?
- What do students know about this PBIS social culture?

Sub-Questions:

- What do students know about the common language of their school's PBIS social culture, and how do they use it?
- What are the students' common experiences and how do they contribute to the social culture?
- What do students know about the social culture that makes them socially competent?
- What do students understand about how their own behaviors affect the school's social culture; in other words, do they buy into shared values?
 - What do students need from adults?
 - What do students need from each other?
 - What are students' obligations to each other?

- o What are students' obligations to everyone else?

Research Type

In response to the research questions, this study called for exploratory qualitative case study. Because little is known about what students know about the PBIS social culture and how those conditions may be cultivated, an exploratory study allowed the researcher to investigate the little-understood phenomena, identify or discover important themes of meaning to the participants, and to “generate a hypothesis for further research” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 69).

A qualitative approach utilizing case study methodology was determined to be most suitable for discovering what students know about the PBIS social culture in their school. Case study was the most appropriate method for this study, since it used lived experiences to uncover certain phenomena in addition to lending itself to multiple approaches, therefore providing a comprehensive research strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The unit of analysis was a single site selection, and the research strategies included multiple sources of evidence: observations, semi-structured, focus group interviews, and document analysis.

Perspective of the Research

The methodological orientation that guided this study was phenomenological. Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individuals' lived experience: “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). This approach typically involves interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, and analysis proceeds from the central assumption that there will be an essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience. In this study, participants who appeared to have similar experiences were treated as unique expressionists and then compared to each other's

responses to identify the essence (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Since social competence is a sharing of language, experiences and values, the belief of this phenomenological approach was that students would be able to think about, discuss, and describe the PBIS phenomenon in their school.

The research perspective was concerned with developing an understanding of what students know about the PBIS social culture in their school (the common language, experiences, and values) individually, then in a focus group. While the methods embraced the majority of qualitative procedures, some quantitative methods were employed with data collected from documents and reports (e.g., behavioral or restraint data) to support and clarify observations or semi-structured interviews. As a case study, the researcher intended to provide an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single special education school that circumscribed the investigation (Merriam, 2009).

Site

The study was conducted at Valley Creek School (VCS), a private licensed academic school and alternative special education placement for children and young adolescents in kindergarten through eighth grade. These students have been identified as having emotional and behavioral challenges and a primary diagnosis of Emotional Disturbance (ED), often accompanied by a secondary diagnosis of Other Health Impairment (OHI) or Specific Learning Disability (SLD). These conditions significantly contribute to levels of frustration, poor impulse control, self-regulation and coping skills, and incidences of physical aggression and verbal noncompliance. Some students that attend VCS may also have comorbid diagnoses (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual Disability (ID)). All students at VCS have documented severe behavioral challenges that may be accompanied with mental illness or other

mental health needs and have been referred for admission by the child's home school district or charter school. School districts refer to VCS when the home district fails to provide an appropriate special education program, and therefore, the child is not able to make progress behaviorally or academically, regardless of the special education supports and interventions offered by the district.

The school population was generally comprised of students that are referred from one of three main sources within 25 miles of the school: 1) suburban districts; 2) large urban school district and charter schools within the city; and 3) host school district of a Residential Treatment Facility (RTF) on the campus of VCS. Students that were transported to the school for the duration of the school day and returned home each afternoon were referred to as community students, and those that lived on the campus were identified as residential students. Community students from suburban districts and the city may have ridden on district-provided transportation for as long as 90 minutes per ride, as much as three hours per day on transportation, as far as 30 miles from their homes.

All students at VCS had emotional and behavioral challenges that hinder their ability to access their education. The students that attended VCS from the RTF not only had educational needs as a result of their ED diagnosis and severe behavioral concerns, they were also receiving treatment, having been victims of severe sexual, physical or emotional abuse, sexual trauma, chronic neglect, mental illness, family history of mental illness, and violent and self-harming behaviors. While not all students attending VCS have been housed in a treatment facility, many community students have also been identified through admissions applications as having been hospitalized for self-harm, neglect, or mental illness.

The staff members at VCS followed all state mandates for teacher certification and licensures for clinical professionals. VCS had a team of certified school administrators, special education teachers, certified special area teachers, licensed school counselors, social workers, behavior analysts, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and reading specialists. The non-certified staff members served as classroom and instructional assistants and behavior support, and ranged in education levels from holding associate to master's degrees in areas of criminal justices, psychology, and human services, to high school graduates that have many years' experience in the school setting, coupled with training and development acceptable to state-mandated requirements for staff who work with students with disabilities.

The researcher was employed at VCS at the time of the study as a school administrator who was not directly in a supervisory position with teachers or did not directly instruct students in the school program. The researcher had full access to all student demographic information and student behavioral and incident data on a daily basis. Sorting data, generating behavioral reports, and having access to identify students receiving Tier II and III interventions was available as part of the researcher's administrative role in the school, and did not require consent from parents to view the information. The identities of students in each intervention level (Universal, II, and III) were public knowledge, accessible to all teachers, staff, and administrators in the school. Identities of students that voluntarily participated in the study were confidential, as the researcher was the only person involved with collecting consent and assent forms from parents then students, and the only person involved when interviewing the students.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). To fulfill this role, the researcher will need to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, expectations, or experiences to qualify her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). Stating experiences and considering potential bias prior to conducting research can become a great strength of a study if properly addressed and thoroughly inspected.

As an educational administrator, I have specific but limited experience with PBIS programs in alternative education settings. During the time of my doctoral program, I have been employed by three alternative special education settings that serve children and youth with Autism and Emotional-Behavioral Disturbance; all three schools used PBIS to differing degrees of fidelity. As part of required coursework, I learned about the documented benefits of PBIS, and surveyed staff members of my previous school about the teachers' and staffs' perceived readiness to accept a PBIS program. As a result of my informal data collection, I recommended formal development of a PBIS program and remained with the school just long enough to observe, but not participate in, the development of school-wide expectations and the social culture. Regarding the site of the study, I was hired as a lead school administrator and had participated in staff development (facilitated by an external organization) about the purpose of PBIS and how schools can use behavioral data to inform program and intervention decisions. At the time of the study, I had not participated in the development of the school-wide expectations or the PBIS approach in the school, nor had I participated in school-level data decision groups that refer students to more intensive levels of support (Tier II or Tier III), or other PBIS committees.

Stake (2010) states that the qualitative researcher experiences a gradual separation from impersonal into personal, allowing the researcher to evolve personal experience and subjective interpretation toward objectively collected data to seek explanation and understanding. Having this experience may be a great benefit to the reader and provide context for determining validity, as I had knowledge about PBIS implementation and had been part (at the administrator level) of the positive culture that PBIS was intended to create. I may have had subconsciously held an expectation about potential success of a properly implemented PBIS program, and may have had some hidden assumptions about what students and staff should know and be able to do. This was an important realization when answering the research questions, as I was mindful and empathetic during data collection, recording student and staff behaviors and probing for understanding about their personal perceived values and beliefs as members of a PBIS community only during the interview process. These insights, while looking objectively at collected data, artifacts, and during interviews, may have helped inform that which actually was, as opposed to what I might have thought or expected when considering context and actions in relation to the research questions. Until I considered this aspect of role of the researcher from role of the educational administrator, I might not have recognized the potential bias, or opportunity to ask resolving questions that might have appeared to be participants' perceptions. This realization may strengthen the study, as I made effort to listen to responses, thought deeply about data, and built a picture based on participant responses using thick, detailed descriptions, which are described in Chapter 4. The researcher's journal logs and field notes assisted in examining addressing, and overcoming researcher bias.

Participants

All interview participants were students of the selected site, VCS. Students included in the study were 1) boys and girls in grades 4th through 8th; 2) identified as having ED as a primary disability; 3) enrolled in the school for at least one calendar year to ensure they were familiar with the PBIS program; 4) identified as not needing Tier II or III supports for at least six months, and 5) voluntary participants. These students may have had mental health supports as appropriate (i.e., counseling) written in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), characteristic of a full time emotional support program, and within the guidelines of successful adherence to the Universal level of support. A total of 28 students participated in this study: four fourth graders (three boys and one girl); five fifth graders (two boys and three girls); four sixth graders (three boys and one girl); seven seventh graders (five boys and two girls); and eight eighth graders (six boys and two girls) (see Table A2).

Participant selection. Participants were selected for meeting inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher had no direct instructional or evaluative responsibilities of any students in the school, but had access to the school's behavioral database to sort students by grade level. At the time of the study, 198 students were enrolled as kindergarten through eighth grade students at VCS. Students in grades kindergarten through third grade were eliminated from the selection process. Of the 198 students, 151 students were enrolled in grades 4-8.

Inclusion criteria. Students included in the study were enrolled in the school for at least one calendar year to ensure they knew and routinely participated in the expectations of the school's PBIS program, and only those students that had documented success at the PBIS universal level of support for at least six months were considered. Of the 151 students, 94 students in grades 4-8 had been enrolled in the school for at least 12 months, ensuring they were familiar with the PBIS expectations and participated in the PBIS program.

Exclusion criteria. Students who were excluded from the study were 1) non-English speaking students or their primary language was not English, 2) identified with ASD or ID, 3) enrolled in grades kindergarten through third, 4) non-voluntary participants, or 5) identified as needing or participating in Tier II or III interventions within the past six months. Of the 94 students meeting grade level requirements, five were identified with Intellectual Disabilities, five were identified as having Autism, fourteen were identified as having a dual diagnosis of ID and ASD, nine were identified as being recommended for or participating in Tier II or III interventions and two were identified as having English as a second language, excluding 35 students from the study. The remaining 59 students were identified as being eligible for the study.

Students identified as successful in the Tier I or Universal level of support required particular criteria, as designated in the school's PBIS Handbook. For the duration of one calendar month students must maintain the following criteria: 1) one or less restraints; 2) five or less incidents; 3) zero incidents of suicidal ideation; 4) zero or less incidents of police involvement; 5) zero incidents of abuse allegations; 6) three or less absences; 7) less than two visits to any Tier II intervention; and 8) zero clinical needs referrals. The 59 students identified as being eligible for this study maintained success at the Universal level for at least six consecutive months.

Parent consent. The researcher provided parents and participants assurances of confidentiality and anonymity to minimize potential risks. All parents and participants were informed about the purpose and process of the proposed study and consent forms. Parents or guardians of the 59 students were contacted by the researcher via phone to discuss the purpose of the study, methods, and reporting strategies. Consent forms were mailed home (see Appendix C).

Of the 59 families contacted, 22 parents returned consent forms. After a second consent form was mailed and follow up phone call was made by the researcher, a total of 28 parent consent forms were received. Of the 28 parent consents received, all 28 students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and signed the assent form (see Appendix C).

Adult consent. Direct classroom observations were not included in this study because adult consent procedures were not a planned strategy of the methodology. The adult perspective is included as a suggestion in the limitations section of this study in Chapter 5.

Data Collection

Marshall and Rossman (2011) state that qualitative researchers typically rely on four primary methods with varying emphasis for gathering information: participating in the setting, observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents. As discussed in the Role of the Researcher, potential bias and assumptions were examined by the researcher regarding the values and beliefs of the adults who set the school expectations and about social competency as perceived by the students. Therefore, participation in the setting was believed to be professional and private to only the scholarly community, as the researcher was mindful of reflexivity, the conscious explicit position of potential biases, values, and experiences brought to the study (Creswell, 2013).

Methods

As stated earlier, this exploratory qualitative case study approach was the most suitable methodology for examining school social culture at a single site. Information collected in case study research included participant observations, interviews, artifacts, and documents of a single culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). The case study approach was a real-life context to uncover certain phenomena, providing a comprehensive research strategy for a single site, allowing for multiple sources of evidence (documents, observations, semi-structured interviews,

and focus groups), pattern-matching and case study protocol (Yin, 2002). The four main sources of evidence for this research were observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Table A3 relates the research questions to the methodologies intended to answer these questions, and represents a triangulation matrix (Sagor, 2000) displaying the various data sources that were used to answer each research question guiding this investigation. The use of the matrix supported the idea that the strength of qualitative research lies in its triangulation, collecting information in a variety of ways (Mills, 2003).

Document review. In order to understand the approach used at VCS and get to the central understanding what students understand about their social culture, the researcher reviewed the VCS PBIS Handbook to examine how students learn about their PBIS expectations. In the beginning of the school year, all school expectations are explicitly taught in every location of the school by means of the lesson plans included in the school's PBIS Handbook. In the lesson plan for the classroom, students were asked to brainstorm behaviors appropriate in the classroom. The expectations for classroom behaviors stated in the lesson plan are to be safe (keep hands and feet to yourself, stay in assigned area, and use equipment as intended); be respectful (use inside voice and use kind words); and be responsible (accept feedback, follow directions, complete work, and wear the school uniform). The teacher instructed these expectations and reviewed them with the students, who then participated in a thumbs-up-thumbs-down activity (adult role play) to demonstrate mastery of knowing how to be safe, respectful, and responsible in the classroom. The last part of the lesson included a student practice and role play, where students were asked to demonstrate only behaviors expected in the classroom, with specific examples. Students would end the lesson with a review of the safe, respectful, and

responsible behaviors expected in the classroom. According to the PBIS Handbook, this lesson is available for review and additional instruction as needed to explicitly teach the expectations to the students. The timing of this lesson plan was the first week of school, September, 2017. As this study had not yet begun, the researcher used the lesson plan matrix as an indicator that the lessons were taught across the school. To ensure the lesson was taught, the researcher designed a scenario extracted from the original lesson plan for classroom expectations.

The researcher developed a scenario to familiarize students with the language of PBIS as an activity to ease students into answering questions during semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E). The scenario for this study was derived from the classroom expectations lesson. The scenario was written to describe a student named Johnny, who borrows a pencil from a peer for class work, needs to use the restroom during instructional time, was redirected twice to complete his work before using the restroom, and returns his borrowed pencil at the conclusion of the lesson. That particular lesson was selected because the classroom was the most frequent location that students spent during the duration of the school day, and since it was taught at the beginning of the school year, would be the most frequently reviewed lesson explicitly taught. While the actual lesson plan taught in September, 2017 was not observed as part of this study, a lesson reteach was observed in another location during informal interviews, described in Chapter 4.

After semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the researcher engaged in a second phase of document review to distinguish the day-to-day operations of the program as prescribed in the PBIS Handbook, in relation to general observations in the school. This information was used to verify processes and procedures about what the researcher recorded in field notes, and

ensure that procedures were documented in an attempt to reduce researcher bias and draw inferences from observations.

Student semi-structured interviews. As stated earlier, the scenario for the student semi-structured interviews was created using the scripted lesson that all students were familiar with as a guide to have students articulate their understanding verbally and in their own words. The intention was to gain an understanding of the students' knowledge of the social culture, by means of identifying common language and experiences in the school and glean shared values from the student perspective.

Within one week after parent consent and student assent forms were collected and documented, the researcher began scheduling semi-structured interviews. In a private location away from instructional hallways, during non-literacy and non-mathematics time, students had a second opportunity to review their assent and participate in the study. All 28 students that voluntarily assented agreed to participate in the student interviews. Upon agreement, the researcher explained that the interview was to be audio recorded and students were assured no one would hear the recording except the researcher. No interview exceeded 19 minutes.

Before students were asked to listen to the scenario, all students were asked if they could name the school's PBIS expectations. All students were provided a copy of the scenario and the questions the researcher asked so they could choose to follow the written words while being read the scenario and questions. The scenario was then read to students, and they were prompted to listen for ways that Johnny demonstrated being safe, respectful, and responsible at VCS. After the scenario was read to them, students were asked, "What should the student in this scenario (Johnny) do or say to show he knows the school PBIS expectations? Could you tell me examples of how Johnny was being safe? How about respectful? How about responsible?"

Students were later asked to describe how their knowledge of PBIS expectations affects their behavior, whether students and adults follow the PBIS expectations, and how their behavior affects other students. Some responses required probing questions, such as “What does it look like when kids or adults follow the rules or do not follow the rules? Do you follow the rules; why? Do you like when kids or adults follow the rules; why or why not? Do you have anything else to tell me (the researcher) about PBIS that you think I should know?”

Member checks. At the conclusion of all interviews, the researcher transcribed the interview session within one week. After interviews were transcribed, some slang was used by student participants that needed additional clarification, and the researcher met briefly with six students for member checks to clarify transcriptions.

Informal observations. In order to ensure sound, reliable data were gathered, a tactical approach to observing, then interviewing, was followed. Observations of the general school environment gave the researcher an objective lens from which to paint a visual representation of the PBIS social culture of the school. General observations of different school locations (classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, playground) allowed the researcher to note what students and staff do as part of the school culture (Sugai et al., 2012), so the strategy helped capture the general PBIS implementation practices embedded in the school program. Fifteen visits that lasted no longer than 10 minutes occurred in various common school locations (hallways, cafeteria, playground, classrooms) and included a variety of grade level interactions (all grade levels of the school). The researcher used field notes to capture all school observations, and develop thick, detailed descriptions of the PBIS social climate, as stated earlier, will be described in Chapter 4. Examining documents specific to the PBIS program (behavioral data and reports, implementation procedures, handbooks, lesson plans to teach PBIS expectations, fidelity

measures, school demographic data) was used to triangulate that which the researcher observed, as well as provided opportunities for further clarification and probing during semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

During this phase, six observations with field notes were conducted in common areas such as hallways, cafeteria, and play areas for no longer than 8 minutes at a time, where the researcher positioned herself from interacting with any activity or any students or staff members. A second set of six informal observations was conducted again in common areas to help describe the general atmosphere of the middle school and in common areas across the school campus, and verify student statements from focus groups. Three additional observations of the school were completed when no students or staff were in the building, either after school or while students and staff were in other locations of the buildings. These three observations allowed the researcher to verify procedures from the PBIS Handbook were followed, including posting expectations in every common area, bathroom, hallway, and classroom in locations across the campus.

Classroom observations did not occur in this study. The researcher did not observe classrooms because consent procedures for teachers and other adults were not considered as a strategy for data collection. The lack of classroom observations is addressed as a limitation in Chapter 5.

Focus groups. A total of 19 of the 28 students participated in five focus groups (three from fourth grade, five from fifth grade, four from sixth grade, three from seventh grade, and six from eighth grade). During each 20-26 minute grade level focus group, students were asked the same questions in a group setting and expanded on the preliminary themes (restraints and perception of safety, described as common experiences), recorded in the semi-structured

interviews (Appendix E). Students who did not participate were absent from school on the scheduled focus group day. Only one student stated he felt uncomfortable and did not want to answer questions in the group setting. All focus group meetings were 26 minutes or less. All focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

Confidentiality

The researcher understood the power she had in the research process, and was careful to examine consent, confidentiality, privacy and empowerment, and caring and fairness as part of the attention to these procedures (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Once permission to use the site was granted, consent and confidentiality procedures included consideration of how to approach access to families for parental consent, confidentiality of student participants and selection, interviews and focus groups, location, generalization of the school site, and storing collected information.

Because of the uniqueness of the educational setting, identifying information about the location of the school was broadly generalized to the regional location of the country. This careful presentation of information was purposeful in increasing researcher credibility and validity, in that the observations and interviews were non-dependent upon relationships with the study participants, reducing the potential for researcher bias. School documents were used to complete a well-rounded picture of the student demographics, insight into the work adults used to define PBIS protocols, and the general overview of the school.

All collected data, including digital field notes, transcriptions, artifacts, and other documents (such as a master list of the types of information gathered) were stored on secured non-public-access computer files, password-protected and encrypted. A master list of the types of information gathered was included in the secured information. All artifacts, school documents, student answer sheets, scenarios, and other hard copy papers were housed in a locked

metal file cabinet. All proper names in this study were pseudonyms. The researcher had no direct influence over student participation, as participation was strictly voluntary. The researcher also provided no consequence for student participation or for divulging personal perspective information as part of the study.

Regarding the actual interview process, the researcher identified and located a suitable and private space for the semi-structured interviews on a long hallway secluded from the classrooms, and also created a safe and welcoming environment to ensure a sense of caring and an environment of trust. Students were asked to share their responses of what they know about their PBIS social culture (based on the lessons learned by what the staff in the school teaches them about school-wide expectations) in focus groups as a methods strategy; therefore, sessions were audiotaped only to ensure that the privacy of individuals and the protection of their identities were paramount (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in a visual and/or discussion format (Creswell, 2013). McMillan & Schumacher (2006) suggest qualitative analysis is an inductive process of organizing data into categories, identifying patterns, and seeking plausible explanations that emerge from the data in a cyclical process integrated into all phases of the research. These phases of data analysis for this study included 1) recording information through observations and researcher logs; 2) coding and categorizing; 3) identifying patterns and themes; then, 4) preparing analysis for narrative and visual representation. Strategies included summarizing field notes, using data analysis for identifying codes and relating themes to the conceptual framework, then, developing an illustration to outline and explain research questions and capricious themes.

After data collection, information was reviewed and organized. The main sources of data collection were document review (including review of the school PBIS handbook and behavioral data reports), informal observations, student interviews, and student focus groups. Preliminary analysis identified common themes in the student responses about the language used as part of the PBIS program, and how students could identify safe, respectful, and responsible behaviors in the classroom.

The second phase of data analysis and coding was conducted to tease out specific values and characteristics of students regarding their experiences and values about the PBIS program. These values and characteristics were then sorted into categories that connected the students' perceptions of language, experiences, and the values that they identified as part of the buy-in to the PBIS social culture.

The strategy of relating themes and contextualizing within the conceptual framework of the language, experiences, and values of the social culture helped the researcher identify ways of displaying the data in a visual and narrative format. The final product was a portrait of the PBIS social culture, the connections and contrasts from all recorded and interpreted data, presented in Chapter 4, Results.

Trustworthiness

Special attention was paid to validity and credibility measures for this qualitative study. Trustworthiness, or goodness of the qualitative study, suggests criteria around which the soundness of this study was employed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Stake (2010) refers to trustworthiness in terms of validation or authenticity and strategies or procedures that document the accuracy of their study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the processes described in the phases of this study also required dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability of

the data, ensuring the rigor of the qualitative findings. The techniques for ensuring these criteria of trustworthiness included triangulation, member checking, thick descriptions, and audit trails (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation. Data triangulation encourages the researcher to collect information from multiple sources, enabling confirmation around the facts or phenomenon (Yin, 2002). Stake (2010) suggests triangulation is a form of confirmation and validation, giving respect to multiple points of view, and to increase the confidence in collected evidence. Merriam (1998) suggests the qualitative investigator's concept of credibility deals with the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality?" As stated earlier, the main methods of data collection were document analysis, observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. Triangulation is the technique that was used to examine quantitative data from documents (behavioral data) and compare that which is observed, written, and described by study participants to elucidate complementary aspects of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data collection, including observational and semi-structured interviews (Table A3), were surveyed by the method of triangulation, essentially capturing the school's general social culture and explanations of the students' opinions of what might be recorded in the observations. Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, (2005) suggest theory triangulation, including the use of multiple perspectives, may be necessary to ensure the intent of the PBIS culture (created by adults) is socially valid among students and that students' demonstrate social competency of their social culture.

Member checks. To further encourage objectivity and acknowledge bias, efforts were made to check data gathering and analysis for validation and critical review (Stake, 2010). Guba and Lincoln (1985) consider the single most important provision that can be made to

bolster a study's credibility is member checks. Checks relating to the accuracy of the data took place in the course and at the end of the data collection dialogues. Participants were asked if they could offer reasons for particular patterns observed by the researcher and for clarification that their ideas had been accurately captured.

Thick descriptions. Detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under scrutiny can be an important provision for promoting credibility as it helps to convey the actual situations that have been investigated, and to the extent the contexts that surround them (Shenton, 2004). Rich, thick descriptions with abundant, interconnected details allowed the researcher to describe a general idea to more narrow or specific theme, but also allowed the reader to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings were transferred "because of shared characteristics" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p.32). As stated in the methods section, during the data collection stage, the researcher spent ample time in the site setting. This close attention to observing the natural setting allowed for developing a detailed picture of the school culture, as well researcher mindfulness to record memos and acknowledge bias or any prejudgments of observations or interviews. With this insight, the reader of the final account may be able to determine the extent to which the overall findings "ring true" (Shenton, 2004). Thick descriptions were used in Chapter 4 as a detailed account of the experiences in which explicit patterns of cultural and social relationships were described into context of the PBIS social culture.

Audit trail. Due to the nature of the types of recorded and the timing of data collection (in phase 1), it was important to have a clear pathway for reporting information, including data construction and process notes. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested an audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and

reporting of findings and the records kept during what was done in the investigation. Of particular interest, this strategy was useful during the selection of study participant and the sample, as students were from one tier of intervention (Universal) and in reference to quotes and experiences stated by the students. The audit trail included researcher notes from observations and triangulating the information by examining the school PBIS Handbook. The researcher took careful notes to align observations with documents and student quotes.

