Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students

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Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models
To Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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August 6, 2020
Date Approved
Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students

Ronald Diltz
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education

National Louis University
2020
ABSTRACT

Instances where minority and/or economically disadvantaged students are the unfortunate recipients of the majority of discipline referrals and suspensions may be traced throughout the history of American public schools. The purpose of this study is to determine whether various student support systems implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, while supplemented with tailored support strategies, had a positive impact on the behavioral and academic outcomes among at-risk students. The context of this inquiry is a large middle school located in a medium sized public-school district in North America. This mixed-method, quasi-experimental, formative evaluation, demonstrates outcomes of decreased levels of discipline referrals and higher levels of academic performance among “at risk” students.
PREFACE

I earned a B.S. Degree in Agriculture from the University of Florida, a M.B.A. Degree from Webster University, an Education Specialist Degree in “Ed Leadership” from Argosy University, and now a Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership from National Louis University. I also hold professional certification from the Department of Education in Educational Leadership (All Levels) and Business Education (6-8). In addition, I have a total of 18 years of professional experience in education. This experience includes 9 years in the public sector, where I taught middle school agriculture (1 ½ years), and as a Dean of Student Discipline (7 ½ years). Prior to that, I spent 9 years in the private sector, consisting of 4 years teaching math, science, and other subjects as needed (3 years as team leader), and 5 years as Principal/sole administrator.

I became a teacher because of my desire to have a positive impact on education and student outcomes, and my desire to answer the call to fill the void and desperate need for students to have exposure to positive male role models in their lives. I envisioned these role models making major positive differences in the lives of students by establishing self-pride, self-discipline, and self-confidence, while inspiring most to look beyond their current circumstances and focus on developing positive aspirations. I became an administrator because of my passion for growing and developing future school leaders, as well as my desire to ensure that the needs of all students that I serve are effectively addressed by assuring that their background and/or circumstances would not be an obstacle or hindrance to their overall success.

After serving as a K-8 private parochial school Principal for 5 years, I transitioned to public school administration as a Dean of Student Discipline. I remember being
extremely excited and even relieved to be able to focus on one aspect of education administration, as opposed to juggling the entire array of administrative responsibilities. I also remember being excited about the opportunity and challenge to serve in an environment that most would attempt to avoid. This avoidance may be attributed to the context of my assignment, which was a large Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Magnet middle school located in the lower socioeconomic section of an affluent school district in North America.

Shortly after the start of my new assignment, I realized two major truths. First, although this school offered its students an abundance of electives, along with various clubs and activities to include opportunities for students to, not only acquire knowledge, exposure, and hands-on experiences in various career fields, but also in some cases, have the ability to acquire occupational certifications; unfortunately, because of their behavioral challenges, issues, and/or concerns, (whether proven or simply perceived), the majority of the economically disenfranchised and/or minority students were unable to experience exposure to those opportunities.

The first revelation inspired acknowledgment of the second major truth. I realized just how important and even imperative it was to have and maintain a strong African American male role model in the Dean’s position, who not only has knowledge of, but also is sensitive to the issues and challenges often faced by minorities and/or economically disenfranchised students. This is why I made it a personal mission to research scholarly based, time-tested, proven, and effective ways to address those challenges, and to develop a research-based action plan that would make a positive difference for this population. The positive results of this study were assurance that the
actions and efforts outlined within this study are definitely steps in the right direction of addressing effectively the academic and behavioral concerns/challenges often faced by the aforementioned sub-groups.

Some significant leadership lessons learned within this experience were the importance and imperativeness of providing consistent professional training and development workshops, resources, and support throughout the school year. These training resources should include learning opportunities regarding Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS), Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), Restorative Practices, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), along with effective classroom management strategies, and cultural/diversity awareness and sensitivity training. Additionally, another significant lesson reiterated within this experience was the imperativeness of establishing and maintaining strong and consistent communication with all stakeholders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I acknowledge my Almighty God, who made this project and all things possible.

I extend a sincere heartfelt appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jenifer Neale, for her countless hours of reading, critiques, suggestions, encouragement, and most of all patience, throughout this journey. I acknowledge and thank my dissertation co-chair Dr. Edie Sohigian for her time energy, suggestions, and expertise. A special thanks to Dr. Carla Sparks for her guidance, support, inspiration, and expertise. Dr. Sparks you truly made this journey an enjoyable experience. I also extend a special thanks to my APA Editor, Charlotte Hughes for her patience, suggestions, and expertise.

Finally, I acknowledge my colleagues at the target site. Thank you all for your support, encouragement, suggestions, and for allowing me to bounce ideas regarding this project off you. I am extremely appreciative for all your efforts to address effectively the daily challenges that we often face at the target site to level the “playing field”. Thank you all for having high expectations for the behavioral and academic achievement of all students who have been entrusted to us.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the memory of Frank, Sr. and Naomi Diltz for setting the stage for my life. Immeasurable is the value of the life lessons taught by their words, wisdom, and most importantly, their actions. They inspired me to reach my full potential and provided the resources to do so. Additionally, they inspired me to become the successful husband, father, and man that I am. I deeply miss our meaningful, insightful, and in-depth conversations. My dad’s reaction, and excitement when I shared with him that I was pursuing a doctorates degree was “priceless!!!” It was also the inspiration that drove me to endure this journey to its end. I love and miss them both dearly!!!

I also dedicate this work to my beautiful wife, Emma Diltz, for her love, devotion, support, and patience, not only during this journey, but also during the course of the past 40 years. I thank her for believing in me and encouraging me along the way. Additionally, I thank her for the consistent unselfish sacrifices that she frequently makes for our family and others. Words cannot adequately express my love and appreciation for her.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my four children, Ronald II, Ashante’, Laquisha, and Darius. I am so proud of each of them along with their individual and collective accomplishments, thus far. They are truly major blessings from God. To my family, may this work be a testament of the fact that the Diltz family’s scholastic bar has now been raised!!! -God Bless-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER THREE</th>
<th>CHAPTER FOUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design Overview</td>
<td>Restatement of Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Selection</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>More Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Of Less Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Outliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Gathering Techniques</td>
<td>Summary of Results from Survey Question 2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Summary of the Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Techniques</td>
<td>Stakeholder buy-in and Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Data</td>
<td>Consistency and Follow Through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Text</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Analysis</td>
<td>Processes/Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>Parental Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>Outliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Summary of Results from Survey Question 2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>Results from Survey Questions 3 - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>Parent/Guardian Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>Restatement of Research Question and Hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Survey Results</td>
<td>Covid-19 Considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and Conclusion of the Findings</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results of Teacher Survey</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results of Parent Survey</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results from SY2019-20 Discipline Data and Academic Performance</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Research</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Survey Questions for Teachers</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Survey Questions for Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Informed Consent Principal Permission to Conduct Research</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Informed Consent Parent Survey: Individual Participant</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Informed Consent School Teacher: Individual Participant</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables

Table 1: SY2018-19 Discipline Referrals Data for 6th & 7th Graders ........................................29
Table 2: SY2018-19 Suspension Data for 6th & 7th Graders ..................................................30
Table 3: SY2018-19 Repeat Offenders 6th & 7th Graders .......................................................31
Table 4: Summary of Data to be Collected and Compared .......................................................36
Table 5: Results from Teacher General Information Section ....................................................45
Table 6: Results from Teacher Survey Question 2a ....................................................................46
Table 7: Summary of Results from Teacher Survey Questions 4 - 14 .........................................55
Table 8: Summary of Results from Parent Survey Questions 2 - 10 .............................................59
Table 9: Comparative Discipline Data between SY2018-19 & SY2019-20 ...............................60
Table 10: Mean and Standard Deviation of SY2018-19 & SY2019-20 ........................................60
Table 11: Paired Samples Test of Discipline Referrals during SY2018-19 & SY2019-20 ..........62
Table 12: Comparative Discipline Data Abbreviated SY2018-19 & SY2019-20 .......................63
Table 13: Mean and Standard Deviation of Abbreviated SY2018-19 & SY2019-20 ...............63
Table 14: Paired Samples Test of Targeted Population Discipline Referrals ..........................64
Table 15: Mean and Standard Deviation of Targeted Population’s Paired Samples ...............64
Table 16: Paired Samples Test of Targeted Population’s GPAs ...............................................65
Figures

Figure 1: Discipline Referrals Received During Past 5 Years .............................................2
Figure 2: Menu of Evidence-Based Supports ....................................................................14
Figure 3: Essential Components: Multi-Level Prevention System ....................................16
Figure 4: Descriptive Graphic of Tier Supports Percentages .............................................21
Figure 5: The Five Core Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning Graph ...........24
Figure 6: Discipline Data of Repeat Offenders .................................................................32
Figure 7: Result of Responses to Survey Question 2a .......................................................49
Figure 8: Result of Responses to Survey Question 2b .......................................................52
Figure 9: Summary of Results from Teacher Survey Question #3 ....................................53
Figure 10: Summary of Results from Parent/Guardian Survey Question #1 .....................57
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Decades of scholarly research indicates that punitive discipline is ineffective and may have detrimental outcomes on student discipline and academic achievement (Webster, 2019; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Desautels, 2018; Brill, 2018; Sprague & Tobin, 2017; Dublin, 2015; Smith, Fisher & Frey, 2015; Gardner, 2014; and Macallister, 2014). Further, when punitive discipline includes an exclusionary consequence, it may result in a lifetime of negative impacts on its recipients (Duncan, 2019; Kline, 2016; Skiba & Losen, 2015; and Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014). Hannigan and Hannigan (2017) contend that exclusionary discipline practices are equivalent to using the wait-to-fail approach in academics as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 response to intervention (RTI) framework; both are reactionary, not preventive. Costello, Watchel, and Watchel (2010) add that when we punish students by excluding or humiliating them, they do not feel connected to school administrators, teachers or their well-behaved peers, but rather feel alienated and seek and bond with others who have been excluded from the mainstream, creating their own negative sub-culture in the school (p. 62-63). Kline (2016) posits that exclusionary approaches to discipline are ineffective, contribute to imbalanced discipline data, exacerbate the achievement gap, and push minority students into the juvenile justice system.

Problem Background

In order to maintain anonymity, Divine Touch Middle School (DTMS) is a fictitious name I have given to a public middle school located in an affluent school district; for the purpose of this study, the school district will be known as Royal County Public Schools (RCPS). RCPS consists of over 68,000 students distributed among 37 Elementary
Schools, 12 Middle Schools, 9 High Schools, 4 Charter Schools, and a Virtual School. DTMS is a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (S.T.E.M.) Magnet that serves 1570 students who reside throughout the RCPS district. DTMS has a 59% minority student enrollment consisting of 26% African American, 19% Hispanic, and 14% Asian. The student to teacher ratio is 18:1.

For the past five consecutive school years (SY2014-15 to SY2018-19), the number of student discipline referrals received at the middle school, DTMS, has increased from 796 to 1,591 (one referral short of doubling). Even more disturbing was that throughout those years, minority and/or economically disadvantaged students received most of those referrals. Figure 1 illustrates how the number of referrals received at DTMS increased during the period. The total number of referrals received by the entire student population is represented in blue. The number of referrals received by economically disadvantaged students is represented in orange, and the number of referrals received by African American students is represented in gray.

![Figure 1. Discipline referrals received during past 5 years at DTMS](image-url)
Of the 1,591 referrals received during SY2018-19 at DTMS, 805 resulted in suspensions. What is more, although students who received Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) represented 55% of the total student population, this group accounted for 81.9% of all referrals and 78% of all suspensions. Additionally, although African American students represented 26% of the total student population, this group accounted for 52.2% of all referrals and 47.7% of all suspensions. These results are consistent with an abundance of literary findings that indicate economically disadvantage students and/or minority students are more likely to be disproportionally represented with referrals and suspensions (Coley, 2020; Tanner, 2020; Adams, 2019; Blad & Mitchell, 2018; Johnson et al, 2018; Little & Tolbert, 2018; Lacoe et al, 2018; Suggs, 2017; Mallet, 2016; and Fabelo et al, 2011).

The negative impacts of exclusionary discipline have resulted in an urgent need to effectively address the situation at DTMS. Behavioral challenges require the identification of, and the implementation of more effective, evidence-based student discipline interventions and supports. Although all teachers and administrators at DTMS received formal training on several evidence-based student interventions and support models before, and during, the 5-year period described above, the problem continues to increase in severity. Although the models that have been presented during the trainings have a history of producing positive behavioral and academic outcomes, the spike in disciplinary challenges experienced at the school during that time has continued to rise. There has been a disconnect between the best practices professional development content presentations to staff and the direct implementation of such evidence-based student interventions and support methods by staff and the expected impact on the behaviors exhibited by the student body at DTMS.
**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, had a positive impact on behavioral and academic achievement of at-risk students at DTMS. Although there are many definitions of at-risk students, for the purpose of this study, at-risk students were defined as those students who received five or more discipline referrals during the school year 2018-19 (SY2018-19) while attending DTMS.

