Utilizing a Systematic Approach to Problem-solving in the Elementary School Setting: A Program Evaluation Project

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UTILIZING A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING:
A PROGRAM EVALUATION PROJECT

Edie E. Sohigian
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
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This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


ABSTRACT

Sunnyside Elementary School, an anonymous name, had a high number of discipline referrals. The purpose of this inquiry was to develop and follow an action plan to reduce behavior issues. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry, I collected discipline and academic achievement data as well as survey data to analyze the impact of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process on the rate of discipline referrals. Although the overall number of referrals increased, other significant findings were determined. The leadership team and faculty must be vested in the action plan as a priority in order to achieve positive results. It was also determined that utilizing the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process increased the recognition of need for problem-solving to solve school-wide problems.
PREFACE

At the time this Program Evaluation began, I was working for Differentiated Accountability (DA), which was contracted with the Florida Department of Education to support underperforming schools. One focus of DA was to guide schools through the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process and help them to carry out the action plan, which resulted from the process itself. This project was very close to my heart because it really identified with the work I was doing on a daily basis.

I chose this school to work with because of my relationship with the principal and history with the school and district itself. The principal and leadership team were easy to work with and eager to learn the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. I thank them for providing their time and energy to the process and having an open mind. Since this was not a school, I worked directly with through my position with DA during the 2012-2013 school year; my relationship with these individuals was outside the scope of my regular job duties.

Following the completion of this Program Evaluation, I realized how important it is to set priorities and stick to them. It is easy to get caught-up in the day-to-day grind that occurs at the school-based level. Even though a leadership team identifies a need and develops a plan, if it is not a priority then there probably will not be a lot of emphasis on following through. That is why the elements of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, which include accountability, are so essential. As a team, holding each other accountable for accomplishing tasks and setting priorities are critical elements of true collaboration and lead to successful outcomes.
These experiences have influenced my growth in leadership in several ways. I developed such a sense of respect for the growth of a solid team of individuals that lead a school. It is so important that all members of the team are on the same page and have the same goals in mind. I also have a much deeper understanding of how important it is to develop trust on a team. Without this element, it is hard to hold each other accountable and be considered a true team.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Jacinth Gurdon who has always been my advocate, encouraging me to continue my educational journey. Sandy Laughrey, whom I admire for her professionalism, ambition and focus on family, you inspire me. My professors Dr. Burg, Dr. Schott, and Dr. Buckman whom I learned so many valuable lessons in educational leadership as well as life.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

With the introduction of Federal No Child Left Behind (USDOE, 2001) regulations and now the implementation of Race to the Top legislation framed within the Obama Administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (USDOE, 2009), accountability measures in Florida’s public schools are more stringent than they have ever been. The pressure to produce high achieving students with a goal of college and career readiness has placed a chokehold on schools to ensure that all students achieve their highest potential and close the achievement gap. Schools strive to overcome common school-wide barriers to student achievement such as daily attendance and discipline referrals to ensure these goals are met. There is an overwhelming need to reduce or completely eliminate these barriers to student achievement. One way to accomplish this school-wide is by using databased decision making while implementing a common, school-wide, problem-solving process.

Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, in their work, Best Practices in System-Level Change (2008) advocate the use of an Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, within the framework of Problem-Solving-Response to Intervention (PS-RtI), which provides an avenue for building school-wide accountability measures. Initially, the school-leadership team identifies a priority for implementation, and elects how the desired outcomes of the priority will be measured by the stakeholders. Second, the collaborative team will brainstorm all available resources that might facilitate achievement of the desired outcome, and all obstacles or barriers that might prevent achieving the desired outcome. Third, the team selects one obstacle from step two to address and writes it in behaviorally
descriptive language. Fourth, members list strategies to reduce or eliminate only the obstacle identified in step three and record them. Fifth, using the list generated in step four as motivation, the group will develop an action plan to reduce or eliminate the obstacle identified in step three, while describing in detail who will accomplish each action and establish time frames for completion. Sixth, the group will specify a plan for follow-up to ensure the task is accomplished with fidelity. Seventh, a plan for evaluation to reduce or eliminate the obstacle identified in step three is determined by the team. At this point, it may be necessary to return to step three multiple times to complete the entire framework or continue on. Eighth, the team uses data to evaluate progress toward the achievement of the overall goal and any next steps that may need to occur (Curtis, Castillo & Cohen, 2008).