Chronology

Data collection consisted of four methods: document review, semi-structured participant interviews, focus groups, and informal observations. Data collection was conducted for a total of sixteen weeks, including the selection process and ending with a documents review, from just before the last week of November 2017 through April 2018. The duration of data collection did not include breaks when the school was closed (see Table A4).

Study length. The researcher conducted the study for 16 weeks, which provided enough opportunity to observe routines and investigate student opinions associated with social culture in their PBIS school community.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the PBIS approach in an alternative special education setting and how the conditions for developing a culture of safe, respectful, and responsible expectations and behaviors are cultivated. A secondary purpose was to understand what students, from their perspective, understand about their social culture in a PBIS environment, specifically their understanding of the common language, experiences, and values in the PBIS approach.

The methods for this twelve-week study included document review, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations to explore the phenomenological orientation to describe how students' experiences were shared and how the researcher analyzed their responses.

In the Data Analysis section, a detailed description is included to answer the central research question, "What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an alternative special education setting using PBIS?" and "How are those conditions cultivated?" At VCS, PBIS is an adult-initiated approach that defines desired pro-social behaviors expected of the student population. These expectations are explicitly taught and re-taught as needed, a system of awarding and tracking data is collected and analyzed at problem-solving meetings, and a token economy system is implemented. A system of three tiers of interventions is described in level of intensity: universal is teaching and re-teaching expectations and utilizing point sheets to award behaviors, Tier II is the Check In/Check Out (CICO) process, and Tier III is highly individualized approaches, depending on the cause of the disruption: anxiety, depression, fear, or suicidal ideation.

The context of the adult-initiated PBIS approach aides the reader in understanding the students' perceptions of the PBIS process, which are identified as themes and subthemes

regarding research sub-questions. As stated earlier in Chapter Two, a PBIS social culture is comprised of three components: common language, common experiences, and common values (Horner & Sugai, 2003). Student responses are organized under each of these components and presented to help answer the sub-questions regarding student perceptions about their common language, experiences, and values. These themes and the sub-themes discovered through data analysis are presented in detail.

Regarding a common language: the specific language used for the PBIS expectations were identical to the expectations themselves: *Be safe, Be respectful, and Be responsible*. Under each expectation, subthemes emerged. In the *Be safe* language, some students referred to “being safe” as a common phrase that was used to describe a cultural expectation and shared experience. Students also referred to specific words in their vernacular to describe “nice” behaviors to describe being safe, respectful, or responsible. While students’ perceptions of their common language was straight-forward, they described emotionally-inspired responses to their common experiences.

Concerning students’ perceptions of common experiences in the PBIS environment, student data is organized in five main themes: 1) disruptive behaviors are a cultural norm, 2) peer rule violations, 3) restraints, 4) adult inconsistencies with PBIS expectations, and 5) relationships with adults. Disruptive behaviors included respondents’ self-awareness of their behaviors and their ability to influence other students into peer violations. Students reported feeling frustrated and distressed about rule violations, and shared a common goal to “get out” of the specialized school and return to a “regular school.” Peers were thought to violate rules for a myriad of reasons: being new, gaining control over the adults or situation through power struggles, being angry and apathetic, having difficult home influences, and desiring to gain peer acceptance.

Students reported physical restraints as a common experience that led to physical injuries and emotional distress. It appeared students believed that adults who were inconsistent with the PBIS expectations perhaps contributed to the disruptive behaviors and peer rule violations, which may have led to restraints they observed on an almost daily basis. Adults were reported to engage in power struggles with students and show animosity toward their disruptive behaviors.

The last major theme under common experiences was in regard to the ability adults could build caring or nurturing relationships with the students, and also how students perceive the adults help them emotionally and academically. Adults were reported to tolerate their disruptive behaviors and motivate students to acknowledge and develop a system of personal values.

The last section is organized by themes under common values. These values appear to be characteristics students identify about themselves, why they want to conform to the PBIS expectations to develop their reputation, and what motivates them to continue to follow school rules. These values include integrity, self-respect, self-identity, and serving as a role model.

Cultivating the PBIS Approach at VCS

To answer the central question, “What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an AE setting implementing PBIS?” and “How are those conditions cultivated?” the researcher spent several weeks examining documents, matching student responses and informal observation notes to understand if the PBIS approach was the social culture of the school. As part of the document review process, a detailed description of the need for a PBIS approach was deciphered through a review of student behavioral data trends and from the historical notes in the school’s PBIS Handbook. In data trend reports from 2012, the school and RTF programs both had consistently high numbers of physical restraints. Because of the nature of the students that attend VCS, a sustainable evidence-based program was needed to encourage desirable school

behaviors and reduce physical restraints. Planning for the PBIS initiative began in spring, 2012, as a result of an agency-wide effort to bring and implement evidence-based practices to the umbrella social services agency of which VCS is a part. Some changes in agency philosophy were prioritized by needs to develop function-based thinking and problem solve for student behaviors, make decisions based on data, create consistency in language and actions for school-wide staff (and eventually in the agency), and to acknowledge and reward students meeting or exceeding the school-wide expectations. The agency leadership supported PBIS because of the prevention-oriented ways that school staff could use the evidence-based practice, improve their skills by implementing those practices, and maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students.

Fidelity implementation. In the fall of 2012, VCS began to integrate some PBIS principles into the behavioral program, at which time the school program had no fidelity measures or consistency in implementing the principles school-wide. In January 2013, VCS identified a need for support in the development of PBIS and entered into a facilitation contract with a support organization affiliated with the State-level PBIS Network, that specialized in assisting school programs develop, adopt, implement, and evaluate PBIS programs in schools. A VCS PBIS Leadership Team was established and trained by the external organization to develop a PBIS framework that would work for the specific needs of VCS. The school reached Universal implementation with fidelity in the 2014-15 school year by the recognition criteria of the Commonwealth—supported by the State-level PBIS Network facilitator and having submitted all required data from the SET and Benchmark of Quality (BOQ) assessment.

Strategies at the Universal level of support. The measurement of fidelity focused on intensified interventions to support student behavior at the universal level including: (a) setting

consistent expectations for behavior, (b) rewarding compliant or exceptional behaviors, (c) consistently teaching behavioral expectations, (d) responding to problem behavior, (e) using tracking, and monitoring point sheets for every student, and finally, (f) applying data-based decision making strategies (TIPS meeting management) in problem-solving meetings. During the 2015-16 school year, VCS received recognition from the statewide network and reached two-year fidelity by measurement of the same tools. For the next two years, VCS staff members worked to embed the PBIS expectations in their daily practice.

Setting expectations for behaviors. Evidence of the behavioral expectations in daily practice were recorded during informal observations. In the elementary building, turning the corner to the main hallway, a bright purple and blue sign with a friendly panther mascot stating the VCS PBIS expectations for the hallway: Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, was prominently displayed. Every instructional and non-instructional space, including 12 classrooms, music room, art studio, counselor suite, therapy rooms, reading rooms, hallway, bathroom, cafeteria, and any multi-use rooms where student instruction occurs were laden with the purple panther posters and PBIS expectations. In classrooms, some staff members carry special pouches to hold their “blue paws” as part of the token economy system, while others kept paws easily accessible near their desks or workstations. Students exchanged paws (converted to points) for items at the well-stocked school store, displaying items at every cost level to ensure students could earn a reward immediately: colorful pencils (10 points), hygiene items (20-50 points), toys appealing to all students at all ages (10-1500 points), college tee-shirts (2000 points), and special field trips (2500 points). Students were routinely polled to find items they want or need, to encourage motivation and participation in the rewards system.

Across the lovely tree-lined campus, the middle school was a two-story building with a total of 8 classrooms, therapy rooms for social workers and occupational therapists, a large gymnasium, library, counselor's office, reading specialist office, and admissions and Deans' suites. Each of the instructional rooms and spaces (hallways, bathrooms) boasted the PBIS expectations and matching PBIS Stop, Walk and Talk anti-bullying posters on all the middle school walls.

Regarding setting the expectations, the researcher observed adult actions that back up the expectations with definitive actions. In the cafeteria, Mrs. Abrams, a school administrator, was observed touring a prospective parent and child before children enter the dining room. As the small group made their way through the cafeteria, she pointed to the PBIS expectations poster hanging near the serving line, and explained that expectations are displayed in every area of the school, how paws are distributed for complying with the rules, and how staff members frame language in positive statements and model expected behaviors. While describing a component of the behavioral approach at VCS is a marketing tool, the researcher also observed the expectations in action.

As if on cue, the kindergarten class, led by the teacher Miss Marigold, entered the cafeteria with their "marshmallow mouths" puckered to practice being responsibly quiet in the hallway, formed a line at the serving area and used staff-prompted "please" and "thank you" statements to the cafeteria server.

Third graders already seated in the cafeteria, Robert and Melanya, without prompting, walked toward Mrs. Abrams. Robert told the visiting student that VCS is an awesome school, and that he should come here. Melanya asked, "Would you like to see our salad bar?" Melanya escorted the guest to the serving line, and said "This is where we get our lunch," and moved to

the salad bar, and then the window where students return their trays after they've finished eating. The visiting parent had tears streaming down her face, as much as she tried to hide her emotions publically. "My son doesn't have a single friend in this world," she told the nearby staff members. "No one talks to him or is nice to us."

When the guests left the campus, Mrs. Abrams delivered special golden paws as soon as she could to Robert and Melanya, for their above and beyond respectful and responsible behaviors with our school guests. The gold paws were later submitted for special random drawings for gift cards; those students who won random drawings had their pictures displayed as "Gold Paw Panthers" winners in the main lobby.

The conditions cultivated in this observed anecdote evidenced that adults use the posters as tools to remind students to follow the expectations in each setting, and that compliance to the rules, especially in the case of Robert and Melanya's behavior, were rewarded routinely. The reaction of the visiting parent appears to indicate that cultivating these conditions for a positive social culture not only applies to the staff and students in the school, but also learned behaviors extend to affect anyone in the school community.

Teaching the expectations. As part of the VCS's implementation of the universal tier intervention, behavioral expectations for students were taught in each school setting to define socially expected behaviors and actions of students and staff. In the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year, the school staff followed a teaching matrix using lesson plans that ensured every classroom taught the behavioral expectations in every setting, including classrooms, restrooms, assembly programs, cafeteria, transition between classes or activities, recess/playground, and busses Scripted lessons for each location were taught in the first week of school and retaught as

often or as needed throughout the remainder of the year, following the same steps and procedures (Appendix F).

While the initial teaching of the scripted lessons was not observed, evidence of re-teaching PBIS expectations was observed and noted in informal observations, captured in this brief vignette: a classroom teacher, accompanied by one or more assistants, instructed her fifth-grade class to practice waiting in line in front of the boys' and girls' separate bathroom entrances and reviewed expectations for bathroom use before lunch. The teacher read directly from the lesson plan: "When we finish using the bathroom, we flush the toilet. Thumbs up or thumbs down?" All eleven students closed their fists to reveal thumbs up. "Is that safe, respectful, or responsible, and why?" A few students replied, with varied reasons why the practice was perceived as either respectful or responsible, and the teacher led a discussion. When the teacher opened either door, a friendly purple panther sign with the PBIS expectations for bathroom use was hung in the bathroom, in full view. The teacher reviewed which behaviors were respectful and which behaviors were responsible. The next stages of the re-teaching were students practicing role-playing scenarios and behaviors in the bathroom (flushing toilets, washing hands, turning off the light).

The importance of this descriptive observation is, when needed, students are re-taught the expectations and are modeled behaviors that are then practiced daily. Once these practices are explicitly taught, adults review their point cards at the end of each period to track compliant behaviors with the expectations. Adults process behaviors with their students so they understand the connection between how their compliant behaviors translate into a daily score on their point sheets. Points are combined over time for students to earn rewards as part of the token economy system. Point sheets and the token economy system are described in the next section in detail.

Point Sheets. As part of the universal level of support, all students were assigned a daily pride card to provide each student frequent feedback at the end of every subject or period and allowed the students to earn points for demonstrating compliance with the school-wide expectations. Students earned 2, 1, or 0 points each period by meeting the expectations, defined as needing no more than one prompt (2 points), needing two prompts or redirections (1 point), or needing three or more prompts or redirections (0 points). These points were awarded at the end of each class, where staff members gave positive feedback for students having earned 2 points and emphasize students will have the opportunity to earn more points in the future and a fresh start, beginning with either the next period or the next day. This process ensured students were reminded each period of the expected behaviors in the classroom. Earned points could be spent at the school store and to purchase special clubs, encouraging student buy-in and promoting compliance.

In an informal observation, a teacher and student were engaged in a conversation about losing points on a point sheet, then moving on through the day with a fresh start: Jamie grabbed his point sheet from the table and wadded it into a paper ball, then threw it, cursing loudly, the sound echoing in the large foyer. A few minutes went by, and—prompted by Mrs. Jenkins (who was then sitting next to him)—Jamie walked over to his paper on the floor, picked it up, returned to the table, and carefully smoothed the paper. Mrs. Jenkins reminded him that he lost his points for this period, but starting the very minute they returned to the classroom, he could earn his points for the remainder of the day.

The use of the point sheets was embedded in daily practice that facilitated a process for adults and students to review behaviors for the past period and document how their behaviors were reflected in the score of the daily point sheets. Students appeared to understand that they

had the opportunity to earn points with new attempts to follow the PBIS expectations at the start of every new class period.

“Getting 60s.” The VCS point sheets total a maximum of 60 possible points per day, meaning students must earn a “2” in each class period to earn a perfect score on their point sheets. During semi-structured interviews, many students made reference to their point sheets as being part of the day-to-day behavior management practices. Matty, an eighth grader, said, “I get 60s on my point cards. Almost always.” Fifth grader Sarah also talked about her score, implying her point sheets: “I get 60s and am following the PBIS rules.” Even when students did not specifically talk about their point cards, they referred to a score, which implied they were referring to what they earned on their point cards. For example, seventh-grade Tyler described how the PBIS expectations help him achieve a desired score: “The PBIS expectations keep me from getting into fights and [show me] how to follow directions so I can get 60s every day, by reminding you what you need to do.” Fifth-grade Trinity explained that students are aware that the points are a reflection of their behaviors, and that they can change behaviors to increase their score, “...this year, I was like getting 60s every day but now I’m getting forties, kind of. But I fixed it and get 2’s at [by] the end of the day.”

These statements also appear to show that the score itself is a motivator for demonstrating pro-social behaviors and achieving status. The phrase “getting 60s” is also listed as a theme later in this chapter under common language, as the phrase appears to be unique to VCS as a shared understanding about earning social status for complying with PBIS expectations. Another unlooked-for implication of the point sheet score was the connection students made to the token reward system, as a motivator that also came with tangible rewards for complying with the

school's expectations, both as desired items or additional recognition and status awarded for random acts of safe, respectful, and responsible behaviors.

Token reward system. Gabriel, an eighth grader, charmingly described how he remembers the PBIS system introduced at VCS and how points or paws are used to earn items and motivate the students.

We started this PBIS thing here a few years ago that was like this star board at my house when I was little, and if I had a good day she would put a star on it and I would get, like if I had five in a row, I would get a prize, and I think it had like 20 stars.

Similar to Gabriel's description of a token reward system his mother used to encourage desirable behaviors, students at VCS were also offered opportunities to earn rewards and celebrate the behaviors of model students. In an informal observation of the school's evidence of PBIS expectations in all locations, a special poster frame was prominently displayed outside the principal's offices in both buildings for *Golden Paw* recipients. When students were observed displaying acts of safe, respectful, and/or responsible behaviors that were more than the taught expectations, they were awarded a large gold paw token on which they could write their names and the name of the staff member who awarded the token, and could submit for a random golden paw drawing for a special prize. Students who were selected from the random drawing had their picture taken with a certificate of achievement, and their pictures were placed in the poster frame until the next random drawing. Adults whose names were on the back of the gold paw also received a special gift card, to encourage adult participation in recognizing exceptional student behaviors. It appeared this double-win for students and adults was a daily practice that motivated adults and students to demonstrate and reward exceptional behaviors.

Point sheets and the token economy system were also part of the data collection and review process. For students who had high numbers of gold paws and/or high totals of point sheets, the data was collected and reviewed at targeted decision-making meetings. High point earners were considered for the *Top Earners* rewards, and students that were identified through data for missing the expected scores were considered for more intensive interventions during Tier II data review meetings.

Data-based decision making strategies. As part of the school meeting structure, every Wednesday was devoted to PBIS meetings at 3:15pm after student dismissal. Staff members were not assigned other specific responsibilities or meetings to allow for attendance. Universal problem solving meetings were scheduled twice per month, including the PBIS team (teachers, classroom assistants, counselors, social workers, and administrators) who reviewed general themes in school-wide data. Strategies were discussed to target specific trends in the data. The discussion about specific problem areas and strategies were then reviewed at weekly “cluster meetings,” which were grade-level classroom meetings including all staff that work with students in that cluster.

Tier II meetings were held once monthly to review student status in CICO. The Behavior Analyst prepared student data from the tracking sheets and plotted progress lines. As a group, teachers, classroom assistants, counselors, social workers, occupational therapists, and administrators made recommendations to continue CICO, increase motivators or the frequency for check ins (if the student was not responding to the intervention), or develop a plan to titrate down the frequency of intervention. If a Tier III intervention was recommended, a smaller group would meet at a time of convenience to develop a very individualized plan.

The Top Earners meeting was held once monthly, with sub-committee meetings to organize special events. The committee consisted of teachers, occupational therapists, counselors, social workers, and administrators, and were dedicated to developing special rewards incentives for students showing consistent performance in complying with school expectations. The committee created a process for classroom team decisions to include students who made significant progress in complying with expected behaviors in addition to students who performed consistently. Top Earners reward periods included special private lunches for the group served by the staff, special events (e.g., bowling field trip), and certificates and announcements of students who achieved the award monthly.

Development of Tier II intervention: CICO. Although schools are encouraged to develop all three tiers of interventions at the same time, VCS used the first two years to fully implement the Universal system, and by spring 2016, began deciding criteria for students whose behavioral data indicated a need for more intensive support. In addition to the universal interventions all students receive as part of Tier I, students identified as needing additional support participated in the group-based CICO intervention, designed to increase the student's access to adult attention through mentor monitoring, peer attention, and activity choices as well as increase structured time for feedback about the student's behavior by a preferred staff member. The adult mentor group, or Panther Partners, was trained on the intervention and met at Tier II problem-solving meetings to identify potential students for CICO, and tracked data bi-weekly throughout the year. Students identified as needing Tier II support received access to CICO, if the functions of the undesired behaviors were attention-oriented, as well as other creative and highly individualized means of support. At the conclusion of the 2016-17 academic

year, VCS reached fidelity recognition for the development and implementation of their Tier II intervention, CICO, at the State PBIS Conference.

CICO and collecting data for Tier II meetings. The CICO process was observed during informal observations. While the researcher did not attend a data review meeting as part of the study, evidence of data collection was observed and minutes from Tier II meetings (using the Tier II problem-solving process) were distributed via email as part of the structured practice.

During point sheet review at the end of the day, in her office doorway, Ms. Bean invited Jeremy, a fifth-grader, to come inside from the noisy transition hallway to review his point sheet. Ms. Bean was Jeremy's Panther Partner, overseeing his Tier II intervention CICO, and had Jeremy's favorite requested candy ready for him, hoping for good news. After a three-minute conversation about his behavior goals for the day, and what he did to achieve them, Jeremy earned 52 points out of 60, and gleefully took the candy from her candy dish.

He gave Ms. Bean a hug and said, "I won't let you down tomorrow, either!"

"I'll help you with whatever you need, 'Jer-Bear.' We'll be moving up to 54 points as the new goal soon," said Ms. Bean. She recorded his points on her data collection sheet, and then later input the information onto a spreadsheet for review at the next Tier II meeting.

The significance of the CICO procedure was to satisfy students identified as having attention-seeking behaviors. The Panther Partners were adults identified as a preferred staff member that could meet the student in the CICO intervention morning and afternoon to review expected goals and suggest strategies to achieve them. Students were given a target score and expected to increase the target score after every Tier II meeting upon successful data score increases to move the student back to the less intensive strategies in the universal level. The example above appears to show the relationship Jeremy and Ms. Bean established and the

motivation Jeremy displayed for meeting his goal and showing pride to his Panther Partner for compliance. However, students that do not show consistent data trends for having an effective CICO goal, are considered for more intensive interventions at the Tier III level.

Development of the Tier III intervention. In 2017-18, in addition to refining the Universal and Tier II interventions, staff focused on students identified as needing more support than Tier II, or CICO. These students were assigned a Panther Partner in addition to highly individualized behavioral interventions, including a Functional Behavior Analysis protocol by a Board-certified BCBA. At the conclusion of this investigation, VCS received self-survey data and met with the external organization facilitators for their PBIS program, who also assisted the school in data collection and the application process for measuring program fidelity. By April, 2018, about the time of the conclusion of this study, VCS was recommended for achieving 80% fidelity implementation at Tiers I (Universal), II, and III. VCS was later awarded recognition as being among only twenty-one schools—public and private—in the Commonwealth to achieve three levels of fidelity implementation at the state PBIS Implementer’s Conference that year.

Tier III interventions were reserved for very few students, and were of a highly individualized nature. Due to the extreme complexities of students whose data showed consistent inability to meet point goals, Tier II meetings included brainstorming individual strategies to help the students struggling with severe mental health or emotional issues that were preventing them from accessing success with the school expectations. At the time of this study, only students enrolled in the RTF were recognized as needing Tier III interventions, which ranged from CICO three to four times daily; spending one period a day with the school social worker to review strategies for anxiety, depression, fear, helplessness, or suicide prevention; or attending school for a partial day, with a strategic plan for increasing time at school for earning a

predetermined score. At the time of this study, there were no evidence-based practices to drive Tier III interventions, so the school team used their best judgement to secure a plan for students in Tier III.

The PBIS approach is adult-driven. To answer the central question, “What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an AE setting implementing PBIS?” and “How are those conditions cultivated?” the document review and evidence of implementation fidelity suggested that students that participated in the study were part of an adult-inspired PBIS system where fidelity measurements ensured consistency in the teaching and reinforcement of the school’s PBIS expectations as part of the school culture. Teachers and other staff were engaged in lesson teaching, re-teaching, data collection and utilizing token systems to proactively recognize and reward compliant behaviors. Behavior data was collected, documented, and examined as part of an organized tracking system, which easily identified students’ success rate at the Universal system, and those students needing more intensive behavioral supports (e.g., CICO). Students described their understanding of point sheets, how points and tokens are earned and awarded, and how students use points to earn rewards for complying with PBIS expectations.

The student perspective. While the PBIS approach was developed by the adults, the students’ perspective provided indications that the approach was implemented and practiced in the day-to-day life of the school. Students provided insight into the connection between the point sheets and the token economy system, and also indicated that a certain status was recognized by students for “getting 60s” in compliance with the school expectations.

In addition to triangulating observations and document review, the student perspective also provided insights into the social culture of the school. Themes and sub-themes were

identified through student responses, and were further organized into a series of patterns related to common language, common experiences, and common values associated with the social culture and the daily practice. These patterns and themes are presented in detail.

Under the organizational heading Common Language, specific phrases emerged as themes, including the PBIS school-wide expectations: be safe, be respectful, be responsible. Students also referred to *nice* behaviors, or behaviors that were described as “nice.” Students used words that repeatedly occurred in descriptions of their common experiences: being calm, patient, and not getting mad. Some of these words appear in common experiences, especially when students describe their relationships with adults, in which they say adults are calm, patient, and do not get mad at students when they tolerate disruptive behaviors.

A specific phrase was first introduced in the description of how the PBIS approach was cultivated in the school by the student perspective: “getting 60s.” This particular phrase appears to cross over answers to several research questions, including themes about how the approach is cultivated, common language, and status recognition in their reputations in the school. The phrase “getting 60s” appears again in common experiences and will be presented in detail in the final section of this chapter: common values.

Common Language

Semi-structured interviews were designed to capture student responses regarding the central research question, “What do students know about their social culture?” and the sub-question, “What do students know about the common language of their school’s PBIS social culture and how do they use it?” As described in Chapter Three, students were asked questions about a scenario written by the researcher (Appendix B) derived from the PBIS classroom expectations lesson plan (Appendix A).