In addition to providing the aforementioned supports at a minimal standard, as compared to SY2018-19, the targeted population during SY2019-20 was provided more frequent meetings with the Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST), more frequent administrator visits to their classes, increased administrator visibility around campus, and additional support to those classes where substitute teachers were involved. Of course, these extended efforts were of benefit to all students at the target site; however, the targeted population was tracked to gauge if these additional efforts and extra attention inspired better behavioral and academic outcomes as compared to the previous school year. This result may eliminate the need for exclusionary discipline, impede the progression of students entering the school-to-prison-pipeline, and ultimately narrow the academic achievement gap that exists between at-risk students and the general education students at DTMS.
Research Questions

The preliminary research questions for this study were:

1. What happens to the academic achievement of at-risk students when various student behavior support models to include the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) are implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality?

2. What is the known relationship between student discipline and academic achievement of behaviorally at-risk students?

3. To what extent (if any) does the implementation (w/ fidelity) of various student behavior support models relate to the academic achievement of behaviorally at-risk students?

I narrowed down these three questions to a single overarching question that captured the essence of what I was attempting to uncover. Hence, the research question that drove this study was the following:

Is there a statistically significant difference in the behavior and academic outcomes of at-risk students when various behavior support models are implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, while supplemented with additional support strategies?

Hypotheses

In order to further clarify my study, I have developed the following hypotheses to guide my research:
Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant difference in the mean number of discipline referrals received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant difference in the mean number of discipline referrals received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant difference in the Grade Point Averages (GPAs) received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no statistically significant difference in the Grade Point Averages (GPAs) received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts

**Theoretical Framework**

This quasi-experimental mixed-method study may be viewed as a formative evaluation because it will focus on ways to improve and enhance the existing behavioral support program at the target site rather than rendering a definitive judgment about its effectiveness. It is quasi-experimental because there is no randomly assigned control group and the interventions (extra efforts) are of benefit to all students and not simply the targeted population that I tracked. Additionally, in alignment with Patton’s guidance (2008), I used an implementation focus in conjunction with an effectiveness focus and attribution focus. The implementation focus allowed me to be able to determine to what extent the program was implemented as designed; the effectiveness focus allowed me to be able to determine to what extent was the collaborative implementation of the supports
effective in attaining the goal of having a positive impact on behavioral and academic outcomes, and the attribution focus allowed me to be able to determine the relationship between the supports (as a treatment) and resulting outcomes.

What is more, this study may also be considered as action research. Action research is defined as a multistage type of research designed to yield practical results capable of improving a specific aspect of practice and made public to enable scrutiny and testing (James, 2008). The challenge that this study attempts to address is assessing the effectiveness of providing additional supports and efforts to supplement and improve the behavioral supports and practices that are already in place at the target site. Ideally, the additional efforts and practices will substantially lower the number of referrals received by the economically disadvantaged and/or minority students at the target site.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used throughout this study:

**Achievement gap.** The “achievement gap” in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students which shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures (Ansel, 2011). Research conducted by the National Education Association (n.d.) identified nine effective strategies to close the achievement gap as follows: Enhanced Cultural Competence; Comprehensive Support for Students; Outreach for Students’ Families; Extended Learning Opportunities; Classrooms That Support Learning; Supportive Schools; Strong District Support; Access to Qualified Staff. This study will focus on the second of these, Comprehensive Support for Students, as a means of narrowing the academic achievement gap.
**Economically disadvantaged students.** Although there are many definitions/classifications for this term, one that captures the essence of disadvantaged students was found on an advertisement website for Best Value Schools as follows:

Disadvantaged students are those who have hindrances to excelling in school because of detrimental circumstances beyond their control. These include financial and social hardships as well as problems within students' families. The category also includes students who would not normally be disadvantaged and who have been affected by some sort of natural disaster. (Best Value Schools, 2020, para. 1)

The key words that make this such a perfect definition in terms of defining this population are “hindrances to excelling in school because of detrimental circumstances beyond their control”. I feel that if all involved in the education and well-being of students classified as such, understand and accept those 12 words, there would be more compassion and consideration related to how to empathize (not in a crippling manner) with this population when disciplinary challenges arise. For this study, this term and students who receive Free or Reduce Lunch (FRL) may be used interchangeably.

**Exclusionary discipline.** Exclusionary discipline describes any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting (Supportive School Discipline, 2019). Although certain dangerous behaviors such as weapons possession, violence, drug use/possession, and so on warrant (by federal mandate) an exclusionary discipline response, research indicates that due to the negative outcomes that are associated with exclusionary discipline, many school districts are seeking
and implementing non-exclusionary alternatives for those behaviors that are non-violent or not drug related.

**Fidelity of implementation.** An all-purpose definition for fidelity of implementation is the delivery of an intervention, program, or curriculum in the way in which it was designed to be delivered (Noltemeyer, Palmer, James, Petrasek & Bowman-Perrott, 2019). This definition describes and pertains to how all student support strategies should be implemented – “as designed and intended”. Without the integrity and preservation of the essential components that made the interventions effective, the desired outcomes are likely to be impacted detrimentally and subsequently fail to produce reliable results.

**School-to-prison-pipeline.** The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund depicts the School-to-Prison-Pipeline as “the funneling of students out of school and into the streets and the juvenile correction system thus depriving them of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and participation in our democracy” (Rehabilitation Enables Dreams, RED, 2019). Research indicates that students of color and students with disabilities are often disproportionally recipients of exclusionary discipline, thus fuels the school-to-prison-pipeline (Blad & Mitchell, 2018; Kline, 2016; Mallett, 2016; Fabelo et al., 2011).

**Organization of Study**

I have organized the study presentation into five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the background of the study including a description of the target site, presentation of the problem, significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the research question, and the definitions of terms. Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive literature review of existing
scholarly research relative to the subject along with the focus of why this study was needed. Chapter 3 contains the methodological approach to be used to accomplish the research. Consistent with recommendations from Cone and Foster (2005), Chapter 3 will additionally provide sufficient details so that the reader may be able to replicate essential aspects. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed summary of what the study uncovered. Careful measures were taken so that the data collected was not compromised or skewed. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide an analysis and implications of the results will be discussed along with recommendations for further studies.

**Conclusion**

There is a wealth of research exploring the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the various support models referenced in this study. Additionally, there is also a wealth of research that highlights the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline and the negative impacts that it potentially has on its recipients. My study is designed to explore if there is a statistically significant difference in the mean number of referrals received by, and the GPAs of at-risk students at a suburban middle school after various support models were implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, while supplemented with additional support strategies.

The study is relevant to the need to address specifically the realities and challenges that are being experienced at the middle school which is the focus of this work; however, research indicates that the challenges experienced at the target site are not that unusual as compared to other contexts with similar demographics. Hence, the findings of this study may be of benefit to other contexts and school administrators and staff who are desirous of addressing similar challenges. The study adds to the body of research effective ways to
address the behavior and academic challenges that economically disadvantaged and/or minority students are disproportionately facing.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The essence of this study presupposes that the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Support (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) utilized collectively as necessary to form a comprehensive plan, may have a positive impact on the behavioral and academic outcomes of at-risk students. The literature review will examine and potentially establish a relationship between the supports and the academic and behavioral achievement of at-risk students.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education/Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA/ESSA). This law gave states and school districts authorization to develop and implement multi-tiered systems of supports to address the needs of all students within their jurisdiction. Although not referenced using the acronym MTSS, the ESEA/ESSA defined multi-tiered systems of supports as a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making (Knoff, 2018a). Ehlers (2018) streamlined the definition of MTSS as a framework for identifying students who need support; making data-driven decisions; implementing research-based interventions aligned to needs; monitoring student progress; and, involving stakeholders. Long before the aforementioned initiative, in 2004, the State Department of Education, in conjunction with the local state university, implemented a problem solving or pre-referral intervention model (referenced as MTSS) to assist
struggling students in standard education classrooms (Blaine, 2016). MTSS is a term used to describe an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data-based problem-solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention (Citation withheld to preserve confidentiality).

Essentially, the ultimate goal of the multi-tiered process is to determine—through diagnostic and functional assessment—why a student is having academic or social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties, then linking the reasons to early, intensive, and successful instructional or intervention approaches that occur, as much as possible, in the general education classroom or the setting where the difficulty is occurring (Knoff, 2018). MTSS is designed to focus on the “whole child.” Essentially, there are three levels of support that increase in intensity as they progress. Referencing an article by Rosen (2016), a basic outline of how a three-tiered system works is as follows:

**Tier 1:** The Whole Class. All students are taught with methods that research has shown to be effective. All students are screened to see who is and is not responding to these strategies. Students may be broken into small groups that address different strengths and areas of need.

**Tier 2:** Small Group Interventions. Some students receive additional targeted support in small groups. The scheduling of these interventions is important. The goal is to keep students from missing any core instruction or other Tier 1 activities that might make it harder to catch up.

**Tier 3:** Intensive, Individualized Support. A few students who move up to this most intensive level of support continues with Tier 1 activities. Their break-out groups are smaller than in Tier 2. These sessions last longer, are more narrowly
focused and are supplemental to Tiers 1 & 2.

If students are not responding favorably to Tier 2 interventions, their break-out groups after Tier 1 activities will advance to Tier 3 interventions. Figure 2 captures the essence of the description of a three-tiered system of support along with examples of specific evidence-based supports at each level. This Figure presents a type of a logic model, which is a graphic depiction (road map) that presents the shared relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact for a program along with the depiction of the relationship between the program’s activities and its intended effects (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Program Performance and Evaluation, 2018).

Figure 2. Menu of Evidence-Based Supports, description of a three-tiered system of support along with examples of specific evidence-based supports at each level, retrieved from: http://www.pent.ca.gov/images/mtss.pdf
According to the MTSS website in the state under study, there are three basic types of “fidelity” for districts and schools to support and/or integrate into instruction and intervention: 1. Fidelity of implementing the critical components of a multi-tiered system of supports; 2. Fidelity of using the problem-solving process across all three tiers; and 3. Fidelity of implementing evidence-based instruction and interventions matched to specific need(s). School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS also known as PBIS) is an example of a multi-tiered system of supports.

**School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS and/or PBIS)**

Algozzine et al. (2014) defined SWPBIS as an evidence-based three-tiered framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social outcomes for all students. SWPBIS is described as 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 all students (Algozzine et al., 2014). Horner, Sugai, and Lewis (2015) defined PBIS as a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success. Hunter (2003) indicated PBIS focuses on the prevention of problematic behaviors through a data-driven process that intervenes with students across the entire spectrum of student behaviors, prevention strategies, and school environments. Horner and Sugai (2015) suggested that PBIS grew from and is infused with the principles and technology of behavior analysis; they described the impact of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) on PBIS as including the following:
a) The emphasis on operational definitions of behavior and intervention elements.

b) The logic model used to select environmental manipulations designed to alter student and staff behavior.

c) An unrelenting commitment to the measurement of both implementation fidelity and the impact PBIS has on student outcomes. (Horner & Sugai, 2015)

Critchfield (2015) indicated that the aforementioned writing by Horner and Sugai was in response to how PBIS has been greeted with skepticism and, occasionally, open hostility by professionals in Applied Behavior Analysis (Anderson & Kincaid 2005; Johnston Foxx, Jacobson, Green, & Mulick, 2006). Critchfield concluded that given classical ABA’s long history of creating powerful interventions, but its limited success at society-wide dissemination, instead of the question being why is not PBIS more like ABA, perhaps the more constructive question concerns why ABA is not more like PBIS.

As indicated above, SWPBIS is an example of a multi-tiered student support system. Kennedy (2018) described the three tiers of SWPBIS as:

Tier 1: Is for all students to learn and practice school-wide and/or classroom behavioral expectations.

Tier 2: Is for those students who need differentiated instruction to learn the expectations, more time to practice, or alternative reinforcement to be motivated to comply.

Tier 3: Is for those high-risk students with intensive needs for targeted intervention to succeed.

Additionally, Algozzine et al. (2014) described the three tiers as:
Tier 1 – The Universal Tier;

Tier 2 – The Targeted Tier; and,

Tier 3 – The Intensive, Individualized Tier.

Figure 3 illustrates a new lens through which to view the essential components of the 3-tiered system of support and highlight the percentages of students represented in each tier. Depending on their needs, students receive support at all levels. As indicated in the Figure 3, when implemented with fidelity, the Multi-Level Prevention System meets the needs of all students with concentrated support at differing percentage levels provided at the different tier levels: the green portion of the graph represents the “Universal Tier” and serves 80% of the student population; the yellow portion of the graph represents the “Targeted Tier” and serves 15% of the student population; and the red portion of the graph represent the “Intensive Tier”, and serves 3-5% of the population.