The purpose of this inquiry was to facilitate the Eight-Step Problem-Solving process with one elementary school in order to help the school leadership team attain their goal of a reduction in the number of referrals. Sunnyside Elementary School (pseudonym) is located within a culturally diverse school district in Florida. During its first year, Sunnyside Elementary opened on two separate campuses and utilized portable structures for classrooms. By the end of its first school year 2007-2008, the two campuses merged onto one new building. The principal retired as the school earned its first letter grade of a “D”. The following year (2008-2009) the school improved to a “C” and met the state’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals through Safe Harbor (an alternative method for elementary schools to earn AYP when reading or mathematics scores show at least a ten percent reduction of non-proficient students, while still meeting AYP requirements in writing) (FLDOE, 2011a). In the years that followed, the school earned
grades of a “D” in 2010, “C” in 2011, and a “C” in 2012. These results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>% Level 3 or Higher Reading</th>
<th>% Level 3 or Higher Math</th>
<th>% Meeting Standard Writing</th>
<th>% Level 3 or Higher Science</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains Reading</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains Math</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains Reading</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Please note that data from the 2011-2012 scores reflect more stringent scoring criteria.

During the 2012-2013 school year, a new principal was appointed, Ms. Valley (pseudonym). She had six years of assistant principal experience at two different schools in the district. This was her first principal appointment. When this study was conducted, there were 76 teachers and approximately 997 students enrolled, at Sunnyside Elementary School, with an 87 percent minority rate and a 39 percent mobility rate. Mobility rate, described by the Florida Department of Education, is the “rate at which students move into or out of the school population during the school year” (FDOE, 2013a, para. 21). A high mobility rate indicates a large movement of students in or out of the school. If a student is not at attendance at the same school throughout the year, the instruction that student received is uncertain. Additionally, ten percent of the school was categorized as needing special education services, 85 percent of the students received free or reduced lunch, and 55 percent of the students indicated that English was their second language. This demographic information on the school population is summarized in Table 2.
The Principal, Ms. Valley, was appointed during the summer of 2012. After analyzing the school’s behavioral data, Ms. Valley and the leadership team decided to focus on reducing the number of behavioral violations (referrals) at Sunnyside Elementary School. There was an assortment of offenses students committed to receive a referral, ranging from a serious Level One offense (i.e. arson, assault, drug possession, etc.) to a lesser Level Four offense (i.e. class disruption, horseplay, profanity, etc.) (School Board of Osceola County, 2009). During the 2011-2012 school year students generated a total of 421 referrals, rising by 124 from the previous year. The top ten referral categories in 2011-2012 included the following incidents: 122 disruptions on a school bus (BUS); 33 unsafe acts (USA); 32 class disturbances or disruptions (CLT); 27 minor batteries (BAT); 23 insubordinations (INU); 20 incidents of insolent attitude (INS); 17 inappropriate or obscene acts (IOA); 16 incidents of defiance of authority or willful disobedience (DEF); 13 incidents of fighting (FIL); and, 13 incidents of profanity or abusive language (PRO). Of these top ten referral categories one of them, minor battery totaling 27 or 6.4% of all incidences for the year, was considered a level one infraction, which was the most serious according to the district matrix. Level two infractions included unsafe acts, insubordination, defiance of authority, inappropriate or obscene acts, and fighting, totaling 102 or 24.2% of the top ten referrals received during the school year.
the 2011-2012 school year. Level three infractions, including both disruptions on the school bus and insolent attitude, equaled 142 or 33.7%. Of all these referrals, 122 were given while students were riding the school bus. Level four infractions, which were the least severe, totaled 45 or 10.6% of the top ten awarded referrals and stemmed from categories class disturbance and profanity. These data are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Top Ten Referral Categories 2011-2012 at Sunnyside Elementary School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Number of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption on a school bus (BUS)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe acts (USA)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Disturbances or Disruptions (CLT)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Battery (BAT)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination (INU)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Insolent Attitude (INS)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate or Obscene Acts (IOA)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Defiance of Authority or Willful Disobedience (DEF)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Fighting (FIL)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Profanity or Abusive Language (PRO)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The 2011-2012 school year students generated a total of 421 referrals, rising by 124 from the previous year.*

Using referral data, the team targeted school-wide behavioral issues. They had the opportunity to identify specific behavioral concerns to address within the framework of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Therefore, it was my aspiration that by utilizing the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, the school experienced a positive impact on student achievement.