In the semi-structured interviews, student responses to the lesson scenario described the common language of the school regarding the PBIS program. Prior to reading the scenario to the students, all 28 students identified “be safe, be respectful, and be responsible” as the PBIS expectations for behavior at VCS. When read the classroom scenario, all 28 students could also name and identify specific examples of the student (Johnny) in the scenario using safe, respectful, and responsible behaviors. However, the students also gave responses that could be interpreted as being among safe, respectful, or responsible behaviors, even though there are specific statements of each of those expectations written on the classroom posters. The specific statements are listed below, in the first row of Table A5.

The following statements are listed by most to least common student response. Responses, recorded in bold, are correct responses in the specific category according to the definitions of the expectations. Other responses appear to be descriptive statements that may fall within any of the three categories. Words that are underlined were used by many students to describe Johnny’s behavior, although those words are not specifically stated on the PBIS posters or in the lessons.

Be safe. During the semi-structured interviews, students were asked, “What did Johnny do to show he was safe?” The *Be Safe* written behaviors were *to keep hands and feet to yourself, stay in assigned area, and use equipment as intended*, (see Table A5). Students described *keeping hands and feet to yourself* as “not snatching a pencil” and not acting physically aggressive by not “hitting anyone, flipping tables or freaking out,” or, stated more positively, “walking down the hallway nicely.” Students described *stay in assigned area* as “didn’t run out of the classroom,” and “came right back to the classroom.” Students described *use equipment as intended* as “didn’t hurt anyone with the pencil.” Students gave responses that fell into the *Be*

Respectful category, such as “didn’t get mad, talked in a kind voice, and “asked nicely.”

Students gave responses that fell under the *Be Responsible* category as “complied with teacher request/finished work,” said “I will do it again and did it,” “just tried again,” “raised hand,” “was patient” and “didn’t call out,” intended to mean *accept feedback*.

“Being safe.” As stated above, *Be safe* expectations in the classroom were defined as *keep hands and feet to yourself, stay in assigned area, and use equipment as intended*. These behaviors were designed to secure order and give students a sense of emotional and social security in the teaching and learning environment of the classroom. Whereas the descriptions of the second and third expected behaviors vary in every location in each classroom, the *keep hands and feet to yourself* safe behavior expectation is consistently described across all settings.

The use of the term to be “safe” or “being safe” is frequent among the students. While students do not refer to “being safe” as keeping their hands and feet to themselves, some students described themselves as generally safe by means of any behavior where they are not overtly physical (not fighting, sitting in their seat to complete work, and not “being physical”. Eighth-grade Gabriel described how he changed his behaviors to be “safe;” “I’ve been working on all that. I don’t get into fights. I usually finish all of my work, and I’m usually safe.”

Adults model “being safe.” The PBIS expectations are intended for students and modeled by adults. Some respondents commented on how adults set up the environment for safety. Gabriel described teachers and staff as creating a safe environment: “They’re always being safe...I don’t see any of the staff doing unsafe things.” Michael, a sixth grader, says teachers create a sense of safety by “monitoring the class and are responsible for the kids, and so they don’t just let the kids run out of the room.” Explanations as to why adults maintain a safe

environment will be described in the third theme, common experiences and adult relationships, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Be respectful. To address the second expectation, when asked, “What did Johnny do to show he was respectful?” the *Be Respectful* expectations were to *use an inside voice and use kind words*, (Table A5). Student responses that described these expectations included “asked nicely to peer for a pencil,” “used manners/said please and thank you,” “responded nicely to the teacher,” and “didn’t yell.” One student gave a response that fell into the *Be Safe* category that aligned to stay in assigned area as “didn’t walk out of the classroom.” Several students gave responses that fell under the *Be Responsible* category as “raised hand,” “was patient/said okay when asked to go back to work,” “didn’t get mad when teacher corrected him/accepted feedback,” “got back to work” and “was calm.”

Be responsible. When asked “What did Johnny do to show he was responsible?” the *Be Responsible* expectations, were to *accept feedback, follow directions, complete work, and wear the school uniform* (Table A5). Student responses to accept feedback included “didn’t go all crazy or throw stuff around” and “was very cool about the situation.” When the researcher clarified that answer through a member check, the student responded that “if it were me, I’d have probably just gotten up and gotten the water. Johnny ‘was very cool about the situation’ and took being told to wait in stride. He accepted the feedback.”

Students reported *following directions* as “giving the pencil back to peer instead of just keeping it/didn’t break the pencil, lose it or steal it” (Josie in the scenario asked for the pencil back), “followed directions/didn’t just get up.” Some students also included “raised hand” and “came back to class from the water fountain” as following directions. When asked to clarify, students made assumptions that “everyone knows to raise your hand and come back to class is a

rule.” Students also responded to “finish work.” The student response to “use the pencil the right way” falls under the *Be Safe* expectation to *use equipment as intended*.

“Nice” behaviors. Among words associated with the common language of PBIS were the exact phrase, “Be safe, be respectful, be responsible.” Additionally, some words that stood out in the description of this lesson scenario included the words “nice/nicely,” “calm,” “patient,” and “didn’t get mad.” (Table A5). Although these words are not directly used on the lesson poster, they were used by many students to describe Johnny’s behavior. Additional responses were implied variations on some words, e.g., “Didn’t throw a fit,” “Didn’t go ‘all crazy’” and “Was very cool about the situation” were phrases during member checks with the intention of the student response of “didn’t get mad,” and was perceived to mean “being safe, respectful and/or responsible.” The researcher recorded the exact responses in the table, above.

“Getting 60’s.” The reference to “getting 60’s” is a theme that was not only identified as a pattern as evidence of how the PBIS approach was established and used in daily practice, but also as a phrase used as common language. It appears that students understand the expectations, as evidenced in a perfect score on point sheets, but also implies that students know that everyone knows the rules, and “getting 60s” refers to status as being recognized as one who follows the school rules. It also appears that “getting 60s” means compliance with expectations that everyone knows, and having social competence for holding each other accountable for following school rules. This term will be described and acknowledged frequently in the sub-themes in common values later in this chapter.

The common language of VCS social culture appears to be enveloped in the PBIS school-wide expectations be safe, be respectful, and be responsible and students’ understandings of most of those expectations. Additional words that describe desirable, “nice” behaviors also appear to

be part of the common language: calm, patient, and “didn’t get mad (Table A5). While most of the student responses about the PBIS language were prompted from the semi-structured interviews, students were able to use the language freely to describe behaviors they appeared to identify as being safe, respectful, or responsible. The term “being safe” is reflected throughout student interviews used to generally describe behaviors that are not overtly physical and refer to the expectation to *be safe*. These words are also used in later themes about adult relationships (adults are nice to students, they are patient or calm when students are non-compliant), which will be presented under the organization of common experiences, and the themes related to student and adult behaviors.

Common Experiences

To further gather information and answer the sub-question, “What are the students’ common experiences and how do they contribute to the social culture?” students were asked the questions, “Do you follow the PBIS expectations? How does PBIS affect you? Do other students follow the PBIS expectations? Why or why not?” or “What does it look like when you or they do or do not follow the PBIS expectations?” Five major themes emerged: 1) disruptive behaviors are a cultural norm, 2) peers’ rule violations, 3) restraints, 4) adults are inconsistent with the PBIS expectations, and 5) adults nurture positive, caring relationships. Within each of these main themes, sub-themes emerged.

Within the first theme, a typical observed disruptive behavior is described to orient the reader to the context of the students’ perceptions. Students describe self-awareness of their own unruly behaviors, and include admittance to including influencing other students into non-compliant behaviors.

Disruptive behaviors are a cultural norm. When asked if students follow the PBIS expectations, student responses fell into patterns associated with their perceptions of the general school environment. Students clearly understood the PBIS expectations and could describe behaviors that would ideally contribute to a safe, respectful, and responsible environment, as indicated in examples of the scenario about Johnny. However, students also shared many examples that while some students follow the PBIS expectations, many of their common experiences were founded in disruptive behaviors as a cultural norm. In other words, students seem to believe that disruptive behaviors are part of their day-to-day experiences in school. A typical disruption was observed in the middle school: staff members intervened while two girls tore at each other, grabbing each other's hair and shrieking inappropriate and hateful insults about interchanges on social media the previous few nights. The girls kicked at the staff and spat at each other. When the girls were carefully separated by the staff members, Ms. Sansbury, a social worker, asked Saquoia to hand over her phone, saying, "What are our rules about cell phones in the classroom?" Saquoia reluctantly admitted she knew to relinquish her phone to the classroom assistant as soon as she was in school, and she was *partly* responsible for the altercation, but "...that b**** had it coming to her." Social media exchanges between the girls after school hours, involving one of the 8th grade male students, spilled into the school environment as a disruptive and potentially dangerous behavior.

Later that day, at dismissal, one bus remained on the campus, unable to leave the middle school lot, because several of the students were screaming at the bus driver and adult attendants on the bus, jumping from seat to seat, cursing, laughing, opening the rear bus emergency door, and threatening to jump off the moving bus. Saquoia and Janiah engaged in residual physical and verbal fighting from the cell phone incident earlier that day, refusing to cooperate and follow

the PBIS expectations to be safe, respectful and responsible on the bus. Fifteen minutes from campus, while the bus was near their home district, Janiah assaulted the bus attendant and Saquoia, who then kicked and smashed a bus window during the fight. When the local police were called, both girls were removed from the bus by the School Resource Officer in their home district.

The observed behaviors described above will be discussed further in the sub-themes, described by the students. Not only did students describe their peers' behaviors to be disruptive for a variety of reasons, it appears respondents have an awareness of their own non-compliant behaviors and the ability to influence other students into disruptive behaviors.

Self-awareness. While students selected for this study were generally successful in the PBIS environment, not needing more intensive supports than the universal level, they could identify themselves and other students as having behavioral and emotional issues. In regard to personal experiences, Emma, a sixth grader, described a long history of having trouble managing her behaviors in school and why she was enrolled at VCS. Emma disclosed that she came to VCS as a patient in the RTF on campus with the school. At the time of the study, Emma was no longer a resident, but remained at the school as an appropriate out-of-district educational placement.

I actually know why I'm in this school because I've had some issues where I was throwing desks at teachers and hitting teachers, and running out of school and hitting kids. A lot of things. And I feel like I've done other things, too, like pulling knives on my mother. When I was younger, I did a lot of things and I think that's why nobody ever trusted me to be in a regular school. So, I feel as though I'm 12 now and I could do better.

Cassandra, an eighth grader, is one of many students who, in interviews, referred to their unsafe behaviors as various forms of physical aggression, fighting, and hitting. Cassandra described her behaviors that she still exhibits despite understanding the behavioral expectations.

I know I can be unsafe. I would just do anything—I'd stand on desks, pick up chairs, I'd do a lot of things. Like if somebody says something smart I'm gonna get smart back, and if the teacher's telling me "no" or telling me to wait, I'm gonna get mad and I'll say disrespectful things. But that's all why I'm here in the first place.

While students are aware that they have disruptive behaviors, some students also recognize and are aware that the other students that attend VCS also have similar behavioral issues as themselves. Richard, a seventh grader, described how the VCS environment was different from a public school, where other students like Richard, due to their behaviors, did not find success.

When we first come here, I don't know why, but it changes your attitude to different things because we are more open to talk here than at a regular school.... And when you come here, you just feel welcome because other kids know what you've been through because they've been there before, and all of a sudden people just start being nice to you here and you just start making friends.

Students appear to understand and are aware they and their peers have behavioral issues, resulting in their enrollment at the school. Richard appears to have an awareness that the school is different than a "regular school" and there exists a shared feeling that students understand each other "because they've been there before," that students understand each other. This is an important finding in the awareness sub-theme, as the pattern suggests that students are aware and

understand each other. They also appear to understand they know when they are being disruptive or noncompliant, and thus violating norms.

Regarding students' awareness of their own behaviors, some students admitted to affecting the social culture in non-positive ways, and were influencers over other students' behaviors. This notion suggests students understand their own behaviors contribute to the social culture, accepting the PBIS expectations or influencing other students to violate the rules.

Influencers. Under the self-awareness theme of common experiences, students recognized they had an ability to influence the behaviors of other students. Student comments seem to imply they persuade other students into disruptive behaviors and affect their consequences, attitudes or behaviors, often in ways that contribute to unsafe situations.

Geoffrey, a sixth grader, admitted that he had a certain influence over his peers to create disruptive situations, "Yeah, when I act up the other kids want to act up; I can make them, probably, if I mess with them." Eighth grade Cassandra stated, "I think that people are always looking at me and watching me, to see how I act. Like when I'm at school, I can tell people what to do and I might let them act out and not tell them to stop."

In both of these statements, Geoffrey and Cassandra appear to act in a particular manner to gain peer attention or to show influence. Cassandra identifies that while she knows she is influencing students in non-positive ways, she also does not do anything to encourage them to follow the expectations. In another quote from a student, eighth-grade Chloe also admitted to encouraging students to engage in behaviors she "starts," but clearly does not want ownership of peers' behaviors:

Because it's like they say, monkey see, monkey do. If they see me acting up then they'll try to act up, too. Like if I run out of the class, they all tear off. I'll be like, "Can you

please get away from me?” And if they don't move then I'll just move them myself or move myself. That starts it, but I end it.

Chloe appears to have a slightly different understanding of how she influences peers. While she is aware students may replicate her behaviors, she also appears to disengage in non-compliant behaviors with other students that follow her. “Can you please get away from me?” indicates a polite but direct request to distance herself from other students who follow her in a moment of non-compliance, and she will “move them myself or move myself” from the situation.

Eighth-grade Gabriel described how he can be an influence over students in his class, knowing how to use a sense of command or authority to get peers to engage in negative behaviors. After he engages peers in negative behaviors, he will “ignore it” so he is not perceived by adults or other students as being part of the negative behavior. Gabriel also uses the word “influencer” in the way he describes students who are swayed:

Yeah, you can be an influencer. Because they're always like if I do something then everybody else is just like gonna start laughing and then they'll try and do it, too. It's like a silly thing that we sometimes do. So, say I'll do something silly and everybody will get all get riled up and they'll hop on the bandwagon and they'll want to do what I'm doing. So say, like I flick a rubber band at somebody, everybody will get all riled up and they'll just try to find something to start throwing across the room and stuff like that. Yeah, you can influence the other kids if you do like a silly thing. But, like if I see something going on or I see something that I want to start, I'm just going to start it and ignore it.

Gabriel's use of the word “influencer” coined the theme of this phenomena. Being an influencer appears to indicate students perceive themselves as having an ability to effect peers'

character or behaviors. Tying influencer under the disruptive behaviors theme indicates students appear to understand disruptive behaviors are a cultural norm, and that the school serves students who have disruptive behaviors. Students appear to recognize that their behavior affects the social culture of the school, and that they understand they are being compliant or non-compliant.

The sub-themes above described students being aware of their own disruptive behaviors and how they influence a disruptive environment. The next section will delve into students' perceptions of peer rule violations commonly observed and reported in the school, and the feelings the students have about being in a school with peers who are non-compliant and cause disruption: frustration and distress. Then, students describe their perception of why these non-compliant behaviors occur. Sub-themes emerged as behaviors peers exhibit as part of non-compliance and disruption: power struggles, apathy, peer acceptance, anger, and home influence.

Peers' rule violations. Aside from students' awareness of their own behaviors in the social culture, students are also able to recognize when other students contribute to a disruptive environment. When students were asked to talk about their common experiences as part of the social culture, they reported their perception of day-to-day life in the school as it is affected by students who do not comply with the PBIS expectations. When asked if other students follow the PBIS expectations, the responses varied from no (5), sometimes (16), and yes (4). Three students did not answer this specific question, but gave direct responses to other questions. Table A6, organizes the student responses into no, three columns under sometimes, including not all the time, not all of them (other students), and sometimes, and yes.

Students described their perceptions about commonly experienced rule violation observances and their peers' behaviors associated with PBIS expectation violations. As a follow up question to "Do students follow the PBIS expectations? What does that look like?"

Respondents described social behaviors like “being disrespectful to the teacher:” not following directions, cursing at the teacher, giving the teacher a hard time, and “acting up” (e.g., calling out answers, arguing, yelling in class). These behaviors appeared to be violations of expected norms, or what was perceived to go against the “right things to do.” The discussion of “the right things to do” will be presented later, under common values.

Feeling frustrated. In the interview process, many students expressed their annoyance with and disapproval of peers who violated the school rules and disrupted the learning environment. Cameron, a sixth grade boy, stated simply, “I like it better when kids follow the rules because it makes it better.” Charles, a seventh grader, said that students “don’t get the answer that they want and when they ask for something they cry for no reason and go AWOL and start disturbing the classroom, just to start stuff. It’s annoying.” Anthony, an eighth grader, stated, “Some [of us] won’t be acting up; some of us will be chilling or just doing work and the other half of them, we’ll see what they’re doing and the rest of us would just be looking around like, ‘What are you doing?’ and then we’ll just get back to work.” While Charles described the behaviors from his perspective as annoying, Anthony’s statement appears to imply that peers that follow the rules disapprove with students who are non-compliant and disrupt the learning process. In these statements, students are perhaps on task at work, and when peers become non-compliant, it appears to deny compliant students access to a working learning environment.

Before further exploring the students’ perspective describing frustration, a set of informal observations was recorded to describe frustration with non-compliant peer behaviors:

On the eighth-grade wing, students could be heard emerging from classrooms to transition to their morning special subject, either in the middle or elementary school buildings. Two girls sprinted far away from their class to the end of the hall, shouting and cursing and

pulling at each other's hair and clothes, one trying to grab the other's cell phone. Six eighth graders continued to line up by their lockers, looking disappointed and annoyed that they had to wait, while others formed a circle around the girls, howling and cheering on the fight.

In another observation a few hours later, two different students were visibly frustrated at the end of the day when their bus remained on campus after dismissal, unable to leave the middle school lot because several of the students were screaming at the bus driver and adult bus attendants, jumping from seat to seat, cursing, laughing, opening the rear bus emergency door, and threatening to jump off the moving bus. The same two girls engaged in residual fighting from the cell phone incident earlier that day, refusing to cooperate and follow the bus safety rules.

“C’mon, I want to go home already!” yelled the two older students, infuriated with the drama between the two girls and subsequent misbehavior of other students “caught up” in the circumstances.

In both observations, students appear to be frustrated with non-compliant behaviors when personally affected. In the first observation, the six eighth graders were frustrated because they were delayed in the transition to their next class. In the second observations, different students were frustrated because the fighting delayed their bus ride home. It appears students are frustrated when their peers' disruptive behaviors deny them access to something they want or need.

Some students appear to be frustrated because they prefer to be in a compliant environment. Fifth-grade Shanice used specific language about the classroom expectations—be respectful and responsible—when she described how some of her peers act out in class:

They're annoying when they're not being respectful and they're not being responsible—being responsible is doing your work. Wait, what is that called? Oh, taking responsibility for your actions, like using kind words and being respectful to the teachers so that they can actually do something and not get mad at the class.

Shanice's frustration appears to emerge from her peers' disrespect to the teacher, and that she cares if the teacher will "get mad at the class." Access to a positive relationship with the adults will be discussed more in detail later in this chapter.

While students described they are annoyed, some students become physical to curb peers' negative behaviors. In an informal observation, a first grade class was observed showing signs of frustration and physical aggression toward each other when peers did not comply to the expectations during transition.

All students in the kindergarten class comply to line up in the cafeteria to go to recess, except Taylor, who has had a difficult morning. For no apparent reason, Taylor began shouting, crying, cursing, flailing and punching her way to the cafeteria door, when she was met by Principal Allen, who stopped her in her tracks. Some students yelled, "Shut up, Taylor! We won't be able to go to recess!" Some students laughed at Taylor, and others waiting in line shoved the students who were teasing Taylor and holding the class from going out to recess.

Students described feeling annoyed and disapproving of peers' disruptive behaviors. It appears students are frustrated when disruptive behaviors prevent rule-followers from accessing something they want, activities or rewards for complying with the PBIS expectations, or engaging in a safe, controlled learning environment.

In addition to frustration, some students described feelings of unsettledness or distress when their peers disrupt the learning environment and do not follow the expectations.

Feeling distressed. Frustration was not only the emotion that students shared about peers' disruptive behaviors. Geoffrey, a sixth grade boy, stated he feels upset "when they're acting up and having a bad day. I don't know about what. It's upsetting." Shanice also added, shakily in her voice, "They have their bad days and their good days. And their bad days are like they're disrupting the classroom so the other kids can't learn, for us, the kids that want to learn."

Connor, a fifth-grade boy, described being upset that some students act out purposefully and violate rules to be mean and withhold rewards from other students, including himself:

Because I just don't even see them like trying! I remember when we were having the class reward that if the kids were all following all the directions we would get a point and then if the if the kids were doing something wrong then the teachers would get a point. And Shantel was purposefully acting up and saying the reason why she was just giving the adults the win was she just wants to see the adults eat the pizza, not the class, and I was like, what? Why? No one did anything to her; she was just literally doing that for no reason.

In his response, Connor appears to suggest that the non-compliant behaviors are intentional to prevent students who do follow rules from accessing rewards, as described earlier about frustration. Connor appeared to be not only distressed, but frustrated as well.

The last theme shared by study participants about how it feels to be in a disruptive learning environment was a common goal to "get out" of VCS. This section describes the students' description of "getting out," and the reasons students want to leave: desire to attend a "normal school" and distress from the unsafe environment.

Getting out. As a K-8 school, all students must exit VCS by the end of eighth grade to attend another school, be it another specialized school or return for high school back in the

student's home district. Richard, a 7th grader, said, "I've been in this school for a while, and I want to get out." Sarah, a fifth-grader, said, "I really want to get out of this school, but I don't know how to." When asked why students wanted to get out of the school, the subtheme about "getting out" of VCS appeared to take two forms: those students that recognize the purpose of their attending VCS was because of their inability to manage their behaviors, yet they want to be recognized as being able to attend a "normal" or "regular school," and those students who feel the environment is "not safe" due to fights and aggression.

Emma alluded that the school itself was for students who have unsafe behaviors, and while she understands how managing her behavior will help move her to a less restrictive school, she still must work on her behaviors.

I've been here for almost two years now and to be honest I haven't made it into a real school yet. I mean I've been in real schools but have always been in behavioral classes. So, I feel as though I need to earn my trust and if this is a change for me, then I can move back to the middle school, so I can also feel how it feels to be a normal kid and not be in a school like this.

Like Emma, eighth grade Darnell openly recognized his disruptive behaviors and his enrollment at VCS, and that he will need to change behaviors to return to his home school district:

I was always bad in school. Like, I always got the negative attention. I would run out of class, I would skip class. One day, and I did it by accident, I jumped up and I went to the door and kicked the door, and the glass shattered. Oh, snap. And I took off and the police came. And ever since that moment, and I've thought about it, ever since I came back to the school I thought about I'm gonna get out of here.

Fourth grade Christopher stated that he wants to get out of the school because of his perceived personal safety, “I want to go back to my regular school because there are a lot of fights at this school....if I don’t follow the expectations, it keeps me at this school.” Gabriel, an eighth grader, described how he is working to control his behaviors and that as an eighth grader, he hopes he can return to a “regular high school” that is safe upon exiting eighth grade:

There’s a lot of fights in this school, and that used to happen a lot to me when I first came here, like for the first month or so. But I’ve been working on all that. I don’t get into fights. I usually finish all of my work, and I do say like dumb stuff on occasion but I’m usually safe. I want to get out.

Gabriel was earlier quoted as an example of students using “safe” as a behavior and phrase identified as common language. The full quote was that Gabriel said, “I want to get out.” This quote is important because as Gabriel recognizes his awareness of his behaviors, he also appears to make a connection that following the PBIS expectations will help him “get out” of the school.

The PBIS approach can help students to “get out.” As described above, the significance of feeling frustrated and distressed with peers’ disruptive behaviors appears to be a shared goal to “get out” of the VCS school environment. Students also described the PBIS approach at VCS as being a means to help them learn to manage their behaviors so they can return to a “regular” school. Fifth-grade Trinity said, “I have so many problems. But, now the school kinda teaches kids how to be good so that you can go back to another school.” Christopher, a fourth grader described why following PBIS expectations was important to him so he could return to his home school, even though he continues to have difficulty regulating his behavior,

Because if I don't follow the expectations, it keeps me at this school. Sometimes I listen, sometimes I don't. I have a hard time being respectful because I talk back to the teachers. Some days I feel really happy and some days I just don't want to do nothing. But I get 60's when I'm happy and do what I'm supposed to do.

Christopher's response also uses words identified as common language: "get 60s" and also describes that he "feels really happy" when he "does what he's supposed to do." This sense of feeling pride for complying in this case relates to his desire to get out of the school. Later in this chapter, students describe feeling self-respect as a positive value for the pride they feel for "getting 60s."