Figure 3. Essential Components: Multi-Level Prevention System, essential components of the 3-tiered system of support, retrieved from: https://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/page/746

To reiterate for clarity, the intensity of the service and the student needs increase as the tier level progresses: Tier 3 provides support for 3 - 5% of the student population with the
highest support need; Tier 2 provides support for 5 - 15% of the student body; Tier 1 meets the needs of 80% or more of all students’ needs (Algozzine et al., 2014).

The findings of a study conducted by Noltemeyer, et al. (2019) suggest that higher SWPBIS implementation is significantly associated with positive student outcomes especially those related to student behavior. Similarly, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Leaf (2015) concluded that “at risk” and “high risk” students at schools with SWPBIS implementation were less likely to receive office disciplinary referrals, referrals to counselors, or referrals to special education programs than were those students at schools without SWPBIS implementation. Contrary to those findings, Hirschi (2015) concluded that there was no significant difference between the number of Office Disciplinary Referrals received between schools with or without SWPBIS implementation. Likewise, a study conducted by Ryoo, Hong, Bart, Shin, and Bradshaw (2018) concluded that because SWPBIS implementation had no significant impact on behavioral outcomes, it had no effect on improving academic performance. Further, Ryoo, et al. (2018) suggest that SWPBIS may stimulate greater educational benefits in schools, if it is combined with other approaches intended to enhance student achievement. One such approach is restorative practices.

Restorative Practices

Duncan (2019) concluded that schools experience more significant changes in student behavior when PBIS and Restorative Practice are intertwined. Hannigan and Hannigan (2017) suggested that when a school is firmly grounded in a solid tier one school-wide system for behavior and utilizes effective alternatives that are restorative, reflective, and instructional, a dramatic reduction in the number of incidents and a
significant increase in the positive culture will be observed. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) describes restorative practices as an emerging social science that studies how to strengthen relationships between individuals as well as social connections within communities. In addition, the IIRP proposes that just as human beings need food, clothing, and shelter, we also need strong meaningful relationships to thrive. In his book, *Verbal Judo*, George Thompson (2013) presents five universal truths of human interactions: All people want to be treated with dignity and respect; all people want to be asked rather than be told to do something; all people want to be informed as to why they are being asked or ordered to do something; all people want to be given options rather than threats; and all people want a second chance when they make a mistake. Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, and Cohen, (2014) present restorative practices as an intervention that promotes strong interpersonal relationships and community building and provides students with meaningful opportunities to be accountable for their actions and responsible for helping to make their school a safe and nurturing place. Kline (2016) suggests that restorative practices are an inclusionary, nonpunitive alternative in discipline that offers a preventive as well as a responsive component.

Martin (2015) noted that restorative practices consists of a series of five questions designed to help students use empathy, think about what happened, and take responsibility for making things right. The IIRP list these questions as: What happened? Who was affected? What are you able to take responsibility for? What could you have done differently in this situation? What are you willing to do to make things right? The most common restorative practice noted in the literature is the practice of holding restorative circles.
Restorative Circles

A circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community, or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts, and problems (Costello, Watchel, & Watchel, 2010). Restorative circles are designed to prevent conflicts between students and to repair relationships after a student has harmed an individual and/or the school community (Dublin, 2015). During the circle, participants and others pass a “talking piece” (an object that is meaningful, e.g., an artifact) around the circle, and only the person holding the talking piece can speak (or choose to pass) at that time (IIRP, 2019). This allows everyone to hear about and understand the harm from different points of view (victim, perpetrator, other students, teachers, parents, community) (Guckenburg, Hurley, Persson, Fronius, & Petrosino, 2015).

Costello et al. (2010) declares that Restorative Circles, by their very structure, convey certain important ideas and values without the need for discussion:

- Equality – Literally everyone in the circle has equal seating.
- Safety and trust – You can see everyone in a circle, so nothing is hidden.
- Responsibility – Everyone has a chance to play a role in the outcome of the circle.
- Facilitation – The circle reminds the leader to facilitate rather than lecture.
- Ownership - Collectively, the participants feel the circle is theirs.
- Connections – These are built as everyone listens to everyone else's responses. (Costello et al., 2010)

Further, Costello et al. (2010) suggested that in restorative circles we face each other and speak respectfully, one person at a time, diminishing the feeling of disconnectedness that
permeates our modern world and restoring the sense of belonging that constitutes healthy human community.

**Implementation in Schools**

In their study, Guckenburger et al. (2015) interviewed experts of restorative practices and asked them to describe the key features that they thought were important to implementing restorative practices in schools. The four key features identified were:

- Focus on repairing harm rather than punishing the offender
- Include the student voice in the process
- Integrate a whole-school approach
- Incorporate practices and strategies to build students’ social/emotional skills

Figure 4 illustrates where restorative practices (sometimes referred to as restorative justice) fit within the multi-tiered intervention support framework. As depicted in the graphic, restorative practice is a part of the Tier 2 supports structure. This graphic also highlights various support strategies at each level.
Hannigan and Hannigan, (2017) emphasized that we (as educators) have an obligation to help students become productive members of the community by preparing them academically as well as social-emotionally to succeed.

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, and Hymel (2016) defined SEL as the process of attaining prosocial competencies which include the abilities to identify and manage one’s emotions, develop concern and caring for others, develop and sustain positive relationships, make healthy and responsible decisions, and effectively deal with challenging situations. Although not identified as being directly or indirectly associated, the “Universal Truths” mentioned above in the Restorative Practice section, seem to be aligned with the premise of this definition. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2019b) defines SEL as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Similarly, the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Programs (2019) describes SEL as a critical component of the educational experience that is proven to lead to improvements in student behavior, reductions in classroom disruption, and greater academic achievement by going beyond traditional academic skills and teaching students how to resolve conflicts, handle emotions, empathize, and make responsible decisions. As indicated in Figure 3, SEL is an essential part of Tier 1 support interventions and may carry over into small group training at the Tier 2 level.
CASEL (2019a) identifies and defines the five core competencies of SEL as follows:

- **Self-Awareness**: One’s ability to accurately recognize and assess his/her strengths, limitations, thoughts, emotions, and values, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a growth mindset.

- **Self-Management**: One’s ability to successfully regulate his/her emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This includes effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and self-motivating along with the ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- **Social Awareness**: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures along with the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- **Relationship Skills**: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups along with the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- **Responsible Decision Making**: The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms including the realistic evaluation consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.
Students develop these core competencies in various ways and in various settings. When intentional strategies, practices, and policies foster consistent messages and opportunities for SEL across all contexts, they are more likely to internalize core competencies (CASEL, 2019a). Figure 5 illustrates the five core competencies of SEL along with focused attributes to be developed within each competency as identified by CASEL (2019a).

**Figure 5.** The five core competencies of social and emotional learning graph created from template retrieved from presentationgo.com

**Synthesis and Clarification**

With the authorization of ESEA/ESSA in 2015, school districts throughout the United States were authorized to develop and utilize a multi-tiered system of support to identify and address effectively the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all student within their jurisdiction. Commonly, a three-tiered model is used consisting of Tier
1 - the Universal Tier (serving all students); Tier Two - the Targeted Tier (serving targeted students); and Tier Three - the Intensive Tier (serving intensely targeted students).

SWPBIS/PBIS is an example of a multi-tiered system of support. This framework not only forged a way for an evidenced based model of behavioral support to be delivered to all students, but also allows those students who need additional support to be identified and targeted supports to be implemented. In addition, within this framework data tracking is used to inform decision making. MTSS used together with restorative practices and SEL as needed, were designed to address effectively the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students.

**Data Tracking and Stakeholder Buy-in**

Essential to the success of the aforementioned supports at all levels are data tracking and stakeholder buy-in.

**Data tracking.** The definition that captured the essence of what data tracking means and would look like in this study was discovered on a security company’s website; data tracking is a system that allows one to know where something is at any point in time (Securitec1, 2020). Referencing that definition, data tracking will allow all stakeholders in this study to know where the targeted population stands (behaviorally and academically) at any point in time. This will allow all stakeholders to monitor the progress, or lack thereof, of each participant so that the listed systems of supports are used effectively and yield the best results. In essence for the purpose of this study, data tracking is used to inform all decision making.

**Stakeholder buy-in.** In education, a stakeholder is someone who has a vested interest in the success and welfare of a school or education system (Study.com, 2016).
Although examples of stakeholders may include, students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and the community as a whole, for the purpose of this study, stakeholders will consist of the first four: students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

When implementing a framework that requires contributions from multiple stakeholders, (such as the supports in this study), buy-in, or belief in and support of the idea or practice, is essential to its success (Boden et al, 2020). A study conducted by Briggs, Russell, and Wanless (2018), regarding Kindergarten Teacher Buy-in for Standards-Based Reforms, summarizes the importance of teacher buy-in as a critical factor in educational change:

Buy-in is characterized by an alignment between teacher beliefs and the goals of a change or reform, as well as feelings of competence in implementation. As a result, buy-in can produce with greater motivation and enthusiasm for teaching and amplify the impacts of reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

The study by Briggs, Russell, and Wanless (2018) concluded that such effects can have an impact on student learning and outcomes as a result.

Therefore, referencing the aforementioned conclusion, stakeholders’ receptivity to the support models within this study depends to a large degree on their level of buy-in and belief that the implementation of and sustained usage of those models are in the best interest of the students and their academic and behavioral outcomes. MTSS used together with restorative practices and SEL as needed, were designed to address effectively the academic, social, emotional and behavioral needs of all students. This must be clearly understood by and emphasized to all stakeholders to enhance their level of buy-in and belief.
Conclusion

As educators, an integral part of our jobs is to make a positive difference in the lives of all students that we have been entrusted to educate. Within that process, we must discover and address effectively any shortcomings and/or failures in our current systems, thus affording the best educational experience for all students, regardless of racial or socioeconomic status. The focus of this study was to examine the impact that various student support models, working in unison to complement each other as needed, had on the behavioral and academic achievement of at-risk students. There is a plethora of literature that highlight the adverse lifetime effects that exclusionary discipline may have on its recipients. The essence of this study presupposes that the implementation (with fidelity) of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Support (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL), while being supplemented with various additional support strategies, may have a positive impact on student behavior. The results of this study may eliminate the need for exclusionary discipline, impede the progression of the school to prison pipeline, and ultimately narrow the academic achievement gap that exist between at-risk students and general education students. The study is needed to bring this issue back to the forefront of academic scholarly agendas, so that strategic plans may be designed and implemented to effectively address this dilemma.

In the next chapter, the methodological approach to be used to accomplish this research will be introduced. Consistent with recommendations from Cone and Foster (2005), sufficient details will be provided so that the readers of this study may be able to replicate all essential aspects.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Research Design Overview

The goal of this evaluation was to determine whether the MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and SEL support models implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality while being supplemented with various additional support strategies, would provide the at-risk students at Divine Touch Middle School with the support they need to become behaviorally and academically successful. The study was based on the premise that discovery of the effectiveness of these supports and additional efforts would help to minimize, if not eliminate, the need to utilize exclusionary discipline as a means of potentially modifying undesirable behaviors. As previously indicated in Chapter 1, the aforementioned was accomplished by using an implementation focus, in conjunction with an effectiveness focus and attribution focus. The implementation focus allowed me to determine to what extent the program was implemented as designed; the effectiveness focus allowed me to determine to what extent was the collaborative implementation of the supports (as needed) effective in attaining the goal of having a positive impact on behavioral and academic outcomes; and the attribution focus allowed me to determine the relationship between the supports (as a treatment) and resulting outcomes (Patton, 2008).

Rationale for Selection

The targeted population for this study was based on the 6th and 7th grade students who received five or more discipline referrals during SY2018-19 while attending Divine Touch Middle School. The selection of this population focused on two major concerns. First, this group received 854 referrals which was 53.7% of all referrals received at the target site during SY2018-19. In addition, 85% of those referrals were received by students
eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (FRL) and 50.2% were received by African American students.

Table 1.

SY2018-19 Discipline Referrals Data for 6th & 7th Graders at DTMS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Total Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Recipients Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</th>
<th>% of Recipients who are African American (A.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>854</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: EdInsight, 2019

Second, the targeted population received a total of 356 suspensions during SY2018-19. My education, experience, and personal observations indicated that if not provided with the supports that they desperately need, this population would potentially become recipients of additional exclusionary discipline during SY2019-20 and beyond, and thus perpetuate further the academic and behavioral challenges that they already faced.