**Rationale**

As a teacher and instructional coach for eight years in Title I schools with high minority populations, I encountered many barriers to improving student achievement. Now, as a Mathematics Specialist for the Florida Department of Education Bureau of School Improvement, my perception that there are many barriers to student achievement
has been solidified. As I worked alongside many administrative teams throughout the
designated Region (consisting of seven school districts in central Florida), I observed
countless instances of problem admiration and a lack of proactive problem-solving. The
absence of the school leadership teams’ ability to improve school-wide behavior,
structural, and academic issues may ultimately negatively impacted student achievement.
Organizational change requires the use of a structured problem-solving process (Curtis,
Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). As I attended leadership meetings at various schools,
administrators and instructional coaches often posed questions to one another, the
answers to which were often challenges the school was not able to overcome without
using a strategic, systematic problem-solving process. Within the Problem-Solving-
Response to Intervention (PS-RtI) framework, it is important to ask questions that will
lead to real solutions that should result in cultivating student-learning gains (Buffum,
Mattos, & Weber, 2010). Adhering to this mind set is essential to implementing the
Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

Within Schubert’s (1996) framework of the four curricular traditions, the Social
Behaviorist’s approach to curriculum development requires systemic commitment to
change—the kind of systemic change that would enable leadership teams to investigate
school-wide issues with a clear and concise vision for sustainable outcomes. The Eight-
Step Problem-Solving Process, not unlike the Social Behaviorist’s perspective, has the
potential to transform school culture into an all-encompassing magnet where assessment,
curriculum, instruction, learning environment, and behavior culminate. Not only do
teams collaborate to identify barriers, but also develop action plans, which focus on
students’ needs.
Embarking on a school-wide culture of problem-solving can provide an avenue for this evolution of cultural norms. Wagner (2008) reveals that in the 21st Century, critical thinking and problem-solving are essential “survival skills” (p. 14) for students to possess in our “global knowledge economy” (p. 15). As a key component of the problem-solving process, critical thinking is a pathway to providing significant analysis of school-wide issues.

Wagner (2008) conducted an interview with Rob Gordon, a military officer, who described critical thinking skills as they pertain to his life:

Critical-thinking skills include the ability to apply abstract knowledge to solve a problem and to develop and execute a solution—the ability to think broadly and deeply. It means having and using a framework for viewing alternative solutions. Another part of critical thinking is surrounding yourself with people who have differences of opinion and who can help you come to the best solution: team-based leadership (p. 22).

The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process provides this framework for proactive, team-based, problem-solving. In addition, extending from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, it was my hope that this program evaluation provide an avenue for leadership teams to develop and utilize action plans with the intention of reducing the number of discipline referrals.

As problem-solving behaviors begin to emerge within in a school, the implications for functionality within other areas of need at the school are numerous. The School Advisory Council (SAC), made up of both school and community members, continually make decisions throughout the year that have a deep impact on student
learning and resource allocation, including the School Improvement Plan. Since this group is comprised of school and community members, adopting problem-solving behaviors within this committee also has the potential to increase student achievement, depending on the barriers the group chooses to address.

In this case, where the school chose to use the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process to reduce the number of discipline referrals, there was a specific alignment to increased student achievement. The developments of social aspects of education (including student behaviors in the classroom) have a direct and positive correlation to academic performance within early childhood education (Forster, 2010). In an article summarizing findings from multiple studies, Wentzel and Wigfield (1998) concluded that students who, “display socially appropriate classroom behavior are more likely to succeed in school” (p 15).

It is important that during the problem-solving process which the action plan is derived from a basis that teachers fully participate in delivering parts of the action plan to which they are assigned. Teachers are the most central force in ensuring that the plan is successful. Since intrinsic motivation and academic performance are found to be directly correlated with one another (Coates, 1989), then someone inside the classroom has to monitor that motivation. Teachers’ expectations of student conduct were significantly related to levels of supposed student academic proficiency, meaning that if the teacher expected that the student would behave well, then the student tended to have better academic proficiency. In addition, when teachers support students through clear and consistent expectations of behavior, there is a significant and positive correlation to the
student displaying engagement in the class lessons. It is the teacher that makes it all happen (Akey, 2006).