As an eighth grader, Gabriel will advance to another school. He explained his understanding of the PBIS approach at VCS. He understands rewards and token systems help motivate students into compliant behaviors and following behaviors gives access to earned incentives. He envisions discipline differently when he advances to a "regular" high school if he moves on to a school that does not use PBIS:

I mean I've been here like since second grade. I haven't been in a public school in a while, so I can't say if I'm ready for high school. I think instead of PBIS they [future high school] have like a detention system and they like will send me there or if they're in that mood that day they can suspend me for a little bit or I could get sent home and end up with a conference or a phone call with my parents and stuff like that.

Gabriel's response appears to indicate that students rely on the PBIS approach to help them adhere to school expectations and behavioral compliance. Interestingly, Gabriel suggests that other schools will use discipline like detention or send him home "if they're in that mood that day." It appears that Gabriel understands that these punishments are not part of a school that

uses the PBIS approach, and his future high school may revert to punishments for his non-compliance. It also appears these reactive responses to his behaviors are remembered experiences from when he attended a non-alternative special education school. While Gabriel knows he will attend another high school, it appears he is concerned about his next placement and if he does not have a PBIS approach as support, as he stated “I can’t say if I’m ready for high school.” This was an interesting perspective, as while students yearn to be recognized as “regular kids” they also understand the level of support available to them in a school using a PBIS approach.

Why peers violate the rules. Continuing with the subthemes associated with peer rule violations as common experiences, students had thoughtful reasons about why their peers violate the rules. When asked, “Why do you think students don’t follow the rules?” eighth-grade Gregory’s response was, “I don’t know anyone that follows the PBIS rules unless they want something!” His was an interesting perspective because PBIS is designed to proactively set expectations for desired behaviors and reward students when they comply. In this simple phrase, Gregory validated the PBIS system works because as students indicate they “want something” they are motivated to be rewarded for compliant behaviors.

To further understand the shared experiences regarding peer rule violations, respondents described their perspective of why their peers are disruptive and violate the rules. In the organization of this data, the following reasons are identified as common experiences, as they are reported by respondents’ perceptions. Being new to the school is certainly one shared experience of all students at VCS, but only one reason students may not yet conform to the expectations. Peers were also described as trying to assert power over the adults (power struggle), were just angry and “get mad,” had an attitude that they “just don’t care” (apathy),

tried to gain peer acceptance, and, more sympathetically, perhaps had a difficult home influence. Each of these sub-themes are presented as perceived reasons why students do not follow the PBIS expectations.

Being new. Being new to the school and needing time to learn the expectations and behaviors accounted for one noteworthy perspective, because VCS has a rolling admissions process, many students are new to the classroom environment throughout the year, which changes the classroom dynamics of established rules and order. Emma identified new students as lacking an understanding of expectations as part of the reason for disruption:

I really think some people just got here. I mean, when I was new it took me a while to understand that I needed to follow them [the rules], so I feel as though there's so many new people here. And some people who are new, they don't know anybody and they just want to, you know, not be following the directions and they just want to be rude all the time. You know that, right? I feel like most of the kids that are new here now like, by the end of the year will settle down. So I feel that's part of the reason why other students don't follow the expectations: because they don't know yet and they just don't have to.

Emma's statement appears to capture the essence of the social culture, that students need time to understand the rules and importance or expectation in following them. It appears that students need time to fully understand the common language, share in some common experiences, and identify a sense of self-identity within the school. The initial behaviors may be non-compliance, but as they are accepted into and understand their contribution to the social culture, they may readily comply with the expectations. The concept of students knowing who they are in the social culture will be presented later under the organizational heading Common Values.

Power struggles. Diego, a fourth grade boy, believes that students simply do not like complying with expectations “because they just don’t want to because they don’t like the rules. They don’t want to follow the rules. I guess they just want to do whatever they want because they don’t like them and they don’t want to follow them.”

Anthony, who voiced his frustration earlier with peers not complying with the school expectations continued to describe that peers simply do not like following rules, and want to “show them” (the staff) that they have no power over the students:

They think [PBIS is] not to their quality (“it is beneath them” when asked in a member check). It's not how they want the rules to be, they want them to be theirs's because they want the staff, not to be afraid of them, but they want to show them that they're not going to do any work and they're just going to do what they want to do, because they're just the way they are. I don't like that about my peers, because it's just not right.

Students in the middle school felt students do not care to follow the rules to exercise defiance toward adults. Chloe, an eighth grade girl stated, “They like to give teachers a hard time and go out the distance because they don’t care.” Cassandra, an eighth grade girl who earlier discussed understanding that students are at VCS for their behavior, believes “they don’t listen to the teachers, and they think that the teachers aren’t going to stop them from whatever they’re not supposed to be doing. It’s a mess. They say anything they want.” Tyler, a seventh grader, said, “They don’t want to do what the teacher tells them. I don’t know. They’re just being disrespectful.” David, a seventh grader says students don’t care about the PBIS expectations “Because they don’t want to learn, or something like that.”

While the student responses above describe their peers’ behaviors, it appears students are trying to exercise a sense of power over the adults or have some independent control over their

inability to conform to school rules. In support of these perceived explanations, the nature of the students who attend VCS struggle with an inability to control their behaviors, and may be using strategies that have worked for them in the past or at a previous school to gain dominance over the adult's influence by "going the distance." It also appears that students recognize power struggles as a non-compliant behavior and that students who do follow the expectations have been conditioned to prefer the positive attention and rewards in the PBIS approach and may have a more sophisticated sense of self within the social culture, so they are more comfortable using other strategies to manage their behaviors.

While power struggles are an observed behavior, some students also contribute their peers' anger, as a reason why students do not follow the expectations.

Anger. Students reported that they believe students are angry and engage in disruptive or dangerous behaviors as a result of their anger. Referring to the vignette in the beginning section of disruptive behaviors, two students engaged in a physical fight due to a cell phone, part of the observation included a student's inability to control her anger: staff members intervened while the girls kicked at the staff and spat at each other. When the girls were carefully separated by the staff members, Ms. Sansbury, a social worker, asked Saquoia to hand over her phone, and asked, "What are our rules about cell phones in the classroom?" Saquoia reluctantly admitted she knew to relinquish her phone to the classroom assistant as soon as she was in school, and she was *partly* responsible for the altercation, but "...that b**** had it coming to her..."

In this scenario, Saquoia's anger with another student resulted in the disruptive behavior. Another way of phrasing anger in student responses included explanations about peers "getting mad," which was a phrase used in the common language associated with peer rule violations.

“Getting mad” occurs as a behavior toward adults and peers, and disrupts the learning environment.

“*Get mad.*” Student respondents indicated that when peers fail to meet the expectations they “get mad” at other kids. Lucia, a fourth grade girl said, “Some kids really don’t care because sometimes they just forget about the rules and sometimes when that happens, they get mad at other kids.” Sarah, a fifth grader, also stated that when a student is angry, other peers try to further ignite the situation. “Some people aren’t respectful, like if someone is mad and grabbing papers and ripping them up, other kids will just play around and be like, go irritate them even more, because when a person is mad they just want to make the other people more mad.”

In both Lucia and Sarah’s descriptions about why peers violate rules, Sarah’s explanation in particular refers to the other student’s behavior to “play around” and “go irritate them even more,” which could indicate influence over other student’s behaviors in an unkind way. It appears some students encourage disruptive behavior and take advantage of their inability to control their emotions, which results in anger.

Christopher, a fourth grader who described earlier that he understands that students are attending VCS because of their behaviors, says students “get mad” when they don’t get their way or don’t get what they want.

Well, they lose points and sometimes they get mad because of something they did and they [adults] say ‘Don’t do that.’ Like this boy in my class, he got so mad when the teacher told him he couldn’t use the computer because he was being smart to her at lunch, and she said he had to earn the computer...boy, he was cursing at the teacher! And then he was getting in fights. It bothers me when they get in fights because somebody can get hurt.

Christopher's response simply describes why students "get mad" and the behaviors that accompany student anger: cursing and fighting as a result of losing points or being punitively punished. While it is understood the nature of students attending VCS have difficulty controlling their behaviors, Christopher's description also indicates that the adult in this scenario is using a negative or inconsistent strategy with the PBIS approach. It appears she withheld an activity as a result of a negative behavior and challenged him to "earn" the activity, which resulted in the aggressive episode and the student "getting mad." Adult inconsistencies with the PBIS approach is another theme as a common experience in this social culture that will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Students do not use their coping strategies. It is well documented students who attend VCS have poor regulation and control abilities over their emotions and have shown aggressive behaviors prior to enrolling at the school. As part of the school's therapeutic environment, students are taught strategies to control their anger and impulses. As students are referring to using coping strategies, it is evident that learning strategies to control anger are a common experience in the school.

Michael and Chloe both verify that students are taught skills to manage their anger. Chloe mentioned using a strategy she was taught to "walk away" and manage her anger, "And the younger kids and the other eighth-graders, when they see when I get angry, I walk away from the situation, where some of them would just get angry and do something even though they know what to do." Michael, a sixth grader, discusses his perception about students violating rules because they are angry, even though they have been taught skills to manage their behavior so they can follow the school expectations. "Because some kids just act up even though they know the rules. They don't think about their coping skills or anything because they're angry. And

they bully people. Because they're angry at something that's their personal business and they want to make people miserable." In both responses, students are taught skills to manage their anger as part of their common experiences.

In the scenario describing Sequoia and her cell phone rule violation, the social worker also was observed rehearsing coping skills and alternative behaviors to engaging in a physical altercation with another student: Saquoia reluctantly admitted she knew to relinquish her phone to the classroom assistant as soon as she was in school, and she was *partly* responsible for the altercation. Saquoia handed her cell phone to Ms. Sansbury, who walked her back to join her class in the library, discussing alternative behaviors, like asking an adult for help, and expecting an apology for the inappropriate language.

It appears that all students are taught strategies to manage their anger and behaviors as part of the school environment. Using strategies to manage behaviors appears to be a common experience. Students reported that peers do not use their strategies to manage their behaviors as one reason students violate the rules.

Apathy. Unlike anger, an impulsivity recognized as part of a behavior of students' disabilities, some respondents perceived peers' rule violations as attitudinal. Students referred to their peers simply as they "don't care" and are indifferent to rules. Jerry, a seventh grader, although unsure why kids do not comply with rules, confirmed his belief that students "don't care...because they like to fool around and like to do whatever because they don't care. I don't know. They just do whatever."

One indicator of apathy is knowledge without effort. Fifth-grade Connor stated, "Because I see them not doing it, [following the rules]. Well, yeah, if they actually tried, but most kids just really don't care."

Defiance. The quotes above indicate there is no apparent reason for non-compliance and that students “don’t care.” Defiance is a recognized behavior as a result of indifference to the rules. Gabriel appears to believe that students know the expectations and act in ways that show defiance:

They know what the right thing is to do. I don’t really see why you would just want to be defiant and stuff like that without really a reason. It’s like they’re just defiant, like for the most part. It’s usually something that sets them off. All they have to do is come in wild, like if they have a friend or something with them. But in the case of some students, I really don’t know why, I don’t really think they have a motive.

Darnell, an eighth grade boy, talked about his eighth grade peers, whom he said were having a particularly difficult time as a class about to transition to high school, and an even more difficult time as a class conforming to the behavioral expectations:

The kids say they’re [the PBIS expectations] retarded. That’s how they put it. They don’t care about it. I mean you got people cursing, people are getting into fights, and people are cursing out staff. Because they don’t care, and they don’t want to do them because they’re dumb. And I always tell them, ‘You gotta follow the rules. It’s not that big of a deal.’ I mean it can go in one ear and out the other.

In the statements made by Connor, Gabriel, and Darnell, there is a perceived lack of compliance effort and indifference to staff or other students knowing they are not following the rules, and use defiant behaviors to cause disruption. As all behaviors have a rationale or motivation, it appears defiant behaviors may be to access peer acceptance.

Peer acceptance. Daniel, a seventh- grade boy, believes students “don’t care” and want to be perceived a certain way by their peers, and “act like they’re cool.” He also described students “follow” others.

They like to fool around and like to do whatever because they don’t care. I don’t know.

They just do whatever. Well, to me, it’s because they follow other people. They follow what other people do. And they just don’t care, because they want to act like they’re cool, to me.

Gregory, an eighth grader, appears to have implied a similar reason as Daniel stated about “being cool” and expressed peers do not follow the rules to avoid positive attention: “But I think they don’t because they want to act cool so they won’t be singled out.” This statement about “acting cool” returns again along with Daniel’s perception that students “follow” others. It appears that as students “don’t care” to follow PBIS expectations, as stated by many participants, students also can be influenced into engaging negative behaviors as a means of peer acceptance.

Earlier, some students described how they can be influencers over other students and sway them into disruptive behaviors. It appears that students described as not caring about the rules may be trying to gain peer access and be accepted into one of two peer groups: those who do not follow rules and those who do. In the peer group of those who do not follow the rules, as Emma stated earlier, students may not yet be confident about their identity in the social culture, so they may gravitate toward other students with non-compliant behaviors they understand. As the students in this study are generally successful in the universal tier of support, they are frequently high reward earners and gain positive attention from adults. Others may follow other students, or are influenced by those students who are perceived as having social status, in disruptive behaviors because they have not yet learned the coping strategies to conform

independently to the school rules; yet, they would be associated in the compliance social group. In both cases, the motivator appears to be peer acceptance.

Home influence. Understanding more about how and why students access coping strategies may be evidenced in the nature of the students who attend VCS. As stated earlier in Chapter Three, VCS educates students from the community and also from the RTF that is housed on the campus. Many students receiving treatment in the RTF have been victims of sexual, physical, and/or emotional trauma. Typically, when students have concluded treatment at the RTF, they continue to remain at VCS for their education, and may be released back to live in the homes where the trauma occurred, or are sent to foster homes if the court system determined students would be unsafe with their biological parents. The majority of students that undergo restraints at VCS are clients in the RTF and also are the group of students most frequently involved in physical restraints according to school behavioral data. The observed meeting describes the type of anxiety and behaviors associated with a child's home influence.

As an example of an observed disruptive behavior in the context of a student with a difficult home environment, the following observation is provided.. At the end of the day, and as part of the school protocol for proactive planning after a physical restraint, the adult group met to debrief an incident involving a physical restraint. To solve proactively for future responses to Jamaal's behavior, the social worker involved in the restraint indicated that Jamaal had been extremely physically aggressive for three days. The social worker learned Jamaal was reviewing his trauma narrative with his social worker in the RTF as part of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, so it appeared Jamaal was reliving his trauma events and causing extreme disruptive behaviors. Jamaal was admitted to the RTF for sexual and physical abuse by his father in his home, and the RTF staff were preparing him for a home visit to prepare him for living in the house with

mother. The trigger appeared to be social studies class. *You and Your Community* was part of 3rd grade curriculum, describing homes, families, and living in a neighborhood. So, the discussion triggered his flight response and extreme anxiety of his pending weekend at home.

Student perspective on home influence. Upon asking “Why do you think kids ‘don’t care’ about the PBIS expectations?” students discussed their perspective about their peers’ home lives. Marquis, an eighth grader, said, “I see them doing a whole bunch of things that they’re not supposed to be doing. I don’t know, probably because they’re having a hard time at home. Kids don’t follow rules because they are having a hard time at home.” Chloe, who earlier acknowledged her belief that “kids don’t care about the PBIS expectations” explained how she believes it has to do with how they are treated while home: “You don’t know what the person was going through at home before they came to school. Yes, that’s hard for every kid. They’ve all got issues. That’s why they are fighting in the morning and on the way into the day.” Marquis simply acknowledges students “having a hard time at home” and Chloe describes home life for students at VCS as “hard for every kid.” However, Chloe’s statement introduced the understanding that “they’ve all got issues,” and that there is an acknowledgement that students have emotional or behavioral issues that may be influenced from their home lives.

Students appear to be concerned about the community and RTF students in the school, and the difficulties students have with their home lives. Cameron stated his reason why kids’ don’t care was “probably because of their parents. Because probably they don’t have parents and that’s probably why they do that stuff and act up.” Trevon, a seventh grade boy, believes student behavior is affected by their upbringing, and that they bring the disruption to school from their past experiences. “[They don’t follow the rules] because maybe that’s how they were raised, or that’s what they saw in their past lives (meaning previous schools or home lives, if they are “Unit

Kids”—students admitted to the RTF—or in the foster family system, as discussed in a member check) because it would make their life better instead of having a life of chaos, I should say.” In both statements from Cameron and Trevon, it appears the students’ home influence affects their values, or how they “were raised.” Values will be discussed later in this chapter.

Disruptive behaviors as a cultural norm spans a wide range of topics, from students’ self-awareness of their own behaviors to peer rule violations and the subsequent feelings associated with being in a school where disruption is a daily occurrence. Students also described the reasons they believe peers violate rules and contribute to disruptive behaviors. All of these sub-themes fall under common experiences, as daily interactions that students encounter.

Continuing themes organized under common experiences were student responses that specifically described their impressions about watching other students being held in a physical restraint, which was an outcome of severely aggressive student behaviors or behaviors that endangered a student or student or adult targets of the aggression. In responses, students identified unsafe behaviors: crying, running around in and out of the classroom (AWOL), physical aggression (throwing things, hitting, fighting, “jumping other kids”), bullying, defacing property (drawing on desks), and property destruction (flipping furniture and breaking desks). Physical aggression and property destruction appear to be among the types of disruptive behaviors that result in restraints.

The next section describes students’ perspectives about physical restraint, and the physical and emotional hurt students incur from observing restraints. These perspectives are part of the common experiences in their cultural norm of disruptive behaviors, but fall under personal perspective as well as thoughts about peers. Therefore, restraints are categorized under common experiences rather than disruptive behaviors or peer rule violations.

Restraints. The topic of restraints—a physical intervention when a student has been determined to be a danger to himself or others—appeared to be a very influential factor in student responses when discussing safety and “being safe.” Students described that restraints are something “done to students” when adults “put their hands on kids.” Students also appeared to have a perception of what “being safe” means in regard to having been restrained themselves (in the past) or having had watched a peer being held in a physical restraint.

The researcher observed and recorded a physical restraint to give context to student responses. This observance was about Jamaal, whose backstory also framed the context for students’ responses earlier about home influence and students’ behaviors.

In the afternoon, a “Support 3” call is heard on the walkie-talkies as Jamaal was running, fast, AWOL from social studies class, out the side doors, between parked cars in the school parking lot, across a very busy street near a 5-point intersection, horns honking, and drivers exacerbated. Jamaal ran into a bank parking lot, with four, then seven staff members following, panting and out of breath, with a supervising administrator trailing behind in the school car. When staff approached Jamaal, not winded at all from running, he began screaming, crying, punching the closest staff member, kicking both staff members that asked to hold his hand and show safe behaviors, until he shoved with full force a staff member to the ground, and she hit her elbow, hard, on the pavement. As Jamaal fell to the ground also, he began hitting his own head on the ground, little stones sticking to the back of his scalp as he screamed louder and banged harder. A supine restraint was initiated using proper technique with two staff on either arm, one across Jamaal’s legs, and a staff observer. The school security guard responded to the situation and assisted by directing bank clients around the small group; spectators watched with visual

concern, wide-eyed and jittery, that adults were restraining a screaming child in a public parking lot. Jamaal repeatedly screamed, “Get off me! Get the f*** off me!”

The vignette above may incite an array of emotional responses from the adults engaged in the restraint, the observers that work in the school and know the student, and the observers (and perhaps readers) that do not have a context that physical restraints are intended to prevent the child from hurting himself or others. Depending on the context of the situation, students also described an array of responses to and reasons for physical restraints.

Students do not follow the expectations. Connor had described earlier that his peers’ non-compliance was frustrating, and describes his perspective about restraints and students that “don’t care about the rules.”

And like even today I think there were like two restraints from some kids in my classroom. Well, the thing about restraints is that if the kids are gonna get into a restraint it’s because they don’t care about rules. I mean even if it’s there [PBIS expectations] or not the kid is still gonna act up. I mean kids know what the rules are pretty much. It’s not like they have no idea what the rules are. It’s not like they don’t know they can’t just rip up things and try punching people. They know they can’t do that. It’s not like it really matters. It’s not like it’s gonna do anything for most of them and I think they never really stop to think about it.

Connor’s perspective appears to imply that students know the rules, and understand that violating safety rules (hitting people, punching people) could lead them to a restraint. It also appears he implies that regardless if rules exist, students will “act up” and will not “stop to think about” their actions. Connor’s perception appears to support the statement that adults support a safe environment, and that the onus of the restraint is because of students’ actions.

However, many students commented on how the adults sometimes “put their hands on students to keep them safe.” Seventh-grade Charles said, “When somebody...if they start doing something that was way off and off limits and stuff, then they [adults] will put them in a restraint.” More specifically, Gregory, stated, “they [the adults] only put their hands on people when they actually have to; they don’t punch the kids like physically or verbally hurt them.” It appears that there is an understanding that adults are to restrain a student or “put their hands on them to keep them safe” when a student does something that is “way off.”

The fifth-grade focus group (which included all five study participants from that grade: Trinity, Shanice, Thomas, Connor, and Sarah) further discussed their perspective about restraints. Four of the five students were quoted about their individual perspective, and when asked about if PBIS helps with their behaviors, the topic of restraints was over a third of the focus group interview time and discussion. All five participants had been previously restrained in the school (prior to meeting study criteria), which had a lasting impression on their sense of disruptive behaviors and safety in the school. Their sense of safety from their previous experience being restrained or from watching peers in a restraint is defined in their concerns in two categories: physical injuries and emotional distress.

Physical injuries. Fifth-grade Trinity alluded to students being hurt in restraints when she described that adults could use de-escalation techniques (talk to the students nicely) instead. Trinity had been restrained a year or so earlier, and she was adamant about not wanting to be restrained again: “Like, I don’t like to get hurt. But if they [students] go way too far, that’s the time to do your job [adults]. But still, I don’t want and I don’t like getting touched and I don’t like getting hurt.”

During the focus group conversation, fifth-graders were talkative about restraints. Sarah said she was put in many restraints her very first day at VCS. “You don’t have to put this in your report, but I don’t think it helps us. It was scary. It was weird. It hurt. It’s hurtful. It’s like people put their knees like right here in your arm (points to arm below her shoulder). It makes you not like the school anymore.” Trinity nodded, and added,

Because tell me how restraining us is helping us? How is that keeping us safe? It isn’t keeping us safe. It hurts.... But then they’re going to start getting on top of us putting us through lots of pain. That’s a form of torture! It’s like slavery! You can’t do that and say it’s right—no child should get hurt or go home with a freaking ice pack. They literally injure you, especially the hefty guys.

Emma, the sixth-grade girl who shared her acute awareness of her behaviors, shared her experience when adults “put their hands on students (including herself) to keep them safe.” Emma describes a situation that physically hurt her and that staff members know when “they’ve done something wrong:”

Because not everybody always follows the rules. Sometimes staff can be a little, you know, how do I say it? Like sometimes they cannot (do not) follow the rules, but the staff will mostly come up to you and say what they did wrong and they’ll say sorry for it. Sometimes they will apologize. They will if they’ve done something wrong and they feel that they should probably do that. Like Mr. George came up to me today and tried to apologize to me, when I said what he did to me (held her arm) didn’t make sense and he did apologize to me. I mean, some staff in my room say that it’s okay to twist somebody’s arm, that it’s the rule if they’re being unsafe. It’s like you know, someone

who does this (makes twisting gesture with her hands) and that's what I'm talking about.

So it's not being safe. But neither am I though, so...

Emma's comments indicate she was physically and emotionally hurt during the "hold" a staff member engaged her. The adult apologized, because according to Emma, Mr. George realized he was in a power struggle with her that resulted in holding and twisting her arm. Emma understood that the adults are not supposed to "put their hands on students" and when they do, and the student knows that the adults know they are not following the appropriate procedure, the adults may apologize if they feel they have done something inappropriate. Emma's statement introduces an underlying aspect of the social culture: adults and students know the rules, and adults and students know that everyone knows the rules. While this phenomenon occurs under common experiences, it will be discussed again in Chapter Five.

Emotional distress. Students discussed an emotional distress when watching a physical restraint. In addition to physical injury, Emma's statement above also implied an aspect of emotional hurt, when an adult apologized for twisting her arm. Other students also felt that restraints affect them emotionally. Fifth-grade Trinity stated:

If I see somebody getting hurt like my brother got hurt, I cry. And I will cry. They [adults] are trying to follow the PBIS expectations but I don't like when I see kids getting hurt and crying with their shoes off. Some people take kids' shoes off when they're kicking people [during a restraint]. I saw one of the kids getting in a restraint and they had to take her shoes off because she was kicking the teacher. It's nasty, hurtful, and sad. With their shoes off, that's why it's nasty.