Although students who received Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) represented 55% of the targeted population, this group received 88.2% of the 356 suspensions. Further, although African American students represented 26% of this population, this group received 51.4% of the 356 suspensions (Table 2).
Table 2.

*Source: EdInsight, 2019

This data inspired and drove the selection process because, as indicated in a study by Mallett (2016), students from low income and/or minority families are disproportionately suspended from school and are more likely to end up involved in the juvenile justice system as a result of those suspensions. This kind of outcome is counterproductive to my overall objective of narrowing the academic achievement gap that exists between the targeted population and the general population at Divine Touch Middle School (DTMS).

**Participants**

In order to gather the information needed for this study, three participant groups were included. These three groups were students, parents, and teachers. The groups and sampling techniques are described below.

**Students.** Students were selected based on the existing data from the Royal County Public Schools (RCPS) District’s software system of choice, EdInsight, to which I had access and used in this study with permission from the school district. From this system, the 6th and 7th grade students from SY2018-19 who received five or more referrals during the school year while attending DTMS were identified. Initially, this was a pool of 64 students; however, 22 members of this group (34.4%) no longer attended DTMS, thus...
narrowed the pool down to 42 students. Of this population, 57.1% were male and 42.9% were female students (Table 3).

Table 3.

**SY2018-19 Repeat Offenders 6th & 7th Graders at DTMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remaining Repeat Offenders w/ 5 or more Referrals</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: EdInsight, 2019*

**Parents.** The parents/guardians selected to participate in this study were the parents/guardians of those 42 students identified using the procedure indicated above. I surveyed the parents/guardians to gauge their mindset regarding the behavioral climate and supports for their student(s) while attending DTMS. Via phone and email, several attempts were made to contact all of those parents/guardians, and information regarding participation in this study was communicated.

**Teachers.** All teachers who taught at Divine Touch Middle School during SY2018-19 and remained there during SY2019-20 (72 teachers) were solicited to participate in this study. These teachers were identified through my own experiences at the school as well as with input from other members of the school’s administration.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected resulting in mixed methodology. The quantitative data was collected through the school district’s software of choice, EdInsight. Using this platform, 6th and 7th grade students from SY2018-19 who attained five or more discipline referrals while attending Divine Touch Middle School
(DTMS) were identified for participation in this study. Figure 6 illustrates this targeted population \((n=42)\) along with the Mean (8.4) and Standard Deviation (4.15) of number of Discipline Referrals received.

Figure 6. Discipline data of repeat offenders during SY2018-19; Mean = 8.4, Standard Deviation = 4.15, \(N = 42\)

*EdInsight* was also used to determine the 72 teachers who taught at DTMS during that school year and who remained there as teachers during SY2019-20. The targeted students’ participation in this study consisted of monitoring their responses to more intentional and intensified implementation (with fidelity) of the aforementioned student supports; more frequent meetings with the Behavior Intervention Support Team; more frequent administrator visits to their classes; increased administrator visibility around campus; and additional support in those classes where substitute teachers were involved, all as
compared to SY2018-19.

Additional quantitative data was gathered using an online Likert Scale survey that consisted of 10 and 14 questions for the parents and teachers, respectively. A Likert Scale survey is a scale of answers on which respondents to the survey indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008). More details concerning the creation and design of the surveys that was used in this study are discussed below.

**Surveys.** The survey for teachers consisted of 14 questions designed to ascertain information regarding their mindset on feeling supported by the DTMS’s administration when discipline was deemed necessary, DTMS’s behavioral climate, and their understanding and appropriate use of MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, and SEL. The first part of the survey gathered general information regarding the grade(s) taught during SY2018-19, and demographic information to include gender, highest degree earned, and the number of years teaching experience.

The first question on the survey was a multiple-choice question to determine the most common reason that the teacher sent a student to the Discipline office during SY2018-19. Fifteen answer choices were given to include N/A – I did not send any student to the discipline office. Question 2 is a two-part open-ended question and was used to gather qualitative data. The first part of this question was designed to understand the participant’s belief regarding whether the aforementioned behavioral supports benefit students more or less when compared to exclusionary discipline. The second part of the question was designed to gauge the participant’s perception of the most critical factors in successfully implementing the various supports. Understanding the teachers’ perspectives
regarding those concerns mentioned above is crucial to the overall successful implementation of the multiple supports, as described in this study.

Additionally, Question 2 of the survey was designed to add social validity to the study. Social validity refers to perceptions of acceptability and satisfaction with an intervention by obtaining opinions from those who receive and implement the intervention (Luiselli & Reed, 2011). The primary focus of this part of the inquiry was to attain the opinions of those who would implement the interventions. Questions 3-14 were Likert Styled questions. The participants were asked to identify how strongly they agree or disagree with the statements provided using a scale from 1-5 as follows: Totally disagree, somewhat disagree, not sure, somewhat agree, totally agree, respectively. The survey was disseminated via an online format created in Google Docs - Forms. After the Informed Consent – School Teacher: Individual Participant form was signed, dated, and received, a link to complete the survey was provided to the participant. A copy of the Teacher Perceptions of Discipline Practices at Missing Touch Middle School survey is attached in Appendix A.

Finally, the parent/guardian survey consisted of 10 questions designed to gauge their awareness and understanding of the various supports available to their student, gauge their mindset regarding their role in their student’s academic and behavioral success, and to gauge their perception of being communicated with and feeling supported when their student had behavioral challenges. The first part of the survey gathered general information regarding their student’s grade and gender. Each question on this survey was Likert Styled whereas the participant was asked to identify how strongly they agree or disagree with the statements provided using a scale from 1-5 as follows: Totally disagree, Somewhat
disagree, Not sure, Somewhat agree, Totally agree, respectively. The survey was disseminated via an online format created in Google Docs - Forms. The Informed Consent – Parents/Guardian: Individual Participant form was delivered online and the opportunity extended to continue to a link to complete the survey. A copy of the Parent/Guardian Perceptions of Discipline Practices at Divine Touch Middle School survey is attached in Appendix B.

A Principal Component Analysis was used to examine the latent variables for both survey instruments. Statistically, latent variables are variables that are not directly observed but rather inferred through a mathematical model from other variables that are observed (Wagner, Kantor, Piasta, 2010). This analysis was conducted using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and will be discussed further in the next section. Additionally, to ensure that the survey questions were clear, understandable, and yield the information needed, peer reviews from multiple sources were utilized, along with a pilot survey of teachers and parents (n=10, n=10) who were unaffiliated with the target site.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

The data that was collected from this study included both quantitative data and qualitative data. This mixed-methods approach allowed a more thorough analysis of the impact of the program design under study. This also added to the overall reliability and validity of the results.

**Quantitative data.** To examine the impact that the supports and additional efforts had on the behavior and academic achievement of the targeted population, I compared discipline data from SY2018-19, when a minimal standard of implementation of the
various supports were used, to discipline data from SY2019-20, after fidelity of implementation of the supports was assured, in combination with additional support strategies and efforts. The results provided information on how the student participants responded to the existing support systems in place and the additional efforts (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Summary of Data to be Collected and Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SY2018-19 (pre-implementation)</th>
<th>SY2019-20 (post-implementation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal standard of supports implementation</td>
<td>Intense and Intentional supports implementation w/ additional supplemental strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, each of the responses from the surveys was collected, quantified, and analyzed. For analysis, descriptive statistics was initially used to summarize, describe, and characterize the collected data. The central tendency, to include the mean, median, mode, and measures of variability, specifically the standard deviations for each of the surveys, were examined separately. A frequency table was created showing the frequency of responses for each item in the surveys. The results provided a clearer picture of the participants’ understanding of the existing supports along with their mindset on feeling supported when discipline issues arise that require administrative assistance to resolve.

**Qualitative text.** The qualitative text was analyzed independently. To evaluate the open-ended questions from the teachers’ survey, a selective coding process was employed to categorize and cluster the data as described by James et. al. (2008). Initially, general codes with specific themes for the various responses were established. Next, codes that
match previous responses were linked and new codes for responses that were unconnected to previous responses were established.

**Overall analysis.** This study aligns with a Formative Utilization-focused evaluation. Its focus was on the reality experienced at Divine Touch Middle School and ways to improve the utilization of its existing behavioral support program, by supplementing those supports with additional efforts and strategies. Thusly, this study was not aimed to determine the overall merit and worth of MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and SEL, nor render definitive judgment about their effectiveness. This mindset was because the overall merit and worth of these supports were self-evident at the target site. Merit refers to the intrinsic value of the supports and how effective they are in meeting the needs of those it was intended to help (i.e. the at-risk student population). Worth refers to the extrinsic value to those not targeted for the study (i.e. the general student population). Accordingly, it was understood that an MTSS program complemented with restorative practices and/or SEL that modifies the behavior of the targeted population has merit for those students who moved from Tier 2 (Targeted) or Tier 3 (Intensive) behavioral supports back to Tier 1 (Universal) behavioral supports; and worth to the general student population by reducing the number of behavioral instances and disruptions to the learning environment.

As previously indicated, this study focused on the realities experienced at the target site. Although cognizant of the similarities in realities existing within other constructs with similar demographics, that knowledge was not allowed to impinge on the gathering of data nor the interpretation of its findings.
**Ethical Considerations**

As previously mentioned, the students who were selected to participate in this study were the sixth and seventh graders of SY2018-19 who attended and received five or more discipline referrals during the school year at Divine Touch Middle School. By their actions, these students were deemed appropriate for additional support and outreach. If not provided with the supports that they desperately need, this population will most likely continue to experience the academic and behavioral challenges that they are currently facing. Because of the nature of this study and the method used to collect student data, no student was pressured, coerced, or forced into participating in this study. Participation was anonymous and the additional strategies and efforts was of benefit to all students at target site.

Permission from the school district to use extant data from the software platform *EdInsight* was obtained and aided in the identification of the participants for this study. In addition, permission from the school principal to conduct research at Divine Touch Middle School was obtained. Parents and teachers were provided with an informed consent letter consisting of full disclosure of the purpose of the study, collection methods, data usage, and their right to refuse to participate in the study. Student anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms and excluding identifiable information when describing the student or reporting the outcomes of the study. A copy of each of the aforementioned consents are included in Appendices C – F.

**Reliability and Validity**

**Reliability.** The SPSS software was used to conduct various statistical measures to include a Principal Component Analysis and an Inter-item Reliability Analysis. The Principal Component Analysis was used to examine the latent variables within the survey
instrument. From this process, four components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted. A Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy score of .599 (.6) was produced. According to SPSS, the KMO measurement determines whether it is appropriate to carry out the analysis of the correlation matrix value. KMO scores of .8 can be considered a good indication that a factor analysis will be useful for the variables. Although this study’s KMO value of .6 was lower than the .8 benchmark, this value may still be considered “reasonably acceptable” to carry out factor analysis. Referencing the website Statistical How To (2020), Average Inter-item correlation (a way of analyzing internal consistency reliability) is a statistical measure of if individual questions on a test or questionnaire give consistent, appropriate results by determining if each item in the survey is correlated to the overall survey and is a way of analyzing internal consistency and reliability.

To establish internal consistency reliability for this study, a pilot survey was administered to 10 teachers and 10 parents \((n=10, n=10)\) who were unaffiliated with the target site. Based on the data gathered, a Cronbach alpha score was ascertained. Cronbach’s alpha is most used when one wants to assess the internal consistency of a questionnaire (or survey) that is made up of multiple Likert-type scales and items (Statistical How To, 2020). By some standards, a score over .7 is considered to have high internal consistency. The alpha coefficient for the items used within the teacher’s pilot survey was .858 and the alpha coefficient for the items used within the parent’s pilot survey was .880. These scores suggested that both instruments had “good” internal consistency. Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha scores of .858 & .880 indicated the questionnaires were reliable. A summary of the pilot survey results will be discussed later in this chapter.
Qualitative research requires that this research be trustworthy. Simon and Goes (n.d.) posited in qualitative research, validity—or trustworthiness— and reliability—or consistency— are discussed in terms of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the instrumentation and results of the study. These terms known as “Guba’s constructs”, were the focus of a study conducted by Shenton (2004). I engaged the strategies outlined in that study to address those terms. In addressing credibility, this study’s open-ended questions were designed and focused on the utilization of positive behavioral support models and strategies in lieu of exclusionary discipline and the negative impacts that it has on its recipients. To address transferability, this study sought to provide sufficient details of the target site for its readers to be able to decide whether its findings can justifiably be applied to other contexts. To address the dependability criterion, I strove to enable future researchers to repeat the process and produce the same or similar results. Finally, to achieve confirmability, I took steps to demonstrate that its findings emerged from the data and not from my own predispositions.