As a result of the staff at Sunnyside Elementary participating in this program evaluation and attempting to reduce the number of discipline referrals, part of the action plan they developed required further communication with faculty and staff. This also included processes for the leadership team to develop guidelines for communication procedures. Communication is a large part of the success of the action plan developed from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Communicating the school-wide progression of decision making (how the action plan was developed) with all stakeholders tends to increase awareness of the desired outcomes of the problem-solving process. After a school experiences success with the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process in one area in need of improvement (reducing discipline referrals), the hope is that they will use the same process in other areas impeding student achievement.

In the case of Sunnyside Elementary, there were many people involved in carrying out the action plan who did not participate in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. If members of the leadership team do not employ a comprehensive communication procedure, not only is it likely for the action plan to fail, they run the risk of many stakeholders not knowing about their role in the action plan at all. In addition, effective communication procedures may actually increase the likelihood of the action plan’s success. If district personnel and families are aware of the action plan and the role they play in its success, they may complete their segment and add to the completion of outcomes.
History and Evolution of Eight-Step Problem-Solving

The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (USDOE, 2004) identified the need for Problem-Solving Response to Intervention (PS-RtI). The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process provides a structure to support the implementation of PS-RtI (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). Beginning in 1991 as somewhat of a grassroots effort, PS-RtI (Problem-Solving-Response to Intervention) gained strength and eventually became a Florida Department of Education grant funded entity in 2006 through the University of South Florida. The Florida PS-RtI Project began to provide training and support throughout the state to schools and school districts to support the use of PS-RtI (Batsche, Curtis, Dorman, Castillo, & Porter, 2007). Initial PS-RtI implementation consisted of a four step process; (1) Identify a problem (2) Utilize data to analyze the problem and list reasons why the problem is occurring (3) Develop and implement an action plan (4) Monitor the progress of the plan to determine if additional steps are necessary (FLDOE, 2011b). This four-step model is a databased process that is generally implemented to meet individual and small groups of students’ needs. Its primary focus is on the modification of instruction and behavior at the classroom level (Ikeda et al., 2007).

Utilized for student academic and behavioral trends as well as individual student need, the four-step process of PS-RtI provides the foundation from which the Eight-Step Problem-Solving model emerged. The Eight-Step model includes: (1) Determine desired outcome (goal); (2) list available resources and barriers; (3) select one alterable barrier and write it in measurable terms; (4) list strategies to reduce or eliminate the barrier; (5) develop multiple action plans; (6) determine a means of monitoring the plan to ensure
fidelity; (7) use data to evaluate outcomes; and, (8) decide if satisfactory progress was made toward reducing or overcoming the barrier and meeting the overall goal (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). This Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process is an extension of the original four-step process, creating a more specified, and systematic approach to school-wide problem-solving.

Goals

The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process allows the leadership team and all the stakeholders involved to examine school-wide issues that may have a detrimental effect on the institution. As an avenue to solve school-wide problems and to improve the overall functionality of the system as a whole, the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process may help teams to tackle recognized issues such as absenteeism, graduation rate, referral rate, suspension rate, scheduling, etc. This also includes curriculum issues and the implementation of instructional strategies. For the purposes of this study, the school leadership team worked along with the entire faculty to reduce the number of student referrals. Because students would be present in the classroom for instruction due to reduced disruptions from discipline, a marked positive increase in student achievement is an anticipated possible outcome.

It is my goal and intention that at the end of this program evaluation, there will be three distinct outcomes. First, there will be a marked reduction in the number of student discipline referrals written by teachers. This is referenced by the goal and target of the school’s action plan. If a referral is necessary, not only does it disrupt academic time for the students involved in the incident, many times the entire class is put on hold to deal with the negative behaviors occurring in the classroom. When referrals are written by the
If referral rates decrease, then there will be an increase of academic time on task for students. This should lead to an increase in student achievement because students are spending more time engaged in learning and less time inhibited by behavior issues in the classroom.

Next, Participants will indicate, based on survey results, that they hold a greater understanding of problem-solving strategies and the overall problem-solving processes. Participants will indicate, within survey results, that they utilize problem-solving processes at a greater frequency. It is my assertion that if the leadership team and faculty members are using the action plan developed within the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, and then they will be participating in actions, which resulted from the process. They should develop a familiarity and fluency with the process over time. I believe that if completed with fidelity and the outcomes produce results (reduction in referrals), then this will lead to additional usage of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process with other school-wide barriers to behavioral and academic success of students.