Trinity's statement included very pointed language about her emotions: crying, empathy, sadness, and that adults remove a student's shoes to prevent being kicked during a restraint.

While the practice removing shoes appears to be logical (to prevent adult injury during a restraint), Trinity appears to feel distressed that their personal footwear is removed from a child during a restraint.

Only a few students said that observing restraints or having been in a physical restraint alters their behavior in the school environment. Lucia and Sarah described their experiences of being restrained as having an impact on their thought processes about their behaviors. Lucia described her perception that other students do not accept her as a friend because they saw her being restrained. “I don’t want to get restrained because you won’t have friends, because I was restrained once.” Lucia attributes her lack of close friendships to her experience when her classmates saw her be restrained when she first was enrolled at VCS.

Sarah also described how having been restrained in the past changed the way she thinks about her behaviors in school. Sarah at one time experienced being able to go home during the day in her old school because of her behaviors. “Like in this school, they don’t call your parents like they did at my other school. They don’t call your mom here; they just put you down until you’re safe, in a restraint.” Having been restrained appeared to have an emotional effect on Sarah: she reports that she does not use disruptive behaviors anymore to try to get out of school and have her mother pick her up to go home.

Restraints was a theme from the student perspective that caused physical and emotional distress. The fifth grade focus group also discussed very clear ideas about what adults could do instead of putting students in restraints to “calm you down,” including removing the disruptive child from the room and being more patient (when students do not respond) so that students are not restrained “for no reason.” Especially in the fifth grade focus group, students describe adverse aspects about adult inconsistencies with the PBIS expectations.

Adult inconsistencies with PBIS expectations. A majority of students interviewed felt the staff contributed to setting the teaching and learning environment, describing behaviors like “being calm,” “monitoring the class” “not yelling,” and “trying to help people,” which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, some students thought adults contributed to the noncompliance of their peers by being inconsistent with the school expectations, which resulted in events prior to physical restraints. Darnell, who earlier stated he thinks peers think the expectations are “retarded,” shared his experiences about how the adults are inconsistent with the school expectations:

I notice there’s a lot of play fighting [between adults and kids], like you know, not to follow the expectations. Like the boys in class with Mr. George and Mr. James, and we were all having a blast. And then they would be like, “Get back to work, back to work.” Then some of the kids follow, and some of them don’t. I mean they [the adults] follow the rules, but I’ve seen them go too far.

Adults not using *de-escalation techniques*. Charles, the seventh grader that described his frustration when peers do not comply with expectations also described that it is known by students and staff when adult behaviors are appropriate and when they are not. Sometimes it is perceived that adults restrain students for annoying behaviors, when they could have done something else to have students comply:

I mean, sometimes restraints are good, and needed, but just restraining them, just because they’re banging on the walls and stuff—they can disturb the class, but you gotta take them out of the class and do other stuff. I mean they’re not supposed to do it [a restraint] when something doesn’t happen.

Charles’ perspective appears to suggest that students know the types of strategies that adults use to proactively manage the environment to de-escalate behaviors that adds to the

general understanding of “being safe.” It appears Charles understands adults should manage the de-escalation process (take them out of the room if they are disturbing the class, talk to them, etc.) without engaging in a physical restraint.

Fifth-grade Trinity, who earlier described her distress watching a physical restraint, also indicated adults do not use the de-escalation techniques. She suggests that staff members restrain students—and hurt them—which appears to escalate a situation when students become “mad even more” when they have been hurt. She suggests adults can use relationship-building strategies to de-escalate a situation and maintain a safe environment:

But the adults, touching kids, hurting a kid—that is not the right thing to do. If you don’t want kids to be like disrespectful and not safe, you [adults] have to stop hurting them. If the children get hurt they’re only going to get mad even more and just like walk out of the classroom. But if you like talk to them and tell them, “Do they want to take a break?” you can just say it nicely.

Trinity, and other students, appear to understand that students are aware that adults know alternative strategies instead of restraining a child. Shanice, like Charles and Trinity, also described a situation where the adults in the room clearly could have used strategies that students and adults both know:

But we had a restraint in our class today. And the kids were being bad in there because a kid had his phone in class (his cousin’s or something), so they [adults] came in there and because they patted him down—Mr. George patted him down, patted him all down—and Miss Prince started pushing him around and twisting his arm and stuff, and then they finally put him on the floor, but we were still left in there. Now that’s when the whole class should have been taken out because that was unsafe. We didn’t know what the

student was going to do or who was going to be next, because he was pushing Miss Prince because he had his phone taken and he wouldn't have been given his phone back, over something little like that. But he should have given his phone to the teacher when he got in, like the other students did.

While students understand they are supposed to follow the school-wide expectations, they are also aware that adults are supposed to live and model the expectations to maintain a safe environment. Students seem aware that disrespectful adult behaviors may trigger events that lead to restraints and the interactions between adults and students.

Disrespectful behaviors. While Darnell identified “play fighting” and Charles and Trinity described how adults do not use techniques that students are aware to follow expectations for a safe environment, some other students describe how these adult inconsistencies appear to be “disrespectful behaviors” with the students. When students were asked “Why don't adults follow the rules?” some could identify when they have felt that adults dislike them or perceived adults' negative feelings about them were because of their behaviors. In other words, students appear to feel that adults disrespect them because they don't like them, or like their behaviors. Fourth-grade Christopher said, “Sometimes they don't like kids if the kids disrespect them.”

Trinity, like some other students, referred to adults as being “disrespectful” to students when she described her staff member's actions toward student behaviors she disliked.

But Miss Pat is disrespectful when she's yelling at a child. And she's apparently yelling at everybody, because when she's mad, nobody likes to talk to her. She's always like, “Leave me alone, I'm not in the mood right now.” Yeah, pretty much. If you told her she's not following PBIS she would laugh because she's in a mood.

Disrespectful behaviors appear to refer to adult behaviors that students perceive as being disrespectful toward them. Additional examples of adults engaging in disrespect toward students include power struggles and animosity.

Power struggles. Connor described when adult engage in a power struggle with the students, engaging in the same behaviors as students but using adulthood as the reason adults are engaged in the same behaviors as students.

Do you want to know the one thing I really hate that the adults do? And the teachers? I hate when they start talking to me and then they start to say stuff and I want to respond to tell them to stop talking. I say it like, “You’re talking to me? I’m doing the exact same thing that you are. What makes it any more right for you to say that than me?”

Cameron (sixth grade) described how he perceives other adults who dislike student behaviors and how those adults act toward the students.

In the school they do; they follow the PBIS expectations. And some bus staff. I like the one that sits with us, I just don't like the driver because he stops the bus every day. Like so he'll be saying that we're running late, and then he drives and takes his time and drives extra slow. And then he pulls over and he stops and then he smokes. And he's making us late on purpose. And my cousin (also on the bus) said he was going to call his mom and say he was gonna report him, but his mom didn't have enough time to call it in and report it, so he still does it.

In both perceptions, Connor and Cameron believe that the adults are using their adulthood as a means for controlling a situation over students. For Connor, adults appear to be caught in a battle of wills or words, and for Cameron, an adult uses his control over the bus route

to show power over students. In both cases, the adults appear to force their will over the students.

While some adults are outwardly using power to punitively punish students, some adults are less subtle about disliking the students or student behaviors.

Animosity. The word animosity refers to a strong hostility. Eighth-grade Cassandra described that she could perceive when an adult does not like the students by their tone of voice.

I think some adults can act calm and they try to help people. But not all the adults like the students, probably in the way they act towards the kids, or the way that they talk to us or something in their tone of voice. They sound mean, because of the way students act and the way they talk towards the teachers.

While Cassandra's statement was about something "in their tone of voice," some adults showed outward hostility towards students in an observation:

Later that day, at dismissal, one bus remained on the campus, unable to leave the middle school lot, because several of the students were screaming at the bus driver and adult attendants on the bus, jumping from seat to seat, cursing, laughing, opening the rear bus emergency door, and threatening to jump off the moving bus. The bus attendant screamed back at the students, "Sit down! Shut up! You kids aren't going nowhere on this bus!" Mr. George and Mr. Washington walked onto the bus to find Saquoia and Janiah engaged in residual physical and verbal fighting from the cell phone incident earlier that day, refusing to cooperate and follow the bus safety rules.

"C'mon, I want to go home already!" yelled two of the older students, infuriated with the drama. The bus attendant agreed with the students, adding, "Don't you just hate when these girls

don't listen and act up? They shouldn't be allowed on this bus! I'm quitting this s***. I don't need this!"

Janiah said, "I don't give a f*** who you are, I'm not listening to you and you can't make me do anything I don't want to do. I f***** hate you! I don't f***** care!"

Mr. Washington was visibly frustrated with Janiah and the bus attendant, who made matters worse, had she not verbally targeted the students and only allowed the school support staff to calm the disruptive girls. Mr. Washington walked off the bus and interviewed the bus attendant, wrote notes about the incident and discussed her inappropriate language and behaviors with the children. The bus attendant argued with enmity to "make these kids behave."

The scenario above is an observed occurrence of combined adult power struggle with the students and hostility toward their behaviors. Within the context of adult inconsistencies with PBIS expectations, some adults engage in "play fighting" and not using de-escalation strategies with students when they do not comply with the expectations. Students described "disrespectful behaviors" as power struggles, and animosity toward students that are disruptive.

Yet, while some students described their perceptions about adults engaged in negative interactions with students, many students described the positive relationships they have with adults as part of their common experiences.

Relationships with adults. In the last of the main themes under common experiences, relationships with adults, students described their positive and interpersonal interactions with the teachers and other adults. The experiences most frequently associated with caring for and helping with behavioral management, as well as tolerance and respect.

A brief orientation to the connection students have with adults is best described by Richard, a seventh grader, about attending VCS and the environment:

When you first come here, I don't know why, but it changes your attitude to different things because we are more open to talk here than at a regular school. I mean, there, you don't have any other adults to talk to. I mean I know sometimes you hear us say things like f*** this class and nobody here will help me. But most of the time that's not true, because of the staff. If you've seen the people I know from last year or the other years before, and I look at them now, it's been a big improvement.

Richard's description of the environment and the staff was selected as an introduction to other students' perceptions about aspects of the adults. At VCS, it appears students have the opportunity to "talk to" adults, and the environment in general allows for "openness to talk here than at a regular school." Student responses further describe adults as caring people to "talk to" who help students improve their behaviors, and are described as tolerant and respectful.

Adults are perceived as caring for students. Student responses indicate that adults "care about them." Students cited several examples of adults caring for students, including caring as "helping" students when working with them and their emotional and behavioral issues, and when adults help them manage their academic frustration and finish their schoolwork.

Adults offer help. Some students referred to caring staff as helping them (in general) or helping them with their work. Jerry, a seventh grader, said, "They help other kids. They're trying to get them to stop being so rowdy." Aside from Jerry's perspective that adults help students by maintaining a safe environment, fifth grade Trinity, with heartfelt thoughtfulness, talked about the positive relationship she has with her classroom teacher: "...and Miss Samson. She's always in my shoes and she's always helping me, and the definition of when you're in someone's shoes, it's when you help them and you're going to help make them like happy and stuff, and show them empathy. Miss Samson helps me."

Trinity's perception of her teacher "always in her shoes" indicates a personal or interpersonal relationship. Earlier, Trinity stated she was concerned about peer disruptive behaviors, and that the teacher would "get mad at the class." It appears Trinity describes a protectiveness about her relationship with a trusted adult: her teacher.

Adults help students "calm down." Some students described the staff as "caring" in the way they "talk to the kids" to help them "calm down." Other students described teachers as "being nice and calm" to help deescalate, or "work with" a student during an emotional or physical outburst.

The fourth-grade focus group (Lucia, Diego and James) described what they need from adults was to help them by offering a strategy or "a fidget to calm down." Students cited other actions (e.g., take students out of the room, talk to them, etc.) to help students de-escalate crisis situations and help students gain control or "calm down."

Connor indicated teachers and staff help in school as well as when he is frustrated with his work and emotions:

I've had like good classes [teacher, staff] that have been able to help me. Also, that's what I like about this school. It's meant to help kids be able to do good-like. At my other school, if I needed help, they really wouldn't help me, like when I'm kind of frustrated and stuff or like when I'm just like annoyed. At my last school they really didn't do anything to help me when I was angry.

Connor appears to recognize that adults are helping him when he is frustrated, annoyed, or angry. From informal observations, adults appear to use de-escalation strategies (e.g., building a relationship, using positive language, monitoring students' emotions, and helping them "use their words" to help students calm down and express their frustrations. In one

instance, a teacher was observed using a de-escalation strategy to help a student calm down, then using the PBIS point sheet protocol to help him prepare to reset his frustrations for the next class period:

In the VCS elementary building's open foyer, Jamie was observed seated, bouncing irritably on one of the sofas, then standing, occasionally stomping with an angry expression. Very near, his teacher Mrs. Jenkins gently asked him, "What do you need? What are your coping strategies to stay safe, respectful, and responsible when you're frustrated?" Jamie grabbed his point sheet from the table and wadded it into a paper ball, then threw it, cursing loudly, the sound echoing in the large foyer. A few minutes went by, and prompted by Mrs. Jenkins (who was then seated next to him), Jamie walked over to his paper on the floor, picked it up, returned to the table, and carefully smoothed the paper. Together, they discussed ways that Jamie could ask for help in the future when he is frustrated and needs a break, as Mrs. Jenkins scored his point sheet.

Another observed interaction was observed with a non-instructional staff member checking in on a student's emotional state and using relationship skills prior to the child boarding a bus:

At dismissal, Security Officer McGuinness, who assisted with traffic flow of the eighty or more busses and cabs that arrive to take students home (as far a drive as 90 minutes per direction) was seen handing blue paws and offering an enthusiastic "Good job, walking!" to students walking to their bus and the occasional, "Hey, Buddy, what's wrong?" when students looked upset or refused to get on the bus.

The interactions at dismissal before children board transportation for the ride home is important, as some of the most severe disruptive behaviors occur on vehicles on the way to or

home from school. Officer McGuinness was observed proactively rewarding expected behaviors and checking with students who seemed to be upset. Interacting with an adult is a last proactive opportunity to help students calm down before boarding a bus for a 90-minute ride, with potential for disruptive behaviors.

Another example of a powerful teachable moment enveloped in a caring de-escalation strategy was observed in the continuation of Taylor's story, the young girl who was upset in the cafeteria, and the interaction she had with Principal Allen, who frequently monitored students' emotions and behaviors during the day:

For no apparent reason, Taylor began shouting, crying, cursing, flailing and punching her way to the cafeteria door, when she was met by Principal Allen, who stopped her in her tracks. Some students yell, "Shut up, Taylor! We won't be able to go to recess!" Students laughed at Taylor, and some shoved each other for teasing her.

Principal Allen looked at the teacher and the children, waited a few seconds while Taylor was screaming, and said to one child, "William, I appreciate how you are standing in line patiently waiting for directions quietly. Good job being responsible. That's what I like to see." Principal Allen and the teacher nodded at each other, and Miss Marigold pulled a blue paw from her back pocket and handed it to a smiling William.

"Let's walk to my office and you can tell me what this is about," she said to Taylor, her voice fainting away as Taylor told her story frantically in half screams and cries down the hallway. Within eight minutes, Taylor was reading a story with Principal Allen, discussing the troubles the child in the story was having and how Taylor made a responsible choice today by comparison, by using her words and asking an adult for help to calm down when she gets mad.

Principal Allen demonstrated a few strategies to help students calm the disruption and reward students for following the PBIS expectations. Even in a disruptive situation, students were acknowledged for safe, respectful, and responsible behaviors, reminding them to use their strategies to maintain a sense of calm, and then work with the student in distress.

The strategies observed of Mrs. Jenkins, Officer McGuinness, and Principal Allan all included relationship-building strategies to de-escalate disruptive behaviors. It appears students perceive these behaviors as “helping students calm down” and caring for students.

Adults talk to students. During Jamaal’s restraint in the parking lot, the staff could be heard saying, “breathe; we can help you by you showing us safe behaviors. Calm down, we can help you up.” In four minutes, eventually, with caring gestures and prompts from the staff, Jamaal responded to Mr. Erikson, a favorite teacher of his, who initiated the release and Jamaal instantly transformed to his former compliant self, sobbing loudly, with a wet face and tears. As they drove back to school, Mr. Erikson reviewed coping skills and strategies for Jamaal to ask an adult for help to stay safe in his assigned space and remind him that fleeing the campus was very dangerous.

It appears that adults use opportunities to build a relationship and engage in a dialog with students as a strategy to help students calm down. Eighth grade Anthony described his perspective that adults care about the students when they deescalate crisis situations and invest in time to talk with students:

Most of them do. Like Mr. DiGeorgio and them do. Like, if we're acting up, they'll talk to us. They'll call us out in the hallway and go up on the steps and talk to us. And they'll keep talking and try to help us calm down. And then if it's like over [a crisis], they'll still just keep trying to talk to us and help us calm down.

Adults appear to use relationship building strategies like talking to the students, checking on their emotions, investing time, and offering whatever is perceived as being needed by the students to help them calm down. These strategies appear to be perceived by students as adults caring for them.

Adults offer academic help. In addition to adults helping students “calm down,” students also referred to teachers helping them finish their work when they are frustrated by academic tasks. Christopher, a fourth grader, said, “They help kids when they need it; they sit there calmly and teach us. They respect the kids.” Seventh grade Trevon stated, “Most of the teachers work with the students and help them when help is needed. They calm some students down and they make sure they’re doing good by getting their job done (finishing their work).” Gabriel stated, “The staff will help you out with your work. The teachers try to simplify it for you and make it more simple for you so that you can understand it.”

Richard, a seventh grader who discussed reasons why he wanted to return to his home school, described his appreciation of the relationships he developed with the adults at VCS. He described how teachers were helping students in preparation for more intense high school work expectations:

Like upstairs, (seventh grade wing) we've gotten more work than last year. And they're just getting us ready for high school, or public school, because it's going to be really different when we're in a public school, because you're not going to be talking when people want to learn. I mean there's like 23 kids in one class [in public high school]. I mean here, they teach you how to listen, because [in high school] the teacher's not gonna repeat it over to you, or you're not gonna get to go after class and go over everything you

did in the classroom already and just go to school, come in at her with all these questions that you've already learned in the first class you are in. Our teachers help us here like that.

Richard's description is that the small class size allows for teachers to give attention to academic needs and teaching readiness skills like listening and asking questions. It appears that Richard is describing other experiences from other schools about the differences that teachers at VCS give to help students than in other schools. Interestingly, Richard also describes that "in a public school, you're not going to be talking when people want to learn." While adults teach listening as a respectful classroom expectation, Richard also eludes that adults tolerate disruptive behaviors.

Adults are tolerant of disruptive behaviors. Some students acknowledged adults were very tolerant of disruptive behaviors that were considered disrespectful, and maintained a sense of calm or control to keep students safe in the environment and to foster a climate of trust. Richard, whose description of the relational environment introduced the theme about relationships with adults, and closed the sub-theme about academic help, understands the adults help students manage their behaviors, and are tolerant as "they don't have to deal with all this":

Yes. I like the teachers. Even though it seems like they yell at you or something, it's tough love. Because they're really helping you, because they're here to help kids with anger issues, and you know they don't have to deal with all this. So they're actually helping you, and getting you ready for real life.

Several students indicated their peers' disrespectful behaviors toward staff members, yet, the adults still try to "help them." Cameron (sixth grade) said, "Mrs. Abrams, she tries to help kids, but they are still just disrespectful." Chloe, an eighth grader, said, "They take a breath when a kid is being disrespectful to them. Then they start talking to them. They keep us safe

and stay with the kids who run out of area until they're calm." Diego, a fourth grader, said, "The teachers don't yell at the kids, even when a kid gets angry with them they don't hit them back or something. And you can trust them. When they say that they're going to do something, they do it." James, another fourth grader, described how adults were patient and work with students when they are having issues as opposed to other schools or other places. "Here, the adults don't get upset. Not most of the time. Other adults in other places do. The adults [here] already know how to behave!"

It appears that student perceptions indicate they know that the adults are tolerant of the disruptive behaviors, and attribute tolerance as part of their relationships with the adults. Students also describe adults' tolerance as understanding of their behaviors and as mutual respect.

Adults and students have mutual respect. *Be respectful* is one of the school-wide expectations, and was discussed earlier in this chapter as part of the common language shared in the school's social culture. Students described Johnny's behavior as "nice," "calm," and "didn't get mad." Many students commented that students and staff have a sense of mutual appreciation for "being nice" to each other, expressing these feelings as "respect." Fourth-grade Lucia said teachers are "respectful when they are talking kind stuff and not saying curse words and all that." Anthony stated that adults are, "...respectful, looking you in the eye when they're talking to you and if you ask a question, they won't do other things, they'll try to listen to you."

Some students described respect as when students treat adults the way they want to be treated, and the adults reciprocate that arrangement. Shanice's fifth grade perspective: "Sometimes they're respectful, like the majority. Like, if you are respectful to them they'll be respectful back to you, but that could be with anybody. You want to treat people the way you

want to be treated.” Marquis also had a positive perspective about how the adults “talk to the students respectfully, and they [the students] give them back respect.” Thomas, a fifth-grader, stated the adults in his class, “[The adults] don’t talk back or get smart with the kids.” Tyler said, “They keep the kids safe and are not doing bad things, yelling, cursing, being physical, around them. They treat kids the way they want to be treated back. Like if the kids are being disrespectful, they won’t talk back to them or will try or maybe ask them what’s wrong.”

Student responses illustrate a sense that adults model how to treat other people, and that students understand respect as treating others the way you want to be treated. Respondents acknowledge that adults treat students with respect and that even though students show disrespectful behaviors, the adults create an environment where students can be accepted for their behavioral challenges. How the adults in the school care about students, help students scholastically and emotionally, and maintain a safe environment regardless of tolerating disruptive outbursts are all part of common experiences that adults build relationships with the students.

In addition to building relationships, some students acknowledge some adults in helping them develop their sense of values and identity in the school culture. The strategy for motivating students into developing their values is a common experience. The values students identify are organized and presented under Common Values.

Adults motivate students to acknowledge their values. A strategy for shepherding students toward making good choices and tap into students’ sense of “doing the right thing” appears to be a sub-theme under mutual respect. Several students describe scenarios where adults use their relationships with them to motivate them into positive choices.

Mr. Washington was observed in an informal observation building on his relationship with students and motivating them to improve themselves and their beliefs:

Mr. Washington was seen outside his suite gathering a group of his student radio stars for the morning broadcast message on WPAN—the Panther Network. The word of the day was responsibility, selected by the students, due to a behavioral incident that involved a group of eighth-grade boys earlier in the week. Mr. Washington could be heard saying, “This is your OTI: Opportunity to Improve. We are going to focus, filter, and fix. You young people are the next generation of leaders, and need to demonstrate how to be safe, respectful and responsible when you leave us...” With prompting, students lined up in their order, waiting their turn and ready to deliver their broadcast with nervous enthusiasm.

The observed activity, above, was an example of relationship-building, and also helping students understand the long-term outcome of developing their sense of values using PBIS language and expectations. While behaviors are defined and explicitly taught in the PBIS lessons, this type of motivational strategy to accept the responsibility of being a “next generation of leaders” was more incidental, yet consistent. Eighth-grade Anthony stated:

Mr. Washington says it's all about a goal: he says it's all right in front of you and you need to take it. It's in front of you, like us having the attitude thing [that we talked about] in boy's group. It was cool. It helped some of us get our act together. He talked to us about we can't get involved in all the girl drama. And to stay safe and be responsible and to focus on getting your work done and not goofing around with the other girls.

Anthony's statement that “it's all right in front of you and you need to take it” suggested that students are encouraged to engage in personal decision-making and goal setting. He also specifically used the word “attitude,” which is an influencer of behavior, but not an explicitly

taught behavior. Other student statements referred to the eighth-grade class having a difficult time adjusting to the onset of high school, and many referred to Mr. Washington in particular as helping students think about defining themselves as they move on to new settings.

Regarding students' perspectives of their common experiences, students cited several examples that disruptive behaviors are a social culture norm, and that students are aware they attend VCS because of their past school behaviors and inability to regulate their emotions that cause disruptive behaviors. Students described feeling frustrated with their peers' rule violations and non-compliance, and cited apathy, peer acceptance, home influences, and anger as reasons students do not follow the PBIS expectations.