Validity. Validity refers to whether the instruments utilized collected the desired data and/or text. Careful steps were followed in developing the survey for this study. Additionally, as indicated above, a pilot study involving teachers and parents \((n=10, \ n=10)\) known to the researcher, yet not involved with the school site under study. The pilot study afforded the assurance that the survey questions were clear and consistent. As indicated above, a summary of the pilot study results will be discussed later in this chapter.

In qualitative methods, validity hinges to a greater extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher because the observer or interviewer is the instrument (Patton 2008, p. 398). It is my belief that a well prepared, tried, and trusted open-ended survey
inquiry solicited, even in the absence of the researchers’ physical presence (i.e. an online survey), hinges on those same attributes. Concerns about validity with qualitative data may also be answered through triangulation. There is a plethora of research regarding triangulation and how it may address the issue of internal validity. In general, triangulation means using more than one method or source to collect data to answer a research question or address a topic of interest. Although an in depth discussion of this term and its many uses extends far beyond the scope of this research, I found a scholarly publication by Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) entitled *Denzin’s Paradigm Shift: Revisiting Triangulation in Qualitative Research*, to be a helpful reference that brought some clarification to me regarding triangulation. In addition to encouraging one to revisit Denzin’s work, that which I found most helpful was the encouragement to make it a point to locate and use the seminal source for understanding a concept versus relying on secondary sources. To help us understand the rationale behind this recommendation, we must realize and accept that each of us view the world through our own lenses and personal experiences. Hence, although two people may review the same original source, because of the personal biases that they bring to the table, their interpretation of that source may be completely different.

The primary purpose of triangulation, as suggested by Jonsen and Jehn (2009), is to eliminate or reduce biases and increase the reliability and validity of a study. Several other purposes of triangulation are to increase the comprehensiveness of a study, provide qualitatively derived richness, and achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). For the purpose of this study, the qualitative data collected was used to acquire a deeper perspective of the teacher participants’ mindset regarding the utilization of MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and
SEL. In essence, triangulation was not necessarily used to cross-validate the quantitative data collected, but to capture a different dimension and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives relative to the focus of this study.

**Limitations**

There were three limitations to this study. First, this study utilized 42 students at one school in one state as a case study which may bring into question its reliability and generalizability, specifically as to whether and to what extent its findings would transfer across the wide spectrum of school entities implementing these supports. Second, the integrity of this study was contingent upon the participating teachers’ fidelity of implementation of the behavioral supports (MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, and SEL) and the truthfulness of their responses provided on the survey instrument. The third limitation to this study was the personal bias that each teacher brought into the equation. Teacher bias is a limitation that is far beyond the control of this or any study. We know the world through our personal experiences and through our relations and interaction with others. This is consistent with the ideology that we are products of our environments and are reflections of that which we are (or have been) exposed to consistently within those environments. Within this process our personal biases are developed and nurtured often obstructing our ability to relate to others “not like us”. When those personal biases spill over into the classroom, our students are affected detrimentally. Those who lie outside of the “norms” that we have created, generally become the unfortunate victims that result from our inability to relate to them effectively.
Delimitations

As previously indicated, all students at target site benefited from the various academic/behavioral supports implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality along with being supplemented with additional support strategies. A delimitation of this study is that only those students who received 5 or more discipline referrals during SY2018-19 while attending the target site were tracked, while those who received 1 – 4 discipline referrals were excluded.

Pilot Survey Results

As previously stated, before conducting the actual survey, a pilot survey was administered to access the clarity of the questions and to refine, as necessary. The participants of the pilot survey consisted of 10 teachers and 10 parents who had no affiliation with the target site. The results of the pilot survey affirmed that each question was comprehensible and feasible to produce the kind of information needed to complete my study. As a result, no adjustments or refinements to the original inquiries were necessary.

Conclusion

For this study, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data resulting in mixed methodology to analyze and contribute to my understanding of the overall impact that various behavioral support models implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality while being supplemented with various additional support strategies, had on the academic achievement of at-risk students at DTMS. Ultimately, the findings of this study may not only be useful to Divine Touch Middle School, but also to other contexts as well. In the next chapter, the results from the actual study will be presented.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine whether Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, had a positive impact on behavioral and academic achievement of at-risk students at DTMS. For this study, at-risk students were defined as those students who received five or more discipline referrals during the school year 2018-19 (SY2018-19) while attending DTMS. In addition to providing the aforementioned supports at a minimal standard, as compared to SY2018-19, the targeted population during SY2019-20 was provided more frequent meetings with the Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST), more frequent administrator visits to their classes, increased administrator visibility around campus, and additional support to those classes where substitute teachers were involved. The results of the study are presented in this chapter.

Findings

Although their anonymity was assured, several teachers expressed their reluctance to participate in this study because they feared that the principal and/or their direct supervising administrator would somehow be able to determine their identity. Therefore, of the 72 teachers identified and solicited to participate in this study, only 69% \( (n = 50) \) chose to participate. There were 36 female and 14 male participants who produced the following results: 23 of these participants taught combined/multiple grades (46%), 6 taught 6th grade (12%), 11 taught 7th grade (22%), and 10 taught 8th grade (20%). Additionally, 3 of the participants earned Specialist Degrees (6%), 20 earned master’s degrees (40%), and 27
earned bachelor’s degrees (54%). The final general information item indicated that 34 of 
the participants had between 9 and 21 or more years of teaching experience (68%), while 
16 had 8 or less years teaching experience (32%). These results are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5.

Results from Teacher General Information Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade(s) Taught</th>
<th>Highest Degree Earned</th>
<th># of Years Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Multi/Comb</td>
<td>Specialist 3</td>
<td>0 – 2 5 12 – 14 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Master 20</td>
<td>3 – 5 3 15 – 17 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Bachelor 27</td>
<td>6 – 8 8 18 – 20 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 11 9 21 or more 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 1 on the survey was designed to ascertain the most common reason that 
the participant sent a student to the discipline office. Nine of the participants declared that 
they did not send any student to the discipline office, eight identified “Open Defiance” as 
the reason, seven identified “Repeated Misconduct”, six identified “Insubordination”, five 
identified “Aggression”, five identified “Class Disruption”, three identified “Disrespect”, 
and two identified “Dress Code” as the reasoning. The final five participants identified 
separately “Unsafe Act”, “Skipping Class”, “Confrontation”, “Tardiness”, and “Horseplay” 
as their most common reasons for sending a student to the discipline office during SY2018-
19. Table 6 depicts this data.
Table 6.

Results from Teacher Survey Question 2a: The Most Common Reason You Sent Student to Discipline Office during SY2018-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Defiance</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated Misconduct</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Disruption</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespect</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress Code</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseplay</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping Class</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardiness</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe Act</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2a inquired if the participants believed that Multi-tiered Student Support (MTSS), Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS), Restorative Practices and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) benefit students more or less as compared to exclusionary discipline. Why or why not? The answers to this inquiry were categorized into five themes: More Beneficial, Neutral, Less Beneficial, Outliers, and No Response. Although some of the responses may have potentially illustrated affirmation of the various support models over exclusionary discipline, I was careful not to be biased or presumptuous in
drawing that conclusion. The following sections will highlight some of the responses to each of the categories, then a summary of the results will be presented.

**More beneficial.**

- It benefits students more. Sometimes students do not know better and therefore, cannot recognize that some actions that choose is not the only option and that they can express their emotions or feelings in a different way. Giving them guidance, explanation, support, and opportunities to make better decisions is always more helpful rather than just sending them somewhere to be disciplined only to repeat the same incorrect behavior.

- More. Students need to have discipline (learning) not punishment in order to truly change behavior. Understanding the effects of their behavior and how it affects others are critical for real behavior modification to occur.

- I think it benefits students more. I think students need multiple interventions from multiple people. I think multiple efforts both with intervention and with different people give the student the best chance to make growth and change.

**Neutral.**

- Depends on the student. Some students will take the opportunity to turn things around, most see it as getting an extra strike before they must worry about serious consequences. I have had one student tell me to my face "You can’t write me up yet, I get one more date on my BIF first!"

- I think there needs to be a combination of both. I do not think it can be all positive or all negative.
Of less benefit.

- During a recent seminar, students were asked if the current disciplinary practices named above would cause them to change their behavior. Almost all stated that the current disciplinary practices were ineffective and would not cause them to change their behavior. What they stated would cause them to change their behavior was Saturday School, calling parents, community service, and OSS.

- No. I think students see when they get multiple chances to disrupt the learning environment with little to no consequence do not take the supports seriously. They continue with undesired behaviors until they get the exclusionary discipline.

Outliers (difficult to categorize b/c question was not truly answered).

- Yes, because it helps build rapport with the student

- The behavioral supports in place for students do benefit them by providing ways to learn and change the behaviors that are inappropriate.

Summary of Results from Survey Question 2a

Survey question 2a may be summarized as follows: 11 of the participants felt that the support models were of more benefit to students than exclusionary discipline (22%), 11 were neutral in their response (22%), 14 felt the supports were of less benefit (28%), 13 were Outliers (26%) , and one participant failed to respond (2%). Figure 7 summarizes this data.
Figure 7. Result of Responses to Survey Question 2a, Does MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, & SEL Benefit Students More or Less than Exclusionary Discipline

Question 2b inquired about what the participant believed to be the most critical factors in successfully implementing these student supports? There were five main themes developed: Stakeholder Buy-in and Involvement, Consistency and Follow Through, Processes and Procedural, Relationship Building, and Parental Communication.

Additionally, there were two responses that I identified as Outliers because they did not seem to fit in either of the categories.

Summary of the Results

The following sections will highlight some of the responses to each of the categories, then a summary of the results will be presented.

Stakeholder buy-in and Involvement.

- Teachers, admin, and parents on the same page supporting one another
- Administrative and teacher contact with the student to praise good behavior, and re-direct negative behavior. Consequences need to be clear and consistent, and teacher,
administrator, student, and parent all need to be aware of what has happened, what steps were taken, and what the consequences are.

**Consistency and follow through.**

- Critical factor would be the teacher or adult who is in the classroom checking in and genuinely wanting to support the student. Consistency, guidance and follow through.
- I believe those students with constant repeated disciplinary behaviors should have some type of community service requirement or course to learn how to change behaviors.
- Something like inmates before they get release after serving time. Have those students earn their way back and start early when the problem begins which in most cases is in elementary school and by the time, they reach middle school, it has been years of constant behaviors. The systems need to be consistent with follow through across the board.
- Also, the administration as well as ALL teachers must buy into the systems and know how to implement them correctly with protocols in place in order for them to work successfully.

**Relationship.** Understanding of the supports and interventions, culturally competent individuals, individuals who identify and are aware of their implicit bias, and individuals who form relationships with students.

**Processes/procedures.** More prompt action to statements and discipline referrals.

- Stream-lining the process and intervening quickly I believe the most critical to students having appropriate behaviors are the classroom teacher and how the teacher deals with disruptions. If the teacher gives multiple warnings with no consequences,
students will always push limits and cause disruptions. If a teacher shows that he/she is dealing with behaviors appropriately, then students have a clear expectation on procedures and consequences. Teachers must follow through with consequences…not just threaten consequences.

- A mentor or adult check in person who is monitoring how the student is doing behaviorally and academically on a regular basis. This more regular monitoring and intervention gives the student an attention outlet and does not let them hide.

  **Parental communication.**

- Constant dialog between the school and parents. Unfortunately, parent contacts in Skyward are rarely accurate. Teachers do not have the time to hunt down the proper contact information and it is absurd that what is on the emergency cards and Skyward is not similar information.

- Contacting the parent has been a vital step in limiting the extreme class disruptions. If a parent's information is not accurate or not provided in the system, that missing link in the intervention seems to lead to repetitive behavior actions on the part of the student.

  **Outliers.**

- Teacher fidelity

- The student's desire to change

**Summary of Results from Survey Question 2b**

Survey question 2b may be summarized as follows: 18 of the participants’ responses regarding the most critical factors in successfully implementing MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, and SEL were focused on Consistency (36%), 14 of the responses
focused on Processes/Procedures (28%), 8 focused on Stakeholder Buy-in and Involvement (16%), 5 focused on Relationship Building (10%), and 2 of the responses focused on Parental Communication (4%). As previously indicated, 2 of the participants’ responses were categorized as Outliers (4%), because they did not seem to fit in either of the categories, and one of the participants fail to respond (2%). Figure 8 summarizes this data.