**Research Questions**

The general guiding question of this study is, Can participation in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process lead to a decrease in referral rates, as measured by changes in the numbers of referrals and suspensions? In order to explore this, I facilitated the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process at one elementary school, and gathered data from the participants in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative.
Problem-solving has the ability to focus on a number of different barriers plaguing school-wide systems. The principal and leadership team, after examining the school-wide behavior data from the 2011-2012 school year, identified that the referral rate and number of discipline instances were the biggest concerns. The leadership team decided that this would be the first issue to address using the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. After I completed the initial problem-solving training session, all stakeholders carried out the action plan that was developed in the planning session by the leadership team and me. I gathered the data on the number of referrals from the first nine weeks of the school year and compared them with those from the previous year with an intention to illustrate the effectiveness of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

My primary research questions related to this inquiry included:

1. What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what problem-solving strategies are working well for their school?
2. What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process strategies are not working well for their school?
3. What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process suggest as ways to improve the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process at their school?
4. Do stakeholders in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report an increase in problem-solving behaviors in their school, as a result of their participation in the Eight-Step Problem Solving Process?

The faculty, including leadership, participated in a survey I distributed prior to the utilization of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. For a copy of the survey, please
see Appendix A, Self-Study Survey: School-Wide Problem-Solving. During the final nine weeks of the school year, after implementing the action plan generated from the problem-solving session, the participants took the survey again. The survey contained open-ended questions to get specific and meaningful feedback from participants regarding this particular question. This process should help to answer these questions.

**Conclusion**

In my current job role assisting the lowest performing schools in Central Florida to improve student achievement in various forms, I have noticed a strong need for a consistent problem-solving process especially in under-performing schools; the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process could be an essential tool for self-examination and improvement in various areas. Thus, my aspiration in this program evaluation was to assist a school leadership team in using an action plan derived from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process as a proactive avenue to reduce the number of student discipline referrals. Additionally, if the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process was successful in reducing the number of behavior referrals, it was my hope that this might foster other improvements, such as an increase in student achievement.
SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Change is a consistent theme throughout the process of problem-solving. It is the actual intent that by making a change, the result will be an improved state, or a desired effect. Without it, the process of problem-solving would not exist. Many scholars agree that successful change in the school setting is not a top down progression; rather, effective leadership teams recognize opinions of individuals at all levels of implementation when seeking to transform school-wide processes (Curtis, Castillo & Cohen, 2008). This is not the change of one individual, but rather change that an entire group of people work to implement. This group of people may be a leadership team, an entire staff, or even community members depending upon the desired outcome. The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, as a program, seeks to change the forecast of a chosen barrier and yield positive outcomes (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008).

Problem-Solving

Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen (2008) identify four key stages included in most problem-solving processes to be implemented by a collaborative team: “(1) problem identification and definition of the desired outcome(s), (2) problem analysis and identification of resources and barriers, and (3) strategy development and implementation, and (4) evaluation” (p. 891). This type of systematic collaboration helps to facilitate adjustments in the way schools make decisions (Curtis, Castillo & Cohen, 2008).

Bruce Ballinger, an expert in root-cause analysis and change management, wrote about three critical elements to problem-solving in his book, Got an Effective Problem-
solving Culture? (2010). The first of these three elements requires teams to embrace a
prescribed problem-solving methodology. The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process
defines this first of three pieces. Next, Ballinger emphasizes that it is necessary for the
prescribed methodology to integrate within existing structures and job expectations. The
intent of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process is to mingle seamlessly with existing
systems, improving accountability and effectiveness. Lastly, Ballinger continues his
explanation that it is essential for stakeholders to have the necessary training and support
to embrace a new problem-solving process. He adds that teams would benefit from
utilizing the support of an outside facilitator to guide them through the process. As I filled
this role of the facilitator, I afforded the leadership team with the necessary coaching to
provide a gradual release of responsibility, so that the leadership team would eventually
be able to facilitate the process independently. In my experience with the use of the
Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, teams have struggled to maintain the integrity of
the process after initial professional development if there was no further support. With
the addition of me as the facilitator, it was my intent that the fidelity of the process would
increase.

In the article, Rigor Redefined (2008), Tony Wagner mentions that asking the
correct questions is a key piece of problem-solving. As teams progress through the Eight-
Step Problem-Solving process, they will seek success by asking questions such as: “Why
is the problem occurring?”, “How are we going to assess that our plan is working?”, and
“Who will monitor the progress of our plan?” It is