Many students described disruptive behaviors as a cause for a chaotic and unsafe learning environment resulting in safety issues and restraints. Adult inconsistencies in managing the classroom environment was one specific idea regarding why students are placed into restraints. Many students described the emotional and physical hurt of having been restrained themselves or having had to watch a physical restraint.

Last, students also commented on the number of relationships they share with the adults, including having mutual respect and having adults care for them by offering help academically and to "calm down." Adults are perceived to tolerate disrespectful behaviors, but students also notice when adults motivate them into making positive choices to develop their sense of values.

The next section describes the perceptions of students and the common values students contribute as part of their social culture. The values are different than common experiences as they are more likely to describe personal traits or characteristics as to why students behave as they do in the PBIS social culture.

Common Values

Identifying common values in the social culture required a simple approach to 1) identify behaviors students exhibit to demonstrate they follow the PBIS expectations, 2) probe about their individual ideals, then 3) ask why they care to follow the expectations (their social competence). The rationale for developing the following questions was to determine what students valued about the PBIS system and why they comply with the PBIS expectations. Students were asked, “What would you have done in the PBIS lesson scenario? Would you have done what Johnny did, or would you have done something else?” Student responses described their behaviors in compliance (or non-compliance) along with how or why they valued complying with the expectations in the PBIS environment (see Table A7). In answering the question, 20 of 28 students said they would have or probably would have done what Johnny did (comply with the PBIS expectations). Of the eight that would have done something differently or did not answer, when asked “What would you have done instead?” responses included “get mad” (when being repeatedly denied their request for a drink), continue to ask for water without finishing their work, forget to give back the pencil (accidentally), and ask for help with the worksheet. Only one student said she would leave the classroom without permission to get a drink, mostly because she was “told no.”

These answers were consistent with themes in the common language about words that describe behaviors (get mad), and themes under common experiences that the students describe as disruptive behaviors (walk out of the classroom, not complete work), and tap into the relationships with adults because adults help students.

When describing what compliance looks like and why they comply to PBIS expectations, students identified several examples. They described behaviors often paired with descriptions of how they are perceived in the school community by themselves, their peers, and the adults, i.e.,

their reputation. Their perceptions emerged as personality qualities or characteristics that described their personal nature. The patterns arose as themes to describe their values, the ideals that appear to motivate their behaviors and actions.

Most of the students talked about their perceptions of themselves while complying with PBIS expectations and school rules. These characteristics included integrity, self-respect, self-identity, and serving as a role model. Some students openly admitted to not complying, and noticing that other students would follow them. This theme was described as being an “adverse influencer,” or someone that can influence the undesirable behaviors in another.

Reputation: Why students “do good.” Before presenting the personal characteristics that students attribute themselves when complying with PBIS expectations, some students described following PBIS in school because they wanted to be known as “doing good” or “being good.” Students appeared to be concerned with their reputation as someone recognized to “do good” in the school, and conform to the social norms by following expectations. Anthony, the eighth grader who earlier described students who “don’t care” and his frustration with non-compliant students, also states how the PBIS system helps to create an environment where kids can “do good:” “[PBIS] is a cool system, and it helps us do good, outside and inside here.”

Charles, the seventh grader that earlier described frustration with peers’ non-compliance, described how the PBIS approach reinforces his ability to be “good” at VCS. Charles said, “I’m already good in a way, but PBIS makes me better at what I’m doing, probably because it makes me listen more and makes me pay attention to my behavior and what’s happening in class and stuff.” It appears that “doing good” is believed to be a positive association with their personal identity.

Darnell, an eighth grader, talked about why complying to the PBIS expectations is important to him and he values the benefits that adults perceive him as a rule-follower, after describing his non-compliant behaviors in the past:

I follow the PBIS rules now because they [adults] notice that I'm doing the right thing instead of doing the wrong thing. And I'll get positive attention not negative, because positive is better than negative. I thought about what's going to be best for me once I get out of here and what's gonna be that goal I set to get out of here. I've got to stay focused and don't let these people engage you in stuff that you're not even part of. I mean I have fun from time to time and get in trouble and all that, but my goal now is to inspire people. My school goal is to get all my work done and get good grades.

Darnell described a “goal he set” that will be best for him in “doing the right thing.” He also describes a “goal now to inspire people” and “get all my work done and get good grades.” Darnell’s statements appear to be his testimony that his changed behaviors help build his reputation, which he describes as “doing good.”

After reviewing these stories about why students want to “do good,” sub-themes arose about the qualities they perceived about themselves when they are known to have a “good” reputation and follow the PBIS expectations. What emerged were personality qualities or characteristics that described personal nature, describing behaviors as “doing good.” The boys’ statements above appear to be that they have a sense of adhering to the moral or ethical code of the school, or just doing the “right thing.”

Integrity. Charles and Darnell opened the door to students having an awareness and being reflective of their qualities. Some other students commented that following PBIS expectations was “the right thing to do” and that they recognized they had a strong sense of

adhering to the school rules as a moral or ethical value. Some students also indicated that they comply with rules or “do the right thing” because that is an identification of their personal character.

When discussing Johnny’s actions and comparing her own behaviors, fifth-grade Shanice gave a detailed explanation:

It’s the right thing to do to ask the teacher to go get a drink of water, and if the teacher said to finish the assignment, I’m like, okay, I’ll finish it because you’re supposed to get a drink of water before you start your assignment. So if you’re done your thing you can go get a drink of water or go to the bathroom. Because once the lesson starts you can’t like get out of your seat (because my teacher thinks that sometimes we’re just doing it to get out of the classroom). So Johnny did it great, and that’s what I would do. Get done what really needs to be done first.

Shanice not only described the responsible behaviors of completing her work before taking a break, but she also eluded to understanding that she needs to be accountable for her work completion. Seventh-grade David also describes his sense of responsibility in being accountable for following the PBIS expectations, using the word “nice” to describe these behaviors: “It [PBIS] makes you do nice things like be safe, respectful and responsible. I don’t hurt anybody. And I don’t run AWOL from school. I don’t curse at the teacher, and I don’t run in the classroom. I do my homework, and I do the work at school, because I’m responsible.”

Gregory, an eighth grader who earlier stated he believes his peers “act cool” so they are not “singled out,” described how he follows expectations in general. When asked if Johnny followed the PBIS expectations, he described following expectations as being “kind” or accepting or complying with expectations because he “knows the right thing to do.”

Or he [Johnny] probably just doesn't know and he's just kind. Or he just like knows what to do in school. I think that I would have done the same thing even if the PBIS expectations were not there. I don't think I'm a kind person, I just know the right thing to do.

Here, Gregory states that regardless if Johnny knew the PBIS expectations or not, he would show behaviors of "the right thing to do" because he is "kind." Gregory implies that Johnny might have been the type of person that intrinsically knows the "right thing to do." When he states he does not think he is a "kind person," but "just know the right thing to do," he also implies that regardless of the PBIS expectations, he would demonstrate school appropriate behaviors without being told what to do.

Michael, a sixth grader, briefly commented earlier about his peers' anger and non-compliance to rules, and his opinion that teachers try to keep a sense of order and safety. When asked why he follows the expectations, he, like Shanice, and Gregory, also described following rules as the "right thing to do." Michael's example described an unusual situation: he observed a bus attendant (who was subsequently terminated) urinating on the school's front lawn in front of students. He said rule-following is a life expectation that "everyone knows."

I would try because it's the right thing to do. Because every rule is important, even the dumb ones. Like don't go to the bathroom on a tree...and everyone knows not to do that! Because following the rules can help you in life. Like don't steal anything, you pay for it.

Michael eluded that following rules helps you be accountable for expectations, and that breaking rules (public urination) makes a person less reliable and accountable. His statement about not stealing also indicates he understands a sense of being trustworthy about his actions, in

school and later in life. These statements explain that following rules, like the PBIS expectations, is simply “the right thing to do.” This intrinsic quality of “doing good” appeared to be associated with integrity, having aspects of trustworthiness, accountability, and reliability as part of their reputation.

Self-respect. Some students also offered how following the expectations makes them feel when they are “doing the right things,” and that those feelings appear to be associated with establishing their character. While integrity reflects students desire to “do the right thing” as a social norm, self-respect is described as a feeling of pride evidenced by their behaviors while honoring the PBIS expectations. Several students indicated a sense of pride and confidence or expressed feeling good about themselves because they appear to believe their behaviors define their personal appeal. Some students believe behaving respectfully and responsibly had natural positive consequences of gaining something, including recognition for “doing a good job.”

Fourth grade Lucia described feeling good about herself because of her positive behaviors. Lucia said, “Well, Johnny’s being safe respectful, and responsible, and I want to be respectful, responsible, and safe. It makes me feel good.” Eighth-grade Chloe said she would follow all the classroom expectations as Johnny did, and likes how it feels that she is recognized for “doing a good job:”

I would’ve gone back to my seat if he said no. And if he would say, ‘Finish your work,’ I would finish all my work. I would return it [the pencil] back to the person that I borrowed it from. Yes, I like that, when the kids know I follow the PBIS expectations, because it lets me know that I’m doing a good job.

Like David, eighth-grade Matty said he feels good about himself and “proud” when complying with school rules, evidenced in frequent perfect scores on his point cards.

Well they steal them [paws], but I follow the rules because I wouldn't want to steal one, and they get in trouble later. If I didn't follow the rules, that would reflect on my behaviors. I don't really disrespect teachers either because of the expectations. I get 60's on my point cards. Almost always. It makes me feel proud.

When describing peer behaviors like stealing token paws from each other, Matty articulated that he would not because there are consequences for stealing, and that would "reflect on his behaviors." In a member check, Matty clarified that reflecting on his behaviors meant that he did not want to be associated with someone that does the wrong thing, and that he likes being known as the "kid that always gets 60s." This statement appears that Matty has pride and confidence in himself, and enjoys being known for his behaviors that honor the PBIS expectations. Matty states he "gets 60s" as recognition that everyone knows that "60s" are evidence of adhering to the social culture, and was described as common language earlier in this chapter.

Continuing with the self-respect sub-theme, Trevon, a seventh-grader, described the kinds of actions he demonstrates to help other students as part of the social norm and honoring the PBIS expectations. He also describes that following the rules and helping others makes him feel "really good." Although he takes advantage of the token economy system (prize box), he feels a sense of satisfaction and recognition by following expected school behaviors and being helpful toward his peers:

It makes me feel like a good person when I do the PBIS expectations. Really good. It makes me feel happy inside (student laughs). I do my work and I help people out. Like when they need a pencil I'll lend them a pencil. Or I'll give them five paws to buy a pencil. When someone is feeling upset or mad or acts up, I'll ask them what's wrong,

and sometimes they'll tell me and sometimes they won't. When they won't, I just tell the teacher that I did at least try and ask them what was wrong. It gives me a little bit of pride and confidence. And they might give me some paws or let me pick out of the prize box or something.

The researcher asked, "Is that important? The prize box?"

Trevon's response was, "No, not as much, not as important as doing my work. Doing my work and feeling good about it is more important, because doing my work is more valuable than a little toy."

Seventh-grade Richard added another aspect that blended being trustworthy (integrity) with feelings of pride (self-respect): "I like when people ask me 'Can I borrow your pen?' I like them to trust me to be trustworthy. I want them to say, 'Richard is trustworthy of holding my pen,' or something like that. I like that feeling."

Self-respect was described as pride and satisfaction students felt about themselves that reflected their personal character. Trevon captured the essence of the characteristic by stating feeling good about his work completion, following expectations, and helping other students as part of the social norm was more important and valuable than a token reward. All student responses indicating self-respect are associated with pride and satisfaction for "doing good."

While some students understand they are recognized as proud rule-followers, by "getting 60s," some students further described compliance as contributing to their character within the social context of the school, which was identified as self-identity.

Self-identity. This theme was identified when students reflected about their behaviors and described a sense of knowing who they are within the social context of their peers. Regardless of peers' behaviors, students appeared conscious of their identity and their own qualities as an

individual. Above, Richard described being “trustworthy.” Trinity, a fifth grader, earlier described how her teacher was “in her shoes” as a caring adult, and how watching other students in a physical restraint had an emotional impact on her. She described herself as changing emotionally, and learning to ignore students that made her feel inferior.

Because I’m good all the time this year, they like to pick on me. Because last year I was shy, and you know, but this year, I was like getting 60s every day but now I’m getting forties, kind of. But I fixed it and get 2’s at the end of the day because, you know, when I get mad at them I run AWOL. But this time, it’s a different time for me to change. And changing is like ignoring people, and like, yeah, so this is how it changes my life and that’s how it changes and affects me. They still make fun of my forehead and the way I look different. But every day I’m different and every day I’m not the same Trinity as last year. I’m like a different one. Because last year I was shy and this year I am not.

Trinity appears to recognize her struggle that because of a nearly unnoticeable physical disfigurement, students who tease her interfere with her ability to “get 60’s.” She stated she “fixed it” and is able to “get 2’s” at the end of the day, which refers to her point sheet score per class period, that when totaled at the end of the day, a perfect score equals 60. Trinity appears to recognize the change comes from within herself, and that she understands her sense of self.

Like Trinity, eighth-grade Chloe described herself as very aware of the person she is “changing” into, and that it is important to her that the adults see her as following school rules as a life expectation.

When I follow the PBIS rules it makes me feel like I’m changing. I like changing into the person I am now. I’m not angry and I don’t want to fight people. I’m changing into somebody better, that doesn’t get angry a lot and doesn’t have a lot of stress on my mind.

And I care that the staff know, because they care about me and where I'm going to go after this school.

Chloe's perspective not only describes her understanding of herself, but also appears to suggest that an awareness of her self-identity is a value that adults recognize, and that she is connected to the adults and cares what they think about her.

Shanice, who also gave responses identified as having integrity, described how she approaches who she is and how peers perceive her in the social context. "Honestly I don't know if they like it or not but to me it doesn't matter because as long as I'm doing what I need to do, as Shanice Jackson, it doesn't matter whoever else thinks what about me because they're not Shanice Jackson, so I don't care what they think."

Eighth-grade Cassandra also is aware of her behaviors; yet, she believes people should take ownership of their own actions.

When I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, great, then they're quiet, and they're doing their work. They're focused. I think that people are always looking at me and watching me, to see how I act. I don't want them to follow in my footsteps, though. I would want people to be their own person instead of trying being Cassandra Jones.

Cassandra's statement is that she understands that she complies with school expectations, and that other students are "looking at" her and "watching" her. Cassandra states she understands who she is, and would encourage other students to "be their own person."

Interestingly, both Shanice and Cassandra referred to themselves as "Shanice Jackson" and "Cassandra Jones," describing themselves as unique individuals within the social context. In both cases, each student appeared to have a strong sense of self-identity.

Several students described that when peers try to engage them into joining in on negative behaviors, their strategy was to focus on themselves, regardless of peer perceptions. Daniel, a seventh grader whose opinion that students “don’t care” about following rules to appear “cool,” also indicated he believed those same students do not have caring concerns about other students. “I don’t know if the kids care how other people act, or about me or about their opinion of me. But I’m not allowed to do that. I just focus on my work and not worry about anything else to nobody.” Similarly, and simply stated, Cameron said, “I worry about myself. They do things to themselves.”

Emma stated she wants “the truth about herself” to be known as a rule follower, and that other students would not have influence over her behaviors:

I actually like when other kids and staff think I am following the rules because I don’t want to be that person that the other kids think, ‘Oh, well she doesn’t follow the rules,’ and they might think maybe we can get her in trouble. I don’t want people to think that about me because that’s a lie. I wouldn’t want people to think that was the truth about me.

As an eighth grader, Darnell described earlier how his behaviors brought him to VCS. He stated several times that he tries to avoid being influenced by other students and focuses on what he is trying to accomplish in school:

They’re trying to get me off my focus. You know, trying to make me start trouble and all that. And I’m like no, get out of here, man, go do something yourself! They’re trying to see me fall. My life is too huge for them to make me fall. And then I’ll have to fall all the way back and work my way up from the bottom. No. I’ve been through that.

Some students indicated that they have begun to understand who they are or are becoming as part of their self-identity when following school rules. The patterns identified as self-identity differed from self-respect in that their perceptions were about understanding who they are, and self-respect reflected the pride they described when they follow the rules or are recognized as following the rules by peers or adults. The next sub-theme, role model, describes when students understand who they are and have an influence, authority, or clout in effecting other peers' behaviors in positive ways.

Role model. Role model differs from influencer because behaviors students want imitated or replicated by other students tend to link a positive association with their feelings, like pride, leadership, providing a sense of direction or guiding others positively, and to inspire. The adverse influencer characteristic—described earlier in the sub-themes about self-awareness and disruptive behaviors—appeared to manipulate other students to engage in negative behaviors, taking attention off themselves as the influencer.

Seventh-grade Tyler, who described the feelings of being recognized as a role model. He said, “I like when I show them what you’re supposed to do. I like how it feels, because it’s like being an influence, by doing what I’m supposed to be doing.” Not only does Tyler acknowledge pride and self-respect, he described pride as “showing” students what “you’re supposed to do” “like being an influence.”

Some students describe when they follow PBIS expectations they can influence other students in positive ways, and identify themselves as role models. Michael, a sixth-grader who said he thought students who were angry contributed to their non-compliance of school rules, said he follows rules and tries to influence students in a good way, but not all respond:

“Sometimes I can be a role model for some kids [when I am] safe, respectful and responsible. Some follow what I do, but some don't.”

Anthony, the eighth grader who described PBIS as helping students “do good,” also describes self-respect and pride, as well as why he feels like a role model when students “look up to him” and how he influences his friends:

And the little kids. It makes me feel good. It makes me feel happy when the little kids look up to me like that when I'm doing good. I want to be a role model, so if I do good they'll see me being good and they'll think about it in their head and they'll know how I think about myself. Sometimes the little kids look up to me as a role model.”

Anthony's comments blended a few sub-themes into his response. He described feeling good and happy about his reputation when he's recognized for doing well (self-respect) and serving as a role model to the younger students. Matty also described feeling proud when other students recognize he follows the school rules and his effort when trying to help other students follow the PBIS expectations. He also uses the words “show them,” implying he wants students to replicate his behavior:

I get 60s on my point cards. Almost always. It makes me feel proud. I try to help out the other kids, the younger kids, and try to help my peers. I try to correct them, and try to show them which ways to go. If they're doing bad, I try to help them do good. If they're doing something they're not supposed to do, I just correct them and tell them to do something good instead. I can show them how to be good. Like, they look up to me because I'm doing a good job. They might want to follow me if I'm good.

Seventh-grade Trevon's perspective displays aspects of self-identity in this statement, that he may be subject to some students teasing him about his compliance, but he chooses to

follow rules “expectationally” (Trevon’s own coined word describing following expectations) so that he can reinforce his identity and influence his reputation among other students by “spreading the word.”

Some of them, it makes them jealous and they start to hate me or something, and for other students, they want to be like me. Like younger kids or older students who might praise me for it. They might praise me because I'm doing a good job. And the younger kids? Well, they might look at me as a role model. Well, some of them don't really like when they know I'm doing good because they might bully me send a text or call me teacher’s pet and stuff like that. But when the students know that I'm doing good, it makes me feel good because sometimes they’re like, ‘Good job,’ or say good things about me, and then spread the word.

Trevon’s statement captured several sub-themes under reputation, including self-identity, self-respect, and identifying himself as a role model. The term role model also includes a self-report, like Matty, that students want peers to replicate or imitate their “good” behaviors.

Richard, the seventh grader who earlier discussed how the adults at the school showed they cared by their “tough love,” described his role as the leader in the classroom, having influence over his classmates, and that the adults recognize his leadership qualities.

I would say I'm the leader of my classroom because I'm the oldest and I just know all my staff (the adults in the classroom and on the 7th grade floor) know that I take leadership. Because if I start talking then everybody's gonna want to start talking. If I start doing something, then everybody wants to do it. Or if I ask to play the Wii, everybody's gonna ask to play the Wii. Or if Miss Shepherd gave me like a hug or something, everybody's gonna want to be asked to get a hug. It's just basically they all just follow after me. I feel

leadership, I mean, I'm a teenager now so I feel more leadership. I'm like the older brother in my class, I'm kind of, I would say I'm like the oldest. I think I'm the second oldest but I still control. I tell them what to do. But the only reason I have leadership like that is because my mom was a manager for a company—I forget what company it was called—and my dad is the manager for trucks at [a local university] so I feel like I get leadership from them, and my older brother and sister. So that's why I think I get leadership.

Richard's beliefs about his "leadership" have many implications. He frequently uses the word "leadership" and explained assuming a leadership role to be imitated. He also states that adults recognize him as a leader and has a sense of self identity in the social context as a "leader," "big brother," and "being the oldest." Richard also refers to "having control over his peers" which appears to mean he influences them, citing mostly positive interactions with adults and peers. He appears to recognize age as one reason students "follow," but also describes being a teenager as maturing into a role that students should follow him.

Interestingly, Richard states he "gets" leadership, meaning he understands what it means to have leadership qualities as a result of his family influence, mother and father who "manage" in their vocations, and older brother and sister, from whom he "gets leadership." It appears that managing, leadership, and having other follow in positive ways are values developed at home.

Results Summary

This section outlined the findings of the exploratory qualitative study about the approach used to develop a social culture in an alternative school for children with emotional and severe behavioral disabilities. PBIS was used as an adult-driven, evidence-based practice identified to reduce non-compliant behaviors, restraints, and establish a safe and orderly educational

environment for kindergarten through eighth grade students in this setting. Strategies at the universal tier included: setting expectations for behaviors, teaching the expectations, implementing point sheets, using a token reward system, and making data-driven decisions about student levels of intervention. Tier II and Tier III interventions included CICO and highly individualized interventions related to student need.

All students who participated in the study could identify the school's PBIS expectations as *Be Safe, Be Respectful, and Be Responsible*. While students could identify behaviors explicitly taught for each of these expectations in the classroom, students would refer to some behaviors that were explicitly taught as one category of expectation (e.g., *be respectful*), could be described and justified in any of the three categories (*be safe, be respectful, or be responsible*). Within that language, certain words were repeated in the students' own words to describe behaviors for these expectations, including variations on the words "nice/nicely," "calm," "patient," and "don't get mad." Additional words that were repeated were "being safe" and being recognized as rule-followers, evidenced on their point cards by "getting 60's."

Five major themes emerged from student interviews regarding the common experiences shared among participants: 1) disruptive behaviors are a norm, 2) peer rule violations, 3) restraints, 4) adult inconsistencies with PBIS expectations, and 5) adults nurture caring relationships. Within the disruptive behaviors as a cultural norm, students reported that they are self-aware they attend their alternative special education school because of their behaviors, and can sometimes influence peers into disruptive behaviors. Students stated that they were generally frustrated and distressed by the chaotic environment set by their peers who frequented rule violations and non-compliant behaviors, and reported a desire to "get out" of the school. Students reported that their peers' non-compliance was because of: being new, power struggles,

anger, not using coping strategies, their apathetic attitudes (they “don’t care”), defiance, peer acceptance, and influence from their home environments.

Disruptive behavior as the cultural norm and peer rule violations also had an effect on the participants’ perceptions of the intensity of physical restraints performed on students, causing them physical and emotional distress. Some students believed that adult inconsistencies with their PBIS expectations contributed to power struggles with students and a lack of using de-escalation techniques paired with adult animosity appeared to trigger disruptive behaviors, rule violations, and restraints.

Students reported relationships with the adults were positive in nature: mutually respectful and caring. When describing caring adults, students identified adults as offering emotional and academic help to students and helping students “calm down.” Some students recognized that adults helped motivate them to identify values in themselves and to “do good.”

When describing how students would have responded in the study scenario, most stated they would have complied with the school’s PBIS expectations. Students articulated following rules were “the right thing to do” and described how their behaviors show they “do good” in school, and those behaviors affect or define their reputation. Sub-themes that emerged as personal characteristics and values toward the social culture included integrity, self-respect, self-identity, and having an influence over other students, as a role model, to imitate or replicate their “good” behaviors. The qualities that made feel students “feel good” about themselves and their influential nature were having pride, confidence, and an adherence to the moral and ethical application of following the rules.

Chapter 5 will include the findings of Chapter 4 and present a summary of the results, discussion, interpretations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The tentative findings of this study describe that a PBIS approach is a complex system and can be effective in developing a prosocial culture and school climate that reflects norms, values, perceptions of safety, and interpersonal relationships in an alternative special education setting. Additional findings may suggest that in a PBIS approach, social competence is the knowledge that all students know the rules and expectations and adherence to those conditions may affect the relationships between students and teachers as an indicator of the prosocial culture and school climate. As stated in Chapter 2, PBIS is particularly relevant in changing school and social climate in settings that require attention to the student populations needing prosocial skills training and consideration of school environment design to discourage problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2009). When implemented with fidelity, adults drive the instruction and modeling of the shared language and behaviors experienced in all locations in a school. Students in this type of setting have demonstrated social competence, meaning they can learn the knowledge and skills to value the common language and behaviors across school settings. While students can be taught the language and behaviors to access extrinsic rewards, developing moral character also appears to have importance, as students' feelings of self-fulfillment shift the focus from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic motivation of valuing the PBIS social culture.