![Figure 8](image)

*Figure 8. Result of Responses to Survey Question 2b, What are the most critical factors in successfully implementing MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, and SEL*

**Results from Survey Questions 3 - 14**

As previously indicated in the *Survey Section* of Chapter 3, questions 3-14 were Likert Styled questions whereas the participant was asked to identify how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statements provided using a scale from 1-5 as follows: Totally disagree, Somewhat disagree, Not sure, Somewhat agree, Totally agree, respectively. Question 3 was separated into four parts (3a - d) and designed to ascertain the participants
level of competence and comfort when utilizing the support models under study. Figure 9 illustrates the results of this inquiry. For illustration purposes, Totally Agree and Somewhat Agree (as well as Totally Disagree and Somewhat Disagree) will be combined and narrowed to reflect Agreed or Disagreed. Hence, 35 of the participants agreed that they were competent and comfortable utilizing MTSS (70%), 7 of the participants were not sure (14%), and 8 disagreed (16%). The results produced for PBIS indicated that 38 of the participants agreed that they were competent and comfortable with its utilization (76%), 6 were not sure (12%), and 6 disagreed (12%). The results produced for Restorative Practices indicated 37 of the participants agreed regarding their level of competence and comfortability (74%), 5 were not sure (10%), and 8 disagreed (16%). Finally, the results produced for SEL revealed that 30 of the participants agreed that they were competent and comfortable with its utilization (60%), 10 were not sure (20%), and 10 disagreed (20%).

![Figure 9. Summary of results from teacher Survey Question #3, level of competence and comfortableness with utilizing MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, & SEL](image-url)
Question 4 solicited the participant’s attestation that he/she understood what behaviors resulted in a referral for student support services; 36 agreed that they understood (72%), 8 were not sure (16%), and 6 disagreed (12%). Question 5 solicited the attestation that the participant followed student support interventions consistently and with fidelity for all student subgroups; 37 of the participants agreed (74%), 5 were not sure 10%, and 8 disagreed (16%). Question 6 acknowledged the participants understanding and use of appropriate student behavior support models (with fidelity) and their attestation that they involve parents/caregivers consistently to encourage all students to behave appropriately prior to referring them to the discipline office; 44 of the participants agreed to this inquiry (88%), 2 were not sure (4%), and 4 disagreed (8%). Question 7 solicited the participant’s attestation that he/she understood the importance of building positive relationships with and having high expectations of all students; 50 of the participants agreed to this inquiry (100%).

Question 8 acknowledged that the participant felt their school's administration was available for support when there is a problem; 33 of the participants agreed (66%), 3 were not sure (6%), and 14 disagreed (28%). Question 9 solicited whether the participant believed that Discipline Referrals encouraged students to behave appropriately; 21 of the participants believed that discipline referrals encouraged appropriate behavior (42%), 11 were not sure (22%), and 18 of the participants disagreed (36%). Question 10 solicited their attestation that the participant understood what behaviors resulted in a disciplined referral and acknowledged that they are consistent when they find it necessary to write discipline referrals; 48 of the participants agreed (96%), 2 disagreed (4%). Question 11 acknowledged that the participant felt supported when they sent a student to the discipline
office; 32 felt supported (64%), 6 were not sure (12%), and 12 felt unsupported (24%).

Question 12 acknowledged that the participant believed that focusing on students' strengths instead of their weaknesses and/or shortcomings would help inspire positive behavioral outcomes; 46 of the participants agreed (92%), 3 were not sure (6%), and 1 disagreed (2%). Question 13 solicited the participant’s attestation that he/she was “culturally competent” when interacting/dealing with all students; 45 of the participants agreed with this inquiry (90%), 3 were not sure (6%), and 2 disagreed (4%). Finally, Question 14 of the Teacher’s Survey acknowledged that the participant believed that there is a relationship between student discipline and academic achievement; 49 of the participants agreed (98%), and one disagreed (2%). Table 7 summarizes these results.

Table 7.

Summary of Results from Teacher Survey Questions 4 - 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry</th>
<th>Understood</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of behaviors that result in referral of student for support services.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followed student support interventions consistently and w/ fidelity for all student subgroups</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding &amp; use of appropriate student behavior support models (w/ fidelity) &amp; involve parents/caregivers consistently to encourage all students to behave appropriately prior to referring them to the discipline office</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood importance of building positive relationships w/ and having high expectations of all students</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt school’s administration was available for support when there is a problem</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believed that Discipline Referrals encouraged students to behave appropriately</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood what behaviors resulted in a disciplined referral and acknowledged that they are consistent when they found it necessary to write discipline referrals</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt supported when they sent a student to the office</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent/Guardian Survey Results

As stated in the Survey Section of the previous chapter, the Parent/Guardian Survey consisted of 10 Likert Styled questions designed to gauge the parent/guardian’s awareness and understanding of the various supports available to their student, gauge the parent/guardian’s mindset regarding their role in their student’s academic and behavioral success, and to gauge the parent/guardian’s perception of being communicated with and feeling supported when their student had behavioral challenges. Although multiple opportunities to participate in this study were extended to the 42 parent/guardians of the students tracked for this study, only 16 (38%) chose to complete the survey. These 16 respondents were the caretakers of 11 male and 5 female students. Ten of the participants’ students were in 8th grade, and 6 were in 7th grade.

The participants were asked to identify how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statements provided using the same scale identified above. Question 1 was separated into 4 parts (1a - d) and designed to ascertain the participants level of awareness and understanding of the various supports available to their student. Figure 10 illustrates the results of this inquiry. Just as above, for illustration purposes, Totally Agree and Somewhat Agree (as well as Totally Disagree and Somewhat Disagree) will be combined and narrowed to reflect Agreed or Disagreed. With that in mind, 13 of the participants agreed that they were aware of and understood MTSS (81%), one was not sure (6%), and 2

| Believed that focusing on students’ strengths instead of their weaknesses and/or shortcomings would help inspire positive behavioral outcomes | 92% | 6% | 2% |
| Felt “culturally competent” when interacting/dealing with all students | 90% | 6% | 4% |
| Believed that there is a relationship between student discipline and academic achievement | 98% | --- | 2% |
disagreed (13%). Likewise, the results produced for PBIS indicated that 13 of the participants agreed that they were aware of and understood its availability (81%), one was not sure (6%), and 2 disagreed (13%). The results produced for Restorative Practices indicated 13 of the participants agreed regarding their level of awareness and understanding (81%), 2 were not sure (13%), and one disagreed (6%). Finally, the results produced for SEL revealed that 12 of the participants agreed that they were aware of and understood its availability (74%), 2 were not sure (13%), and 2 disagreed (13%).

![Bar chart](image)

*Figure 10. Summary of results from parent/guardian Survey Question #1 awareness of available student support models*

Question 2 of the survey acknowledged that the participant understood what behaviors resulted in a referral of their child for student support services; 12 of the participants agreed (74%), 2 were not sure (13%), and 2 disagreed (13%). Question 3 acknowledged that the participant felt the school's administration is available for support when there is a problem; 14 agreed (88%), and 2 disagreed (12%). Question 4 acknowledged that the participant understood the importance of building positive
relationships with their child's teachers; 14 of the participants agreed (88%), one was not sure (6%), and one disagreed (6%).

Question 5 acknowledged that the participant understood what behaviors may result in a discipline referral for their child; 14 of the participants agreed (88%), one was not sure (6%), and one disagreed (6%). Question 6 acknowledged that the participant felt their child is treated fairly when he/she receives discipline for behavioral challenges; 13 of the participants agreed (81%), and 3 disagreed (19%). Question 7 acknowledged the participants awareness that they are an integral part of their child's academic success or failure in school; 14 of the participants agreed to their awareness (88%) and 2 disagreed (12%).

Question 8 acknowledged the participant’s awareness that they are an integral part of their child's behavioral success or failure in school; 12 of the participants agreed (75%), and 4 disagreed (25%). Question 9 acknowledged that the participant felt when there were challenges with their child's behavior, his/her teacher communicates with them prior to referring him/her to the discipline office; 9 of the participants agreed (56%), one was not sure (6%), and 6 disagreed (38%). Finally, Question 10 acknowledged the participant attestation that their child is offered the supports he/she needs to modify his/her behavior; 11 of the participants agreed (69%), one was not sure (6%), and 4 disagreed (25%). Table 8 summarizes this data.
Table 8.

**Summary of Results from Parent Survey Questions 2 - 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry</th>
<th>Understood</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of understanding of the behaviors that result in referral of student for support services</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt school's administration was available for support when there is a problem</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood the importance of building positive relationships with their child's teachers</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood what behaviors may result in a discipline referral for their child</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt their child is treated fairly when he/she receives discipline for behavioral challenges</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware that they are an integral part of their child's academic success or failure in school</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware that they are an integral part of their child's behavioral success or failure in school</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt when there were challenges with their child's behavior, his/her teacher communicates with them prior to referring him/her to the discipline office</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt that their child is offered the supports he/she needs to modify his/her behavior</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Rationale for Selection section of Chapter 3 presented the discipline data from SY2018-19, when a minimal standard of implementation of the various supports were used. As previously indicated, this data would be compared to the discipline data from SY2019-20, after fidelity of implementation of the supports was assured in combination with additional support strategies and efforts. The premise of this comparison will be to determine how the student participants responded to the existing support systems in place along with the implementation of additional strategies and efforts. As previously mentioned, during SY2018-19, the target population received 854 discipline referrals. Table 9 illustrates the results from SY2019-20 for this group was 515 discipline referrals.
Additionally, Table 10 presents the means and standard deviation.

Table 9.

*Comparative Discipline Data between SY2018-19 & SY2019-20*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Total Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Recipients Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</th>
<th>% of Recipients who are African American (A.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2018-19</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2019-20</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.

*Mean and Standard Deviation of SY2018-19 & SY2019-20*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2018-19</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4.150</td>
<td>.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>SY2019-20</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Restatement of Research Question and Hypothesis**

The research question that drove this study is: Is there a statistically significant difference in behavior and academic outcomes of at-risk students when various behavior support models are implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, while supplemented with additional support strategies?

Hypothesis (1): There is a statistically significant difference in the mean number of discipline referrals received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts

Null Hypothesis (1): There is no statistically significant difference in the mean number of discipline referrals received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts
Hypothesis (2): There is a statistically significant difference in the Grade Point Averages (GPAs) received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts.

Null Hypothesis (2): There is no statistically significant difference in the Grade Point Averages (GPAs) received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts.

The relevant results of the paired t-test are the t statistic, $t = 6.98$, $p = .000$; interpreted as a small probability of this result occurring by chance, under the Null Hypothesis of no statistically significant difference. The Null Hypothesis (1) is rejected, since $p < 0.05$, (in fact .000). Although this test indicated the efforts were statistically significant, I had the need to consider if the difference of those additional efforts was practically important. There is strong evidence ($t = 6.98$, $p = .000$) that the extra efforts improved the student discipline of the targeted population on average by approximately 5 fewer discipline referrals. Additionally, we can conclude with 95% confidence that if the targeted population were 100 students, 95% of those would have received between 3.52 and 6.38 fewer referrals.
Table 11

*Paired Samples Test of Targeted Population Discipline Referrals during SY2018-19 & SY2019-20*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Covid-19 Considerations**

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, DTMS remained closed after Spring Break 2020. To ensure fairness of comparison, I compared SY2019-20 data results to an abbreviated SY2018-19 ending both school years on March 13. With this in consideration, the targeted population number of discipline referrals received was adjusted to 605, of which 540 of those referrals were received by students classified as economically disadvantaged (89.3%), and 351 were received by African American students (58%). Table 12 illustrates this adjusted data and reiterates the results of the discipline data from SY2019-20. Additionally, *Table 13* presents the adjusted mean and standard deviation for the abbreviated SY2018-19 ($M = 6.00, SD = 2.66$) and reiterates SY2019-20 ($M = 3.45, SD = 3.05$) results.
Table 12.

*Comparative Discipline Data between an Abbreviated SY2018-19 & SY2019-20*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Total Discipline Referrals Received</th>
<th>% of Recipients Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</th>
<th>% of Recipients who are African American (A.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2018-19</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2019-20</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13.

*Mean and Standard Deviation of Abbreviated SY2018-19 & SY2019-20*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SY2018-19</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>SY2018-19</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SY2019-20</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relevant results of this paired t-test were the t statistic, $t = 4.5$, $p = .000$; interpreted also as a very small probability of this result occurring by chance, under the Null Hypothesis (1) of no statistically significant difference. Null Hypothesis (1) is rejected, since $p < 0.05$, (in fact .000), indicating the efforts were statistically significant. Again, I considered if the difference of those additional efforts was practically important. This result also indicated that there is strong evidence ($t = 4.5$, $p = .000$) that the extra efforts improved the student discipline of the targeted population on average by approximately 2.55 fewer discipline referrals. Additionally, we can conclude with 95% confidence that if the targeted population were 100 students, 95% of those would have received between 1.40 and 3.69 fewer referrals (Table 14.).
Table 14.