Summary of Results

This exploratory qualitative study was designed to understand the approach used to develop a social culture in an alternative special education school for children with emotional and severe behavioral disabilities and trauma-based behaviors, and how that approach was implemented. A secondary purpose was to understand the student perspective of their social

culture and identify what students know about their common language, experiences, and values in the PBIS approach.

A total of 28 male and female students in grades 4-8 who were identified as successful in the universal tier of PBIS supports voluntarily participated in the study. The researcher used qualitative strategies: document review, semi-structured student interviews, member checks, informal observations, and focus groups. Upon data analysis, themes regarding common language, common experiences, and common values were identified as aspects of the social culture in the school using PBIS as their approach to create a positive and safe learning environment.

What is the Approach Used to Establish the Social Culture?

In answering the central question “What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an AE setting implementing PBIS?” and “How are those conditions cultivated?” the document review and evidence of implementation fidelity suggested that adults and students accepted the school’s PBIS expectations, which was a significant factor in driving the school’s PBIS social culture. Informal observations evidenced implementation of the Universal tier as teachers and other staff taught and re-taught lessons, collected and tracked data at all tiered levels, met regularly to analyze data at weekly structured meetings, and used a token economy system to proactively reinforce and reward compliant behaviors. Students described the use of their point cards in many instances making direct connections to the PBIS approach, explained their understanding of how the system was tracked, and how they could earn and access rewards when complying with the PBIS expectations.

What Do Students Know About their Social Culture?

In answering the research question, “What do students know about their social culture?” themes about the social culture were organized under the conceptual model that a social culture

is comprised of shared language, shared experiences, and shared values (Horner & Sugai, 2002).

Themes that emerged from student data concerning common language included the PBIS expectations (*Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible*), “being safe,” “getting 60s,” and words that describe “nice” behaviors. Common language phrases were used repeatedly in both the shared experiences and shared values themes.

As part of the social culture research question, students were asked about their common experiences. When answering “Do you follow the PBIS expectations? How does PBIS affect you? Do other students follow the PBIS expectations, Why or why not?” of “What does it look like when you or they do not follow the PBIS expectations?” five main themes emerged: 1) disruptive behaviors are a cultural norm, 2) peer rule violations, 3) restraints, 4) adult inconsistencies with PBIS expectations, and 5) relationships with adults. Students cited anger, power struggles, apathy, peer acceptance, and home influence as reasons their peers cause disruption.

Students also disclosed the disruptive environment caused them frustration and distress as a common feeling, and a shared goal to “get out” of the school. A second aspect of the social norm was students’ perceptions about safety and restraints. They mostly cited adults’ inconsistencies with the PBIS expectations as an antecedent to unsafe situations, which may have led to the physical restraint of students. Their perceptions included adults (a) did not use de-escalation techniques (“could have done something else”) prior to a restraint, (b) power struggles with students, (c) disrespectful adult behaviors, and (d) animosity. When watching a physical restraint, students disclosed physical and emotional hurt as their perceptions of restraints in the school.

The last theme in common experiences was the general feeling students had that the adults in the school had caring relationships with the students. The students identified that adults “help” students “calm down,” with academics, and in general. Students also stated that adults and students have mutual respect for each other and that adults are tolerant of disruptive behaviors to help everyone “be safe.”

The final theme organized under common values regarded students’ reputations as being known as following the PBIS expectations and “doing good.” Students reported values and obligation to “do good.” Among their values were sub-themes as integrity, self-respect, self-identity, and serving as a role model. Many students referred to “getting 60s” as a way of evidencing their compliance to the PBIS expectations and being recognized as students who “do good” as an identifier of their reputation.

Discussion

In order for readers to understand the importance of the summary findings, it is first necessary to understand this study in context of the literature about school climate. Anderson (1982) conducted a review of descriptive research and school climate: 1) schools possess unique climates; 2) differences are complex and influenced by unique school-specific characteristics (i.e., student population); 3) climate affects student outcomes in areas including academics, behavior, values, and satisfaction; and 4) school climate studies will improve the understanding of student behavior.

VCS was composed of truly unique characteristics, including an entire population of students identified with Emotional Disturbance and severe physical aggression and behavioral issues, as well as an array of acute mental health concerns and trauma histories. At least one-third of the student population were active clients in the RTF for emotional care, the most restrictive mental health setting. An entire school population needing that type of intense social

and emotional support coupled with aggressive behaviors would need a comprehensive behavioral approach to create a positive and safe school climate by teaching pro-social behaviors. As PBIS has been proven to reduce problem behaviors in AE schools, using intensified interventions at each level, PBIS appeared to be a wise choice for developing a positive social climate in this particular alternative special education school.

Yet, even with a PBIS approach implemented with fidelity in place, the very nature of the student population appeared to create a climate of maladaptive behaviors and barriers to student learning even for those identified as successful at the universal tier of intensified support. Students described physical and emotional distress from watching or having previously been the recipients of physical restraints, an action that adults use to maintain the safety of a student that exhibits extremely dangerous behaviors. Several students referred to “getting out” of the school, and stated they comply with PBIS expectations in hope of demonstrating independent behavior management so they could return to a “regular school.” Students identified the constant emotional and physical distress as barriers to satisfaction with the school climate.

As stated in Chapter Two, school climate refers to the experiences of school life and reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structure (NSCC, 2007). The students in this study appear to function in a difficult school climate, where disruptive behaviors are the social norm and appear to affect student’s values, relationships with adults and other students, and ability to access learning within the school environment. Yet, these students demonstrated social competence in the PBIS social culture, appeared to understand the behavioral standards, and demonstrated the expected behaviors.

What Do Students Know About the Social Culture that Makes Them Socially Competent?

Akin to school climate, social climate refers to the social rules about school behaviors (Cushing, 2000). Furthering this understanding in relation to PBIS, Sugai & Horner (2002) stated that a PBIS social culture is made of a common language, common experiences, and common values. In theory, the social culture creates a level playing field where all students, regardless of their backgrounds can be held to the same behavioral standards (Horner et al, 2001). Students are expected to learn and demonstrate each of these components of the social culture. In this study, students articulated a knowledge of PBIS expectations, skills that demonstrated knowledge, and values and buy-in about the PBIS social culture.

Knowledge of PBIS expectations. Using language to demonstrate the PBIS expectations was one indicator of social competence, as every student was expected to know the words and behaviors as part of the school social culture. Students in this study identified the PBIS expectations “be safe, be respectful, and be responsible” as their common language, in addition to adding colloquial phrases like “getting 60s” that meant receiving a perfect score on daily point sheets. Additional words that described desirable, “nice” behaviors also appeared to be part of the common language: calm, patient, and “didn’t get mad,” as described in data analysis. While most of the student responses about the PBIS language were prompted from the semi-structured interviews, students were able to use the language freely and independently to describe behaviors they identified as being safe, respectful, and responsible.

Recognition of behaviors. Another aspect of social competence was the transfer and demonstration of the common language into desired behaviors in various locations of the school environment. In the classroom setting, students could describe the behaviors that demonstrated understanding and following the expected behaviors, including receiving feedback, raising their hand, completing work, and following directions. These components of the PBIS social culture

can be readily explained because the language and behaviors were explicitly taught by the adults, and re-taught as needed when school-wide data was reviewed and problem-discussed at weekly meetings.

Knowledge and skills of expected behaviors. Students described a very esoteric vernacular as a demonstration of knowledge and behaviors. The expression “getting 60’s” appeared to be a common understanding among members of the school community. Students and staff knew that point cards totaled 60 points and “getting 60s” meant that the student received a perfect score. Students later described “getting 60s” as a contribution to their reputation, which they were recognized by staff and peers that they knew, understood, and demonstrated compliance with the expectations. “Getting 60s” was unique to VCS and evidence of an all-school knowledge and skill demonstration of the expectations and behaviors.

Student values and buy-in. Many students referred to “getting 60s” as evidence of “doing good.” In addition to adhering to the language and behaviors, students valued the social norms as an identifier of their reputation. Student reported perceptions about their reputation in association with feelings of integrity, self-respect, self-identity, and serving as a role model. These values appear to represent intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards to shape students’ pro-social behaviors. Acknowledgement of these values may indicate that students in this environment may respond to the PBIS approach, despite having been unsuccessful with similar approaches in less restrictive settings. Additionally, it appears that students can buy into the values set by the adults, even in alternative special education settings, where previous research suggested that perceptions of adults had been documented historically as believing students in this environment would not respond to PBIS (Sprague et al. 2013).

Regarding school climate and culture, the students' knowledge of the language and expectations, demonstrated skills and behaviors, and discussion about their values and buy-in suggest that students are socially competent. From the students' perspective, adherence to these expectations is a condition of the social culture, and appears to affect the relationships students have with their teachers and with each other. More specifically, students recognized their dissatisfaction with the school climate regarding their perceptions of safety and restraints, and with student relationships when their peers disrupted the social culture by not adhering to conditions that were known and expected among all students. Students' perceived dissatisfaction with the school climate and culture also indicated they recognized their needs in the environment from the adults and their peers.

What Students Need from Adults

These findings appear to suggest that adults—administrators, teachers, and classroom staff—actively use the PBIS approach as part of the school's instructional culture. Adults at VCS were observed teaching, modeling and rewarding behaviors, instructing teachable moments to de-escalate extreme behaviors, and motivating students to comply with the expectations. In addition, adults developed relationships with their students and intended to develop an atmosphere of safety and security as an indicator of the school climate.

Positive relationships. In past research, Cohen et al. (2009) and Thapa et al (2013) described school climate as the character of school life and the dimensions of school settings, respectively. In both studies, rules, norms and interpersonal relationships defined culture in the teaching and learning environment. The students in this study identified that adults follow the school rules and “help” students “calm down” with academics and in general. Students described feeling that the teachers care about them. Among adult-student relationships, students

believed that adults and students had mutual respect; adults are tolerant of disruptive behaviors and known for “being in their shoes,” talking to them, and motivating them. Adults who built positive relationships with the students appeared to understand them and their emotional and behavioral needs to help them feel safe and secure. These positive adult-student relationships appeared to help develop a sense of school community as part of the social culture.

Consistent with the literature, relationships are an important part of establishing and sharing a vision of a school community. It appears that students in this school valued the positive relationships with the adults, who structured a learning environment that appeared safe and trustworthy. However, some students reported that they understood appropriate adult behaviors in the school, and could identify when adults were inconsistent with the expected adult behaviors and safety protocols. While some adults would apologize to repair a relationship with students, some adults were described as unaccepting of students’ behaviors as part of their disability. Students very clearly defined when they believed adults liked or disliked them, and their perception of feeling or “being safe” with these adults varied depending on their perception of being accepted.

Consistency with the PBIS approach and safety protocols. Another component of creating or sustaining a positive school culture is the promotion of a consistent, shared vision or values within the school (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Students described that the adults generally modeled the PBIS expectations and used safe behaviors, initiated mutual respect with the students, and were responsible when teaching classes or doing their adult work. Students appeared to understand when they were being treated in the same manner as their peers, regardless of their differences or in consequences for poor choices or inappropriate behaviors.

However, students clearly stated that they knew there were times that the adults did not follow safety procedures and could have “done something else” (remove students from the classroom). Students identified that their peers sometimes would engage in power struggles with adults and sometimes the escalated behaviors evolved into a physical restraint of a student. While adults are required to follow safety procedures when students exhibit dangerous behaviors, they may need to be mindful that in a social culture, students, as well as adults, understand protocols. Students appeared to know when adults were following the appropriate procedures and when they were not. Considering the emotional and mental health needs of the specific population, adults must remain calm and avoid power struggles with students and lessen the likelihood of physical altercations. Adults might benefit from mindfulness training and communication practices with other adults, and recognizing when they are engaged in power struggles with students.

What Students Need from Other Students

Adults in this study appear to drive the structure and instruction of expectations and model behaviors of the social culture. However, for PBIS to be effective, students must accept the responsibility of the knowledge, behaviors, and values of the social culture and being a member of the school community. Students who were described above as being socially competent appeared to have a duty to the adults and their peers in complying with expectations and demonstrating specific and desired behaviors.

Being part of a school community. Many students disclosed their awareness of personal and peers’ behavioral issues, and understood they—and their peers—had trouble managing behaviors in previous schools. As stated earlier, despite functioning in a school environment where disruption was the norm, these students demonstrated social competency. It

seems that the PBIS social culture does not exist merely because of the language and behaviors of the program itself, but also because the students and staff can acknowledge their feelings of caring, tolerance, and connectedness. In other words, their feelings appear to create deep meaning of the PBIS social culture and impression of school community.

Obligation to hold peers accountable. While common language and common behaviors are perhaps observably measureable, feelings appear to create the school community necessary to form a social culture. The language and behaviors are expected to be followed as a social norm, and the relationships students have with adults and peers seem to imply accountability. Students described feelings of self-identity, self-respect, and integrity, which students described as what makes them feel good about themselves. Students also described being influencers and role models. Having an ability to influence peer behaviors can ultimately influence the strength of the relationships and can set the tone of whether peers follow norms. In either case, they are holding peers accountable and influencing behaviors and responsiveness of their relationships. Having been influenced by positive peer pressure and peer acceptance may help all students value the system of expected behaviors, since acceptance may help them feel more successful.

In the literature, students have been reportedly removed from least restrictive settings due to a range of reasons: emotional and behavioral disabilities, having been victims of physical abuse, having intensive mental health issues. Students having these experiences require intensive support, belonging, security and assistance coping with their needs in a school setting (Scott & Cooper, 2013). To achieve acceptance and belonging, students need to be part of a school community, where adults and students have to understand each other, build relationships with each other, and learn to accept each other as individuals with specific needs. Skills acquisition in these areas could aid all students to feel included and accepted.

Practicing empathy and tolerance. Students described feeling annoyed with peers that were disrespectful, in particular, to the adults. Students described in detail a number of reasons for disruption, including their peers being new and unfamiliar with the school, gaining control over the adults or situations through power struggles, general anger and apathy, difficult home influences, and peer social acceptance. It presents that these disruptions weakened the connectedness and relationships between adults and students and students with their peers. Students expressed frustration with their peers for disrespectful behaviors. Like the adults, students need to develop their tolerance to annoying peer behaviors and practice empathetic skills to lessen their frustration and maintain the positive relationships with adults and peers.

Students described having empathy for students experiencing physical restraints. While students understood restraints were for safety reasons, they also understood the experience from the student viewpoint. These feelings of distress indicate that students and their peers already have connectivity to one another because they can feel so deeply from observing a restraint. Students who continually develop empathetic skills could build stronger relationships with each other and help peers negotiate for their needs. While adults teach skills like tolerance, students need to practice the skills as part of the school community.

While the conceptual model was presented (Horner & Sugai, 2003) it seems there is a dearth literature about the importance of instilling values in students for them to buy- into the PBIS system, yet, without an understanding why it is important to “do good” or “do the right thing” there would only be a system of being rewarded for positive behavior. To be part of a social culture of a school, students need a values system as part of the culture to help them make the individual choice to be part of the culture and to create the culture.

Implications for Practice

The tentative findings of this study describe that a PBIS approach is a complex system and can be effective in developing a prosocial culture in an alternative special education setting. When implemented with fidelity, adults drive the instruction of the shared language and behaviors experienced in all locations in a school. Students in this type of setting have demonstrated social competence, meaning they can learn the knowledge and skills to value the common language and behaviors across school settings. While students can be taught the language and behaviors to access extrinsic rewards, developing moral character also appears to have importance, as students' feelings of self-fulfillment shift the focus from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic motivation of valuing the PBIS social culture. Therefore, adults should teach character education in this setting to ensure that students receive direct instruction of values that contribute to the internal development of a child's moral character. The shift from extrinsic rewards to internal motivation occurs when students value the internal relationship more than the external reward.

Educators need to develop strong interpersonal and genuine relationships with students to help them relate to students and develop trust, learning, and to accept the norms and values of the social culture. Students appear to hold accountability of themselves and their peers to the social norms within the PBIS social culture when they have a developed sense of ethical responsibility to the school community. Educators should consider the importance of developing values and character education as part of the skills students need to be successful in the school community.

Research Limitations

While this exploratory qualitative study was designed to examine the PBIS social culture by means of student perspective, it was not conducted without some limitations to the study, including sample size, researcher bias, and access to additional data collection.

A total of 28 students participated in the study; approximately five from each grade 4th through 8th grades. While the intention was to capture a representation to understand social culture across the school, it appeared that each grade level provided more specific information than others. Additionally, it is unknown how deeply students in the entire school population, including younger grades that were not included in this study, feel about observing physical restraints and the level of distress they feel emotionally or physically in those events.

A second limitation is potential researcher bias. While stated earlier in this study, the researcher was employed at the site of the school prior to and during the data collection periods of this study. While the researcher examined personal assumptions, followed a scripted protocol to avoid leading questions during the interview process, and did not directly hold any obligations over students for participating or not participating, it is possible that students withheld information or their perspectives on any of the questions.

A last limitation was the exclusion of the teacher perspective. It may have been helpful to also interview adults for their perspectives about when students observe their peers in a physical restraint, and how that observation may or may not affect the social culture and school climate. It is also unknown if participating as an adult in a physical restraint of a child affects their relationships with students, therefore altering the climate and culture.

Future Research

While providing an intensified PBIS approach was designed to improve student outcomes and teach pro-social behaviors for at-risk youth (Scott & Cooper, 2013), an argument can be made that the acuity of the mental health needs of this specifically unique population may need to be further researched, understood in a school setting, and treated before the components of a PBIS system can improve the social culture. An unexpected finding of this study was that of all

the study participants, none were undergoing treatment in the RTF at the time. This could indicate that the students who were identified as successful at the Universal tier of support were emotionally stable enough to buy into a school system with behavioral expectations. Emotional stability may also imply students could access feeling part of the school community, by being able to understand each other, build relationships with adults and peers, and tolerate and empathize with disruptive students.

In relation to this study, and to further the body of literature about school climate, future research could examine the effects of trauma treatment in alternative special education schools to better understand student behaviors, school readiness, and the ability to accept and comply with school expectations while undergoing trauma treatment.

Trauma-informed training and beliefs. Considering the population of this school, students identified with Emotional Disturbance and acute mental health needs, require a highly trained and informed adult staff with sensitivity to the emotional and physical symptoms of trauma and the behaviors associated with related disorders (SAMHASA, 2014). Trauma-informed practices may help adults practice tolerance of behaviors as they are trained to shift their understanding of traditional behavior models to understanding the child's needs. Trauma informed approaches are appropriate to the population of VCS, and would help the adults maintain safety and raise their awareness of when students who may be responding to the effects of trauma, are uncomfortable or distressed.

Understanding trauma in students may lead adults and educators to better understand a school climate with these specific needs, which may improve relationships, trustworthiness, with students and the effectiveness of the PBIS approach. A trauma lens is referred as a metaphor for an altered way of thinking for those who have not considered thinking previously of the effects

of trauma. Trauma-informed may encompass all types of mental health, mindfulness, child welfare, or other supports, which may be built into the secondary and tertiary interventions, PBIS approach. Future research may help educators understand how incorporating trauma-informed thinking may allow for more students to access and buy into the values of a PBIS system in an alternative special education setting.

Counsel students after they observe a physical restraint. Even with a rigorous proactive PBIS program in place, students reported watching a physical restraint, when warranted, caused them emotional distress, and those that were recipients of the restraint reported having physical pain. In this school's physical restraint protocol, students were examined by a medical professional and engaged in a relationship-repair exercise with the staff in the restraint or the staff that triggered the behaviors. According to students in this study, many described emotional distress from merely watching the physical restraint. While the protocol includes the student involved, additional support could be provided to students who observed the restraint. Adults could counsel student observers and discuss their emotional responses to physical restraints, as part of the protocol, or provide other opportunities for students to seek counsel from a school counselor, social worker, or other certified professional. The stronger the relationships with adult, especially when students believe they are cared for and about, the more likely students may feel comfortable with the school environment.

Teach values-based education. Students described their understanding of their own values and reputation, and more so, a desire to "do good." Students that identified "doing the right thing" held to a moral code, showed integrity, and felt pride and satisfaction about their ability to comply with the expectations. Some students may have values education from their previous school, from home, or from another sources. In a school that utilizes PBIS to teach pro-

social behaviors, the instruction of values and helping students build skills that support character education (taking responsibility, providing community service) may aid students in the positive feelings associated with following rules and norms, and helping students understand feelings like self-respect, self-identity, integrity, and leadership. These characteristics are consistent with the students' perceptions of themselves as members of the school community. While this qualitative study identified moral and ethical self-characteristics students felt in their social culture, future researchers could consider quantifiable measurements to understand the interconnectedness between adults and students, as well as connectivity among students.

Social validity. A last suggestion for future research regarded the Farkas et al. (2012) study about social validity—in its simplest form—to measure how well a social program is embraced by those who are targeted to benefit from it. Lane, Kalberg, Bruhn, et al. ((2009); Frey et al (2010; Farkas et al., (2012), and Miramontes et al. (2011) all described efforts in assessing social validity when implementing PBIS, particularly in conjunction with intervention fidelity among stakeholder (teacher and student) evaluations. In suggesting future research on social validity, researchers may consider evaluating whether or not the goals of implemented programs best serve the client and impact positive and desired changes the adults set forth in the approach. To do so may necessitate having students describe what they need from a PBIS approach, implement strategies for the students' needs, and evaluate if the program successfully met changes needed according to the students. Additionally, future research may include a development index or readiness indicator of adults' perceptions to measure their belief if students in this type of setting can be successful. Understanding what assumptions adults have about their values as positive influencers over their students and the values of students in these types of alternative education programs has yet to be determined.

Information and conclusions from the study can be used to help educators lean insight into their students' values of the social culture for continuous improvement and effectiveness of the PBIS approach in their school, as well as implications for helping develop school community in an alternative special education school.

Conclusion

It would seem reasonable to assume students in any school setting that follow a rigorously implemented PBIS approach with defined and explicitly taught expectations would share a common language and describe expected behaviors, regardless of the dynamics or characteristics of the population. The PBIS approach at VCS appeared to be adult-driven and implemented with fidelity. VCS reached fidelity implementations acknowledgements for Universal and tiered levels of support in consecutive years. Strategies for the Universal level included observed instances of adults setting the expectations for behavior, re-teaching expectations regularly, modeling and prompting expected behaviors, using token economy systems, using student behavioral data for decision-making strategies at all Tier-level review meetings, implementing intensified strategies at Tier II (CICO), and having administrative and staff buy-in: modeling and rewarding students who complied with PBIS expectations.

This study shed new light on the student perception and helped answer questions about their understanding of the PBIS social culture. Despite historical adult beliefs that PBIS could not be successful with the population of students having ED, mental health and behavioral challenges, students in this study demonstrated being socially competent in regard to their PBIS social culture. Students demonstrated knowledge and skills with the common language and behaviors across various locations in the school environment; then described characteristics

about themselves that identified them as having a moral code and obligation to the school rules and developing their reputation as rule followers.

Students described having specific influencing and role model skills that could be attributed to their development of strong interpersonal relationships with adults and other students. The combination of having knowledge, skills, and experiences in a prosocial school environment may lead to determining quality of life outcomes for these students.

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Appendix A

Tables

Table 1

Chronology of the Legislative Acts Addressing Safe Schools in the United States (Congress.gov; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2016)

| Year | Act | Relevance |
|------|--|---|
| 1965 | Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Pub. L. 89-10 | “War on Poverty” federal funds designed to close reading, writing and mathematics skill gaps for students from low-income and low-performing schools (Title I). |
| 1994 | Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) Pub. L. 103-382 | Revision of the original ESEA (1965) |
| 1994 | Gun-Free Schools Act Title IV, Part A, Subpart 3, Section 4141 | Provision in IASA requiring each state receiving federal funds to expel for at least one year any student having brought a weapon to school. |
| 2002 | No Child Left Behind (NCLB) et seq. Pub. L. 107-110 | Revision of the original ESEA (1965) |
| 2002 | Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Title IV, Part A—21 st Century Schools, Section 7101 | Provision in NCLB to prevent drug use and abuse violence in and around schools, involve parents and communities, and foster a safe and drug-free learning environment that promotes student academic achievement. |
| 2015 | Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Pub. L. 114-95 | Revision of NCLB (2002) |
| 2015 | Safe and Healthy Schools | Plans to reduce exclusionary discipline; supports LEAS to impellent mental health awareness, training, de-escalation training, |

| | |
|---|---|
| Title IV, Part A—21 st Century Schools, Subpart vii, section | school-based counseling and mental health programs; disseminate best practices to promote student safety and violence prevention. |
|---|---|

Table 2

Participants and sample size

| Grade | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---------|------|-------|-------|
| Fourth | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Fifth | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Sixth | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Seventh | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Eighth | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| Total | 19 | 9 | 28 |

Table 3

Relationship of the Research Questions to the Methodology

| Research Question | Method | Data Source |
|---|---|------------------------|
| What is the approach used to establish the social culture in an AE setting? | Review of the literature: systemic structure and development of PBIS in AE settings. Fidelity measures. | Literature Review |
| | Document Analysis: review of incident and discipline reports (e.g., number of office referrals, restraints; | School behavioral data |
| | | School PBIS Handbook |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| How are those conditions cultivated? | number of students in Tier I, II and III interventions, intervention data). Also examination of PBIS Handbook in site school (systemic structure, common language, purpose of the PBIS program at the site school). School's PBIS fidelity measures: SET to ensure program is implemented to fidelity; other measures unique to school site. | School PBIS fidelity records, SET, other school-specific data |
| What do students know about the common language of their school's PBIS social culture, and how do they use it? | | Field notes, school posters, banners |
| What are the students' common experiences and how do they contribute to the social culture? | Observations: record field notes in various locations of the school setting for natural context of PBIS expectations: events, interactions, behaviors, experiences among students and staff. | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>What do students know about this PBIS social culture?</p> | <p>Document analysis: examination of PBIS Handbook in site school (common language, purpose of the PBIS program at the site school, lesson plans for teaching the PBIS expectations).</p> | <p>School PBIS Handbook, PBIS lesson plans</p> |
| <p>What do students know about the social culture that make them socially competent?</p> | | <p>PBIS lesson plans</p> |
| <p>What do students understand about how their own behaviors affect the school’s social culture; in other words, do they buy into shared values?</p> | <p>Semi-structured interviews: develop and read scenarios created from the school’s PBIS lesson plans; ask students what the student in the scenario should do according to the school’s PBIS expectations. Probe for how and why they would respond to the scenarios.</p> | <p>Researcher-made scenarios from lesson plans</p> |
| <p>What do students need from adults?</p> | | <p>Student answer sheets</p> |
| <p>What do students need from each other?</p> | <p>Focus Groups: students review their answers about scenarios taken from PBIS lessons in their school during semi-structured interviews; engage in group discussions to answer questions about the shared values of the school. Record answers.</p> | <p>Interview notes</p> |
| <p>What are students’ obligations to each other?</p> | | <p>Student answer sheets</p> |
| <p>What are students’ obligations to everyone else?</p> | | <p>Focus group notes</p> |

Table 5

Behaviors listed for VCS Classroom Expectations and Student Responses to Interview Questions

| Be Safe | Be Respectful | Be Responsible |
|--|---|---|
| Expectations on Classroom Poster | | |
| Keep hands/feet to yourself | Use inside voice | Accept feedback |
| Stay in assigned area | Use kind words | Follow directions |
| Use equipment as intended | | Complete work |
| | | Wear school uniform |
| Student Interview Responses | | |
| Didn't run out of classroom (11) | Raised hand (16) | Gave pencil back to peer instead of just keeping it (15) |
| <u>Didn't get mad</u> ; didn't say, "I want to do it NOW!" or "Arrgh!" Didn't throw a fit, flip tables, hit anyone or freak out (10) | Was <u>patient</u> ; said okay when asked to go back to work (13) | Finished his work (9) |
| Complied with teacher request, finished work (6) | Asked <u>nicely</u> to peer for pencil (13) | Followed directions; didn't just get up (5) |
| Was <u>patient</u> (5) | <u>Didn't get mad</u> (when teacher corrected) him; didn't flip out; accepted feedback (10) | Didn't break her pencil, lose it, snatch it or steal it (5) |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Talked in a <u>calm</u> voice; | Used manners; said | Came back to class |
| said “I will do it again” and | please and thank you (7) | from water fountain (3) |
| did it (3) | Responded <u>nicely</u> to | Raised hand |
| Walked down the hallway | teacher (5) | Didn’t go “all crazy” or |
| <u>nicely</u> ; came right back to | Didn’t yell (2) | throw stuff around (3) |
| classroom (3) | Got back to work | Was “very cool about |
| Just “tried again” (3) | Didn’t walk out of | the situation” |
| Didn’t grab the pencil or | classroom | Used pencil the right |
| hurt anyone with the pencil | Was <u>calm</u> | way |
| (3) | | |
| Asked <u>nicely</u> (2) | | |
| Raised his hand (2) | | |
| Didn’t call out | | |

Table 6

Do other students follow the PBIS expectations?

| No (5) | | Sometimes (16) | | Yes (4) |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| No. (5) | Not all the time. (2) | Not all of them. (2) | Sometimes. (2) | Yeah, most of them. (3) |
| | Not all the time, but sometimes. (1) | Not all of them, but like I don’t want to | Sometimes; no. (1) | |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| use a percentage for like a handful amount; the people that I mean, like a handful of people, do follow the directions. (1) The kids may not normally do it. (1) | Some of them do, some of them don't. (1) Sometimes yes, but a little bit no. (1) Sometimes they do. (1) Some of us. (1) Only a couple do. (1) When they feel like it and when they want to. (1) | Yes, but sometimes the adults even get stuff wrong. (1) |
|--|---|---|

Table 7

Student Responses to "What Would You Have Done?" in Lesson Scenario

| Response | Number of Students |
|---|--------------------|
| "Yes, I would have done what Johnny did." | 11 |

| | |
|--|---|
| “Yes, I would probably have done what Johnny did.” | 9 |
| “I would have done something else.” | 6 |
| Did not answer this question. | 2 |

Appendix B

Figures

Figure 1

PBIS Social Culture (Horner, Sugai & Rossetto Dickey, PBIS.org)

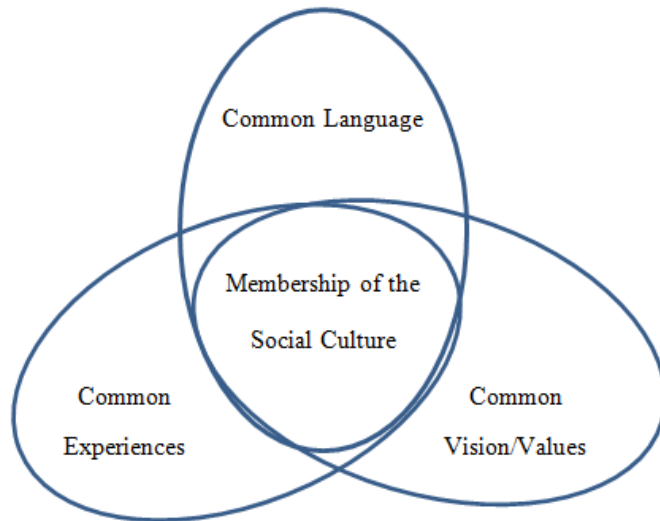


Figure 2

Three-Tiered Framework and Prevention Logic (Horner & Sugai, 2002)

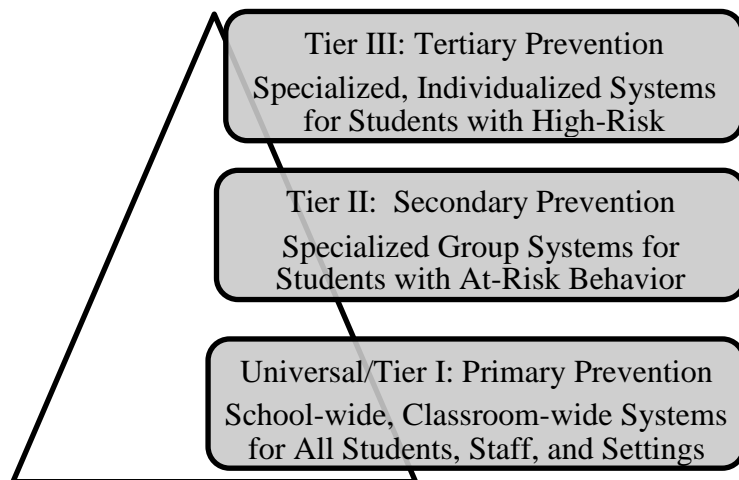
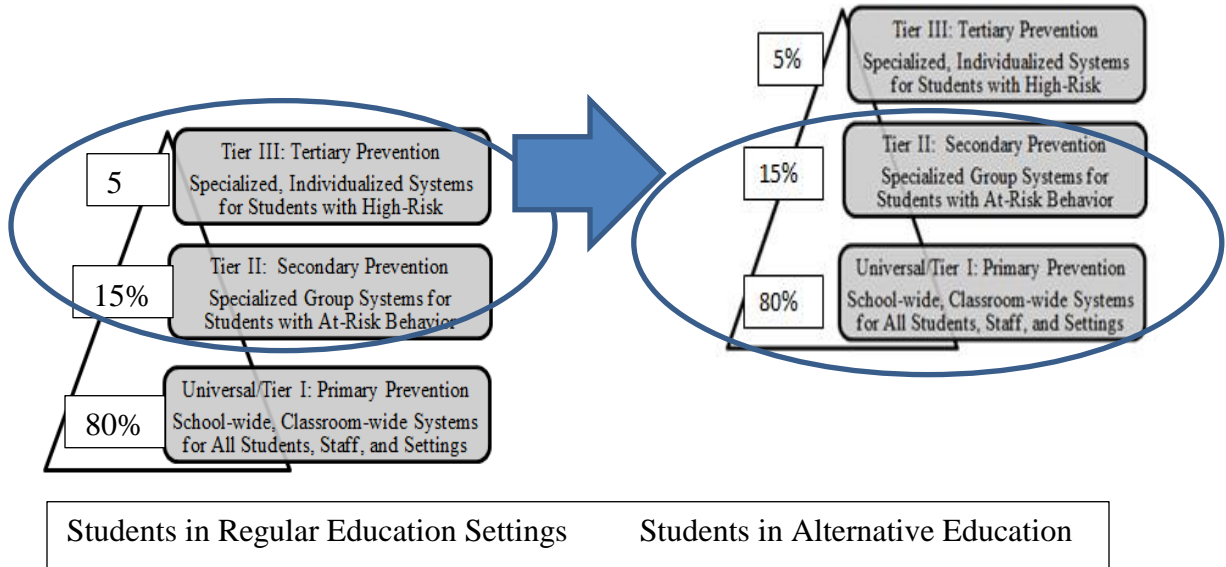


Figure 3

Alternative and Regular Education Students Represented in the PBIS Intervention Hierarchy



Appendix C

Participant Consent Form for Doctoral Dissertation Research Study

Introduction

This consent form provides you with information so you can make a decision as to whether your child will participate in this study. Any questions you have will be answered by the researcher, who is an Arcadia University doctoral student.

Purpose of the study

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study about the School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (PBIS) program in your school. PBIS is a proactive behavior support system that uses positive language and rewards for students who comply with the school's expectations for behavior. More specifically, the researcher will ask students what they understand about what they value about the school's behavioral expectations, their experiences with PBIS, and how the social culture affects their behavior. The purpose of this research is to understand and define these social values, in students' own words, and understand their perspective.

Please note your child's participation is voluntary and he or she may decide to leave the study at any time. Students may also refuse to answer specific questions if they feel uncomfortable. As a parent, you may withdraw permission for your child's participation at any time, in which case any data collected will be destroyed. Withdrawal from the study will in no way affect your student's relationship with his or her teachers, administrators, or other staff.

Data Collection and Usage

Data collected for this study will be used to form part of my dissertation. Once completed, if you wish to receive a copy of the final dissertation I will happily provide you with an electronic copy.

Procedures

By signing this consent, your child agrees to participate in a personal interview about the PBIS program in his or her school. I will arrange a time and date which is convenient for your child; the interview will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. At a later date, I will review responses to interview questions so your child can clarify and verify any statements in a group of his or her peers. The second meeting will take approximately 20-30 minutes.

Risks and Benefits:

There are not foreseeable risks from participating in this study. The benefits of participation include having an opportunity as a student to describe the school's PBIS program and what is valuable and meaningful as a student in this community. The researcher must follow all legal guidelines that protect students from harm. There is no compensation or payment for participating in this study.

Statement of Privacy and Confidentiality

In the findings section of this study, the data presented will contain no identifying information that could associate any child with his or her interview responses. Also, all information will be kept confidential and students' names will be protected by the use of pseudonyms as needed.

Confirmation and Consent

I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in this research study. I have been informed on what participation means and I agree to the use of the findings as described above. I give permission for the interview to be recorded for the researcher to transcribe (type) my interview.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Student Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Maria Kreiter, Doctoral Student and Researcher

Arcadia University, Glenside, Pennsylvania

mkreiter@arcadia.edu

Appendix D

Interview Protocol and Scripted Lesson Scenario

Interview Type: One-on-One Structured Interview

Study: PBIS Social Culture in an Alternative Education Setting: What Do Students Know About Their Language, Experiences and Values?

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Maria Kreiter, Arcadia Doctoral Student

Interviewee:

Grade:

Structured Interview Script:

About the study: These questions are for my dissertation study about how PBIS is followed in your school and what you think about the language and experiences you've had. Since you've been successful in the program, I'm curious what you can tell me about the school's PBIS social culture. That means I'm going to ask you about the way students and staff talk to each other and if you can tell me about your experiences.

I'm going to record our conversation so that I can type it out later for my study. When I get all your answers typed, I'll check with you that I got what you think and make corrections if necessary.

Questions

I'm going to ask you a few questions about the PBIS lessons your teacher and staff members have taught you and your class.

1. What are your school's PBIS expectations? (If student needs prompting, ask *What are the words you know about PBIS?*)

{Researcher reads scenario from the school’s PBIS expectations in the classroom taken from the Classroom lesson from the PBIS handbook.}

I’m going to read a scenario for you from the classroom expectations lesson you learned about in class:

Johnny nicely asks Josie to borrow a pencil.

Josie says, “Sure, just give it back when you are done.”

A little later on, Johnny asks Mr. Taylor if he can get a drink. He raises his hand and waits until Mr. Taylor calls on him, and says, “Thank you for raising your hand, Johnny. I want you to finish your assignment first, and then you can get a drink.”

Johnny says, “Okay,” and gets back to work.

When Johnny finishes his worksheet, he raises his hand and waits until called upon to let Mr. Taylor know he is finished and would like to get a drink.

Mr. Taylor looks at his worksheet and says, “You did a great job, but you should look at number 4 again.”

Johnny says, “Okay” and gets back to work quietly. When he finishes, Mr. Taylor checks his paper and Johnny gets a drink.

When he gets back from his drink, Johnny says to Josie, “Thank you for letting me use your pencil,” and gives it back to Josie.

2. What should the student in this scenario (**Johnny**) do or say to show he knows the school PBIS expectations?
3. What experiences do you have with PBIS and the classroom? (If student needs prompting, ask *What would YOU do or say in this scenario?*)
4. How do these **experiences with PBIS** affect your behavior? Why?
5. Do students and adults follow the expectations? Why or why not?
6. How does your behavior affect the other students? What makes you think so?

Thank you so much for your time and for answering my questions. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

Interview Type: Focus Group

Study: *PBIS Social Culture in an Alternative Education Setting: What Do Students Know About Their Language, Experiences and Values?*

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Maria Kreiter, Arcadia Doctoral Student

Students in the Group:

Grade:

Structured Interview Script:

About the study: These questions are for my dissertation study about how PBIS is followed in your school and what you think about the language and experiences you've had. Since you've been successful in the program, I'm curious what you can tell me about the school's PBIS social culture. That means I'm going to ask you about the way students and staff talk to each other and if you can tell me about your experiences.

I'm going to record our conversation so that I can type it out later for my study. When I get all your answers typed, I'll check with you that I got what you think and make corrections if necessary.

Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that your responses will be anonymous in my final dissertation study. Because we are a small group your responses may not be completely confidential because the nature of a focus group is that you may be able to identify each other and what was said in the discussion. To help keep our answers private, I will be the only one to audio record and write the answers to the questions. We will follow all school rules, which includes no cell phones or electronic devices to record our group. Also, I will collect all papers and anything you write on that helps you form your answers to keep our discussion private and to help me reflect on our discussion when I type it later.

Questions

I asked each of you a few questions about the PBIS lessons your teacher and staff members have taught you and your class.

1. Before we **review the lesson**, can you tell me the school's PBIS expectations? (If student(s) needs prompting, ask *What are the words you know about PBIS?*)

{Researcher reviews the scenario from the school's PBIS expectations in the classroom taken from the Classroom lesson from the PBIS handbook.}

I'm going to read the same scenario I read to all of you from the classroom expectations lesson you learned about in class:

Johnny nicely asks Josie to borrow a pencil.

Josie says, "Sure, just give it back when you are done."

A little later on, Johnny asks Mr. Taylor if he can get a drink. He raises his hand and wits until Mr. Taylor calls on him, and says, "Thank you for raising your hand, Johnny. I want you to finish your assignment first, and then you can get a drink."

Johnny says, "Okay," and gets back to work.

When Johnny finishes his worksheet, he raises his hand and waits until called upon to let Mr. Taylor know he is finished and would like to get a drink.

Mr. Taylor looks at his worksheet and says, "You did a great job, but you should look at number 4 again."

Johnny says, "Okay" and gets back to work quietly. When he finishes, Mr. Taylor checks his paper and Johnny gets a drink.

When he gets back from his drink, Johnny says to Josie, "Thank you for letting me use your pencil," and gives it back to Josie.

2. What should the student in this scenario (Johnny) do or say to show he knows the school PBIS expectations?

3. What experiences do you have with PBIS and the classroom? (If student needs prompting, ask *What would YOU do or say in this scenario?*)
4. How do these experiences with PBIS affect your behavior? Why?
5. Do students and adults follow the expectations? Why or why not?
6. How does your behavior affect the other students? What makes you think so?
7. Does anyone think we've thought of anything differently today than you might have said in our one-on-one interviews? Why do you think your answers were the same or different?
8. What do you value, or think is important to you about our PBIS program? Why?

Thank you so much for your time and for answering my questions. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix F

Valley Creek School Classroom Lesson Plan

MATERIALS

- ❖ Classroom Poster

INTRODUCTION OF SKILL

- Instructor says: **"Today we are going to talk about the rules while we are in a classroom."**
- Instructor asks students: **"What do you think our behavior in the classroom should look like?"**
 - Have students provide examples of how they should behave in the classroom.
 - Shape their responses into observable behaviors.

- Instructor says: **"Those are excellent ideas for how we should behave in the classroom. Additionally, there are a few others rules I think we should have..."**
 - Point to rules poster, say **"Here are some rules we'd like you to follow:**
 - State each expectation (e.g., Be Safe) and then for each rule, tell students how the rule should look by providing a brief example (e.g., "keeping hands and feet to self means...)


| Be Safe | Be Respectful | Be Responsible |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keep hands/feet to self ✓ Stay in assigned area ✓ Use materials as intended | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use kind words ✓ Use inside voice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Complete assignments ✓ Accept feedback ✓ Follow directions ✓ Wear school uniform |

Instructor asks students: **“So, let’s review this again to make sure we know it...What are the expected behaviors for the classroom”?**

- Have students repeat the rules as a group
- Praise students for doing so.

EXAMPLES

- Instructor says: **“Now I’m going to give you a few examples of behavior we see in this classroom and you tell me if it’s an example of following the rules or not following the rules.”**


 **“After I give the example, give me a thumbs up if you think it’s FOLLOWING, or a thumbs down if it’s NOT FOLLOWING the rules. Any questions? Ready.”**

| Following | Not Following |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Complete assignment ❖ Ask for permission to leave your seat ❖ Say “thanks” after borrowing a pen ❖ Speak quietly to the teacher ❖ Raise your hand when you would like to speak or need help ❖ Say “OK” when the teacher tells you how to correct something on your paper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Touch other students ❖ Leave your seat or class without permission ❖ Say “shut up” ❖ Yell in the class ❖ Throw pencils ❖ Call out ❖ Walk around the room without permission |

- Instructor says: **“Okay! You did a fabulous job of identifying examples of following and not following the rules! Any questions?”**

STAFF DEMONSTRATION

- Instructor says: "Now, I am going to show you some examples of following and not following the rules. Watch me and, like before, see if you can tell if I am following the rules or not following the rules."



“When I ask you, give me a thumbs up if you think I am FOLLOWING, or a thumbs down if I am NOT FOLLOWING the rules. Any questions? Ready.”

- Demonstrate two or three of the following scenarios
- Select from Following and NOT Following Rules (NOT following rules examples are *italicized*)
- The final demonstration should be selected from Following Rules
- If necessary, prep another staff member to role play with you
- At the end of each demonstration ask students for a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

| Staff Demonstration Scenarios | |
|--|--|
| <p>Have a staff raise his hand and ask for help. A second staff should acknowledge the nice way the first staff asked for help and provide assistance.</p> <p><i>Be Respectful – use kind words</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students: “Was that FOLLOWING the rules or NOT FOLLOWING the rules?” (Solicit thumbs up/down for each question) |
| <p>One staff will borrow an item from another staff by saying, “May I borrow that _____?” The staff will use the item as intended, and return it to the other staff and thank them.</p> <p><i>Be Respectful – use kind words</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask which of the classroom rules the example showed. (If a “not following” example, ask student what should I have done differently.) |

One staff members asks to borrow an item and the other staff says “no.” The first staff tries to grab the item and pushes the other staff.

Could have found another item, kept hands to self, asked the teacher for an item

Walk into the classroom in the morning and wander around the classroom bumping into other students’ desks.

Could have followed morning directions, kept hands/feet to self, stay in area

- Instructor says: **“Very good! You all seem to really understand the rules for the classroom.”**

STUDENT PRACTICE/ROLE PLAY

- Instructor says: **“Now let’s see if we can get you to show us some examples and if the rest of us can figure out the rules in the classroom.”**
 - Select a few students (volunteers) to demonstrate the following role plays.
 - Provide instructions to students in private so the rest of the class does not know the role play.



After each role play, pose the questions listed and ask for students to indicate their answer with a thumbs up or thumbs down, or some other group response mode.



*****Never have students demonstrate what we don't want them to do. We only want students to practice what we want them to do.*****

Narrate the role plays as necessary, and further explain why these demonstrate following the rules when warranted.

Remember to *praise* students for observing the role plays for: Being quiet, keeping eyes on instruction/ role-plays, and following directions.

| Scenario Options | Questions to Ask <i>after</i> Stopping Role Play |
|--|---|
| <p>Student 1 nicely asks Student 2 to borrow his pencil. Student 2 says “Sure, just give it back when you are done.” Student 1 says “Thank you,” uses pencil, and returns it. Student 2 says “Thank you for giving it back.”</p> <p><i>Be Respectful – Using kind words</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which expectation did this follow? (Safe, Respectful or Responsible) ● Why do you think this expectation is important? ● List a few positive behaviors from this scenario. |
| <p>Student 1 raises hand and waits until called on to ask to get a drink. Student 2 (as the teacher) says, “Thank you for raising your hand. I want you to finish your assignment first, and then you can get a drink.” Student 1 says “OK” and gets back to work.</p> <p><i>Be Responsible – complete assignments, follow directions</i></p> | |
| <p>Student 1 raises hand and waits until called on to tell the teacher he is finished with his worksheet. Student 2 (as the teacher) looks at the worksheet and says, “You did a great job, but you should look at number 4 again.” Student 1 says “OK” and gets to work quietly.</p> <p><i>Be Responsible – accept feedback, follow directions</i></p> | |

- Include additional role-plays if necessary.
- Remember to praise other students in the classroom who are currently following the rules while watching the demonstrations.

- Instructor says: **“Very good! You did a great job showing and talking about what it looks like to be safe, respectful, and responsible in the classroom.”**

REVIEW & WRAP-UP

- Instructor says: **“The staff at Valley Creek School will be looking to see that everyone is following the school rules of being safe, respectful, and responsible in the classroom.”**

- **“So, remember, when we are in the classroom, we need to...”**
(point to poster & have students repeat the rules with you).

| Be Safe | Be Respectful | Be Responsible |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keep hands/feet to self ✓ Stay in assigned area ✓ Use materials as intended | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use kind words ✓ Use inside voice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Complete work ✓ Accept feedback ✓ Follow directions |

END OF LESSON