*Paired Samples Test of Targeted Population Discipline Referrals w/ Adjustment due to Covid-19*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Implications on Academic Achievement**

The second part of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in GPAs of the targeted population pre and post additional efforts. Whereas 67% of the targeted population’s GPAs increased during SY2019-20, with the highest increase of 1.58 to 3.0, 37% of the targeted population’s GPAs decreased. Table 15 presents the mean and standard deviation of the targeted population’s GPAs during SY2018-19 (M = 1.83, SD = .656) and SY2019-20 (M = 2.04, SD = .778).

Table 15.

*Mean and Standard Deviation of Targeted Population’s Paired Samples Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>SY2018-19 GPA</th>
<th>1.8331</th>
<th>42</th>
<th>.65600</th>
<th>.10122</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2019-20 GPA</td>
<td>2.0440</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>.77793</td>
<td>.12004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) is rejected since \( p < 0.05 \). Therefore, we may conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in mean GPAs of targeted population pre and post interventions. Although this test indicated the efforts were statistically significant, I considered if the difference of those additional efforts was practically important. There is strong evidence \( (t=-2.33, \ p=.025) \) that the extra efforts improved the GPAs of the targeted population on average by approximately .211 points. Additionally, we can conclude with 95% confidence that if the targeted population were 100 students, 95% of those students’ GPAs would have increased between .394 and .028 points (Table 16).

Table 16.

*Paired Samples Test of Targeted Population’s GPAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2018-19 GPA SY2019-20 GPA</td>
<td>.21095</td>
<td>.58622</td>
<td>.09046</td>
<td>-.39363</td>
<td>-.02827</td>
<td>-2.332</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next chapter, I will provide a brief summary of each chapter in this study, discuss its significance and what can be concluded from its findings, and discuss its implications for professional practice, recommendation for implementation, and suggested areas for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study was organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the background of the study including a description of the target site, presentation of the problem, significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the research question, and the definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 contained a comprehensive literature review of existing scholarly research relative to the subject along with the focus of why this study was needed. Chapter 3 contained the methodological approach to be used to accomplish the research. Additionally, Chapter 3 provided sufficient details so that the readers of this study may be able to replicate all essential aspects. Chapter 4 provided a detailed summary of what the study uncovered. Careful measures were followed so that the data collected was not compromised or skewed by any preconceived notions or personal biases. This final chapter will provide a discussion and conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further studies.

Discussion and Conclusion of the Findings

This section is divided into three discussions. Each discussion reflects the primary findings of this study and provide a considered response to the research indications of these findings: the teachers’ survey findings, the parent survey findings, and the analyses of the target population SY2019-20 discipline and academic performance data. These research indication discussions form a synthesis of the study and present my overall conclusions based on these findings. The discussion conclusions inform my formulation of implications for practice and the need for further research.
Results of teacher survey. The results of Question 1 of the teacher survey revealed that 5 discipline infractions (Open Defiance, Repeated Misconduct, Insubordination, Aggression, and Class Disruption), accounted for 62% of the most common reasons that the participants sent a student to the discipline office. The overall results produced by discipline data from SY2019-20 indicated that the additional efforts described in this study used to supplement the various support models employed at target site, lowered those 5 discipline infractions to 27% for the targeted population with no infractions for Class Disruption or Repeated Misconduct. Although the results are noteworthy, because some progression towards the overall goal of lowering the targeted populations discipline infractions was accomplished, there is still much work to be done to bring those numbers down to 10% or lower.

Question 2 was divided into two parts. The first part of the question revealed that 78% of the participants either felt that the utilization of the support models in this study were of less benefit than exclusionary discipline (28%), neutral in their response (22%), or failed to answer the question (28%). This result indicates that much work is needed to establish a higher level of understanding, confidence, and comfort in the utilization of those supports. The second part of Question 2 revealed that 70% of the participants believed that the most critical factors in successfully implementing MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and SEL were, Consistency (36%), Processes/Procedures (28%), and Stakeholder Buy-in and Involvement (16%). These results emphasize the need for the target site’s behavioral and academic support teams to pay close attention to these areas to ensure that expectations are not simply met but exceeded.

The results of Question 3 revealed that although the majority of the participants felt competent and confident utilizing the various support models: MTSS (70%), PBIS (76%),
Restorative Practice (74%), and SEL (60%), there is much work ahead to improve these results particularly with Social Emotional Learning. Ideally, my personal goal would be to bring these results to 90% or higher. My rationale is that when one feels highly competent and confident regarding the usage of the support models, he/she is much more likely to utilize with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, thus assure its recipients the designed and most desirable outcomes. Ensuring that all teachers and staff members receive adequate and continual training regarding the proper and effective use of these support models is paramount for continued success.

The training emphasis may also be instrumental in addressing the concerns revealed by the results of Questions 4 – 6. Question 4 revealed that 28% of the participants were either not sure (16%) or disagreed (12%) that they understood what behaviors resulted in referrals for support services; Question 5 revealed that 26% of the participants were not sure (10%) or disagreed (16%) that they followed student support interventions consistently and with fidelity for all student subgroups; and Question 6 revealed that 12% of the participants were not sure (4%) or disagreed (8%) that they followed general protocols of the support models.

Question 7 was the only inquiry of this survey that produced 100% consensus. All participants agreed that they understood the importance of building positive relationships and having high expectations of all students. This result is important because building positive relationships is the foundation for the success of all the support models emphasized in this study. Additionally, relationship building may be used to encourage all teachers and staff members to actively engage in ongoing professional training and development as mentioned above.
The results of Questions 8 and 11 revealed the need for school administrators to do a better job at reassuring that teachers felt supported when disciplinary challenges surfaced. The results of Question 8 revealed that 34% of the participants were not sure (6%) or disagreed (28%) that they felt supported by the target site’s administration when there was a problem; and the results of Question 11 revealed that 36% of the participants either felt unsure (12%) or unsupported (24%) when they felt it necessary to send a student to the discipline office. Perhaps a logical explanation as to why 67% of the participants were unsure of how to respond to this inquiry, may be attributed to the fact that these participants didn’t have a definitive answer because they had not sent a student to the discipline office as revealed in the results of Question 1. Additionally, some of the responses may be attributed to what the teachers are hearing from their peers, and not from their own personal experiences.

The results of Question 9 revealed that 58% of the participants were either not sure or disagreed that discipline referrals encouraged students to behave appropriately. Optimistically, this group is most likely to be more receptive to learning and implementing with fidelity the shared support models. The results of Question 10 revealed that 96% of the participants agreed that they understood what behaviors resulted in a referral and that they were consistent when they felt it necessary to send a student to the discipline office. These results were especially promising when paired with their consensus regarding building relationships and expectations and may possibly be used as a foundation or platform to encourage and propel further the use of the student support models emphasized in this study.
The results of Questions 12 and 14 were also encouraging. Question 12 revealed that 92% of the participants believed that focusing on a student’s strengths inspired better behavioral outcomes; and Question 14 revealed that 98% of the participants believed that there was a relationship between student discipline and academic achievement. These results were encouraging because they also build a strong case for the continued implementation of the various support models and additional support efforts discussed in this study.

Finally, the results of Question 13 revealed that 10% of the participants were either not sure 6% or disagreed (4%) that they were “culturally competent” when interacting with all students. Although this result may seem acceptable, my personal observations and experiences at the target site paints a quite different picture. Hence, I strongly encourage and suggest continual professional development workshops on cultural awareness and diversity training at the target site throughout the school year.

The overall indications of the teacher survey revealed that a solid foundation has been established for the continued growth and successful use of the various support models highlighted within this study. The majority of the respondents feel confident and competent regarding the utilization of those supports with fidelity; understands the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships with all students; and understands that having high expectations of all students while maintaining focus on their strengths, inspire better academic and behavioral outcomes. As indicated in one of the teacher participant’s response:

I believe that PBIS, Restorative practice and SEL are beneficial to the students given that it is used appropriately. I feel that the restorative practice, specifically the circle has been very helpful
with my students when I provide them with questions that do not go over their heads. The circle itself provides the students with a safe place to share and it allows for students to learn about each other. It also allows the students a time and place to talk about things not pertaining to school. Some students do not understand how to listen or to see in a perspective other than their own. SEL helps teach students about these important skills. When I do need to address the students regarding their behaviors, the students are more willing to listen as oppose to retaliating and talking back. When they do retaliate or talk back, it is a lot easier bring them back.

This kind of enthusiasm, in combination with the established foundation described above, along with continued professional growth and development workshops and training opportunities regarding the various support models, and cultural awareness and diversity training, throughout each school year, will assure the continuance of better academic and behavioral outcomes for at-risk students at DTMS for many years to come.

**Results of Parent Survey.** The results of Question 1 on the parent survey revealed that much work is needed to ensure that parents are aware of the various supports that are available for their child should the need arise; 19% of the participants were either not sure (6%), or disagreed (13%), that they were aware of and understood MTSS and PBIS; 19% of the participants were either not sure (13%), or disagreed (6%), that they were aware of and understood Restorative Practices; and 26% of the participants were either unsure (13%), or disagreed (13%) that they were aware of and understood SEL. These results revealed the need for the target site to establish and have ongoing training and resources available for parents throughout the school year regarding the support models.
The results from Question 2 of the parent survey revealed that 26% of the participants were either not sure (13%), or disagreed (13%) that they understood the behaviors that would result in their child receiving a referral for student support services. This result also emphasizes the imperativeness of providing training and ongoing support and resources to parents regarding the student support services available to their child at target site. The results of Questions 3, 4, and 5 revealed similar results. The results of Question 3 revealed that 12% of the participants disagreed that the target site’s administration was available for support when there was a problem; the results of Question 4 revealed that 12% of the participants either were not sure (6%), or disagreed (6%), that they understood the importance of building positive relationships with their child’s teacher; and Question 5 results revealed that 12% of the participants were either not sure (6%), or disagreed (6%), that they understood the behaviors that results in a discipline referral for their child. Although some may consider 12% as insignificant, I feel that its critically imperative that all parents feel supported by their child’s school administration, have knowledge of the discipline procedure of their child’s school, and recognize the importance of partnering with their child’s teachers. Each of these assures students the best possible educational experiences and outcomes.

Just as with Question 4, Questions 7 and 8 sought to understand if the participants understood the importance and imperativeness of their active engagement in their child’s education to ensure success. The results of question 7 revealed that 12% of the participants disagreed that they were aware that they were an integral part of their child’s academic success; and the results of Question 8 revealed that 25% of the participants disagreed that they were an integral part of their child’s behavioral success. These results emphasize the
need to remind parents on a regular basis, using all platforms to include newsletters, assemblies, etc., the critical role that they play in their child’s education. As indicated in a study by Henderson and Berla (1994), the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning, (2) express high, but not unrealistic, expectations of children's achievement, and (3) become involved in their children's education.

The results from Question 9 revealed that 44% of the participants were either not sure (6%) or disagreed (38%) that their child’s teacher communicated with them prior to sending him/her to the discipline office due to behavioral challenges. This result indicates that the administration at target site must be more intentional about encouraging teachers to communicate and partner with their student’s parents prior to referring them to the discipline office. Of course, it is always good practice for teachers to communicate with parents on a regular basis to keep them informed even when there are no behavioral or academic issues with their child.

The results for Question 10 revealed that 31% of the participants either were not sure (6%) or disagreed (25%) that their child is offered the supports needed to modify his/her behavior. As with Question 1, this result indicates the need for the target site to establish and have ongoing training and resources available for parents throughout the school year regarding the various available supports for their child.

The overall indications of the parent survey reveal that each of the challenges that were indicated by the minority of the respondents, may be addressed effectively via stronger communication from the target site with parents, at all levels, and by having
ongoing training and resources available throughout the school year. Perhaps during the initial orientation, an introduction to the various support models available, along with the expression of the imperativeness of building and maintaining positive relationships with the child’s teacher may be shared. Additionally, the proper protocols to follow that will strengthen and perhaps speed up speaking with the target site’s administration, may be emphasized. These efforts would be extremely beneficial in capturing the outliers in each category of the parent survey.

Ultimately, if the overall expectation is that all teachers utilize the support structures with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality; and that all parents have at least a general understanding of the supports that are available to their child, are encouraged to partner with their child’s teachers giving the support that is needed, and to follow proper protocols to address any challenges that may occur; it is imperative that the target site offers on-going training, communication, resources, and support throughout the school year for these stakeholders. This would not only ensure that these support structures and protocols are being utilized but are being utilized appropriately to assure the production of the best possible academic and behavioral outcomes for the students.

**Results from SY2019-20 discipline data and academic performance.** The results from the targeted population’s academic performance and discipline data of SY2019-20 provided the answer to the question under study: Is there a statistically significant difference in the behavioral and academic outcomes of at-risk students when various behavior support models are implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, while supplemented with additional support strategies? This question was answered by comparing the GPAs and the number of referrals received by the targeted population during
SY2018-19, when the support models were being implemented at a minimal standard, to the GPAs and the number of referrals received by the targeted population during SY2019-20, when the support models were implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality, and supplemented with various support strategies. Although the results concluded there were statistically significant differences in the mean GPAs and the mean number of discipline referrals received by at-risk students pre and post additional efforts, there is still much work to do at the target site. These results still revealed the need to have ongoing behavioral and classroom management professional development opportunities throughout the school year.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the number of discipline referrals received by and the GPAs of the at-risk students at target site pre- and post- implementation of the support models with fidelity, along with supplemental support strategies. As confirmation that the additional efforts were of practical importance, the results of the study indicated that the targeted population received 2.55 fewer referrals during SY2019-20 than they received during SY2018-19. Additionally, during that period, this groups average GPAs increase by .211 points. Consistent with the findings above, these results also suggest that should there be assurance that teachers receive adequate and continuous training and support regarding the implementation and use of MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practices, and SEL, there will be practical assurance of the effectiveness of those efforts enhancing behavioral and academic outcomes.

This study has implications for practice at the target site because the additional efforts accomplished its goal of lowering the number of discipline referrals received by,
and enhancing the academic performance of the targeted population, thus maximized their time in the learning environment. It is my suggestion and recommendation that teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities implement and use these support models and incorporate those models into all future teacher preparation curriculums. Additionally, once a teacher is hired to join the target site’s staff, along with continual classroom management strategies, cultural/diversity training, and professional development workshops, I strongly encourage and suggest that the school leaders provide continual professional development workshops for the various support models discussed in this study throughout the school year as well.

Finally, as previously indicated in Chapter 1, the findings of this study may also be of practical value to other contexts desirous of addressing those challenges described. Lessons learned may provide insight to other school sites. Additionally, this study adds to the body of research that is especially aimed at addressing the behavior and academic challenges that economically disadvantaged and/or minority students are disproportionately facing.

**Recommendations for Research**

As educators, one of our goals is to maximize the amount of time our students spend in the learning environment, which should ultimately enhance their academic outcomes. Regardless of our efforts via any form of exclusionary discipline, we are unable to replicate the classroom learning experience that our students are missing and are therefore a detriment to the challenge of narrowing the existing academic achievement gap. Hence, a recommendation for future research would include a study like this topic, but carried out on a much larger scale, perhaps of multiple institutions of learning. A second
suggested study may pose the question, now that we have built a culture in which we have managed to maximize the student’s time in the learning environment, what strategies may maximize their academic outcomes? Finally, a third possible research recommendation, would be to track the targeted population over a 3-year period to ascertain if similar or better results are produced.
References


Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2015). School-wide PBIS: An example of applied behavior analysis implemented at a scale of social importance. *Behavior Analysis in*


http://thoughtco.com
Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions for Teachers

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Parents/Guardians

Appendix C: INFORMED CONSENT
Principal: Permission to Conduct Research at School

Appendix D: INFORMED CONSENT
Parent Survey: Individual Participant

Appendix E: INFORMED CONSENT
Teacher Survey: Individual Participant
Appendix A
Survey Questions for Teachers

Teacher Perceptions of Discipline Practices at Divine Touch Middle School

General Information

Grade(s) Taught during SY2018-19 | Gender | Highest Degree Earned | # of Years Teaching Experience
--- | --- | --- | ---
a) 6th | a) Male | a) Bachelor | a) 0 – 2
e) 12 – 14
b) 7th | b) Female | b) Master | b) 3 – 5
f) 15 – 17
c) 8th | c) Specialist | c) 6 – 8 | g) 18 – 20
d) combined/multiple | d) Doctorate | d) 9 – 11 | h) 21 or more

Please select the best answer to the following question:

1) What was the most common reason you sent student(s) to Discipline Office during SY2018-19?
   a) Insubordination
   b) Inapp/Obscene Act
   c) Unsafe Act
   d) Class Disruption
   e) Disrespect
   f) Aggression
   g) Skipping Class
   h) Confrontation
   i) Open Defiance
   j) Tardiness
   k) Failure to Report
   l) Repeated Misconduct
   m) Horseplay
   n) Dress Code
   o) N/A - I did not send any student to discipline office

Please provide written responses to the following open-ended questions

2a) Do you believe that Multi-tiered Student Support (MTSS), Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS), Restorative Practices and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) benefit students more or less as compared to exclusionary discipline? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________________________

b) What do you believe to be the most critical factors in successfully implementing these student supports?

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix A Survey Questions for Teachers Continued

Please answer the following questions, using the scale below, with the answer that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement:

Totally disagree = 1  Somewhat disagree = 2  Not sure = 3  Somewhat agree = 4  Totally agree = 5

3) I feel competent & comfortable utilizing various student support models to include:
   a) Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) 1 2 3 4 5
   b) Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS) 1 2 3 4 5
   c) Restorative Practice 1 2 3 4 5
   d) Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) 1 2 3 4 5

4) I understand what behaviors result in a referral for student support services. 1 2 3 4 5

5) I follow interventions consistently and with fidelity for all student subgroups. 1 2 3 4 5

6) I understand and use appropriate behavior support models (with fidelity) and involve parents/caregivers consistently to encourage all students to behave appropriately prior to referring them to discipline office. 1 2 3 4 5

7) I understand the importance of building positive relationships with and having high expectations of all students. 1 2 3 4 5

8) The school’s administration is available for support when there is a problem. 1 2 3 4 5

9) I believe Discipline Referrals encourage students to behave appropriately. 1 2 3 4 5

10) I understand what behaviors result in a discipline referral and I am consistent when I find it necessary to write discipline referrals. 1 2 3 4 5

11) I feel supported when I send a student to discipline office. 1 2 3 4 5

12) Focusing on students’ strengths instead of their weaknesses and/or shortcomings will help inspire positive behavioral outcomes. 1 2 3 4 5

13) I am culturally competent when interacting/dealing with all students. 1 2 3 4 5

14) I believe that there is a relationship between student discipline and academic achievement. 1 2 3 4 5
Appendix B

Survey Questions for Parents/Guardians

*Parent/Guardian Perceptions of Discipline Practices at Divine Touch Middle School*

**General Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade of Student</th>
<th>Student’s Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a) Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>b) Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Please answer the following questions, using the scale below, with the answer that best identifies how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement:

Totally disagree = 1  Somewhat disagree = 2  Not sure = 3  Somewhat agree = 4  Totally agree = 5

1) I am aware of the various student support models available for my child to include:
   a) Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)  1 2 3 4 5
   b) Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (PBIS)  1 2 3 4 5
   c) Restorative Practice  1 2 3 4 5
   d) Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)  1 2 3 4 5

2) I understand what behaviors may result in a referral for support services.  1 2 3 4 5

3) The school’s administration is available for support when there is a problem.  1 2 3 4 5

4) I understand the importance of building positive relationships with my child’s teachers.  1 2 3 4 5

5) I understand what behaviors may result in a discipline referral for my child  1 2 3 4 5

6) My child is treated fairly when he/she receives discipline for behavioral challenges.  1 2 3 4 5

7) I am an integral part of my child’s academic success or failure in school.  1 2 3 4 5

8) I am an integral part of my child’s behavioral success or failure in School.  1 2 3 4 5
9) When there are challenges with my child's behavior, his/her teacher communicates with me prior to referring him/her to the discipline office  1  2  3  4  5

10) My child is offered the supports he/she needs to modify his/her behavior. 1  2  3  4  5
Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT

Principal: Permission to Conduct Research at School

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ronald Diltz, doctoral candidate at National Louis University. Mr. Diltz holds a position of Dean of Student Discipline at Divine Touch Middle School in Royal County Public Schools. This study is entitled “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students”, occurring from January 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021. The purpose of this study is to determine whether and if implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL), has any impact on the academic achievement of at-risk students at Divine Touch Middle School.

Student data will be collected and used in this research project and will be part of the report, but no student names will be revealed. Participation at your school includes sixth and seventh grade students from SY2018-19 who received five or more referrals during the school year, the parents of those students, and all available teachers who taught at Divine Touch Middle School during that school year. The researcher will survey those teachers if they are willing and available. Additionally, the researcher will contact parents of the aforementioned students and invite them to participate in a voluntary online survey. Permission to contact the parents to participate in an online survey requires an informed consent form to be signed and return indicating your willingness to allow research to be conducted at your school.

Participation is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. All identities, including that of the district, school, and individual participants will be kept confidential by the researcher and will not be attached to data. Participants’ identities will in no way be revealed as data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. Only the researcher will have access to the survey responses. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure all information collected in a locked cabinet in his home office. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to participants beyond that of everyday life.

Participants will not have direct benefit from being in this research study and taking part in this study may contribute to decisions regarding continued future implementation with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models, beyond the general standard.

You may request a completed copy of this study by contacting Ronald Diltz at rdiltzi@my.nl.edu. In the event you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Ronald Diltz, rdiltzi@my.nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact the dissertation chair: Dr. Jenifer Neale located at National Louis University, or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

Consent: I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to allow Ronald Diltz to conduct research for his dissertation study “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students” at the school where I serve as Principal, including the following:

- Survey the teachers (10 minutes)
- Survey parents of up to 45 participants (10 minutes)

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<th>Principal’s Name (Print)</th>
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<td>Researcher’s Name (Print)</td>
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Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT

Parent Survey: Individual Participant

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ronald Diltz, doctoral candidate at National Louis University. Mr. Diltz holds a position of Dean of Student Discipline at Divine Touch Middle School in Royal County Public Schools. This study is entitled “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students”, occurring from January 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021. The purpose of this study is to determine whether and if implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Support (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL), has any impact on the academic achievement of at-risk students at Divine Touch Middle School. This study will help the researcher develop a deeper understanding of the impact that various support models has on student achievement. Thank you in advance should you agree to participate in this anonymous survey. Additional details are below.

The online survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and the researcher will not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address during the survey. All survey data will be stored in a password protected electronic format and will be discarded within five years of the completion of the study. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. Student data will be collected and used in this research project and will be part of the report, but no student names will be revealed. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate with no negative consequences. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. Participants will have direct benefit from being in this research study and taking part in it may contribute to decisions regarding continued future implementation with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models for the direct benefit of those in need of these supports beyond the general standard.

You may request a completed copy of this study by contacting Ronald Diltz at rdiltzi@my.nl.edu.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Ronald Diltz, rdiltzi@my.nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact the dissertation chair: Dr. Jenifer Neale; or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Please proceed to the survey website directly to signify your acceptance of this informed consent and to take the (anonymous) survey:

Thank you for your consideration.

Consent: I understand that by checking “Agree” below, I am agreeing to participate in the study “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students.” My participation will consist of the activities below between August 30, 2019 and August 30, 2020.

- Completion of one survey that will take approximately 10 minutes.
ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree
Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT

School Teacher: Individual Participant

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ronald Diltz, doctoral candidate at National Louis University. Mr. Diltz holds a position of Dean of Student Discipline at Divine Touch Middle School in Royal County Public Schools. This study is entitled “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students”, occurring from January 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021. The purpose of this study is to determine whether and if implemented with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practice, and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL), has any impact on the academic achievement of at-risk students at Divine Touch Middle School. This study will help the researcher develop a deeper understanding of the impact that various support models has on student achievement. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing the bottom of this form in the space indicated, you are giving your consent to participate in a survey related to the school’s discipline program. The survey will involve approximately 14 questions and will last approximately 10 minutes. A two-part open-ended question will be used to collect qualitative data regarding your view of feeling supported by administration when discipline is deemed necessary, the behavioral climate of the school, and your understanding of MTSS, PBIS, Restorative Practice, and SEL. Your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will not be attached to the data collected during from the survey.

Participation is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. All identities, including that of the district, school, and individual participants will be kept confidential by the researcher and will not be attached to data. Participants’ identities will in no way be revealed as data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. Only the researcher will have access to all survey responses. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure the survey responses in a locked cabinet in his home office. Only the researcher will have access to data. Student data will be collected and used in this research project and will be part of the report, but no student names will be revealed.

Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to participants beyond that of everyday life. While you may not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, taking part in it may contribute to decisions regarding continued future implementation with fidelity, intensity, and intentionality various student support models for those students in need, beyond the general standard.

You may request a completed copy of this study by contacting Ronald Diltz at rdiltzi@my.nl.edu. In the event you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Ronald Diltz, rdiltzi@my.nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact the dissertation chair: Dr. Jenifer Neale located at National Louis University 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

Consent: I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study “Utilizing Proper Behavior Modification Support Models to Narrow the Academic Achievement Gap Among At-Risk Students.” My Participation will consist of the activities below between August 30, 2019 and August 30, 2020.
- Completion of one survey that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

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<td>Researcher’s Name (Print)</td>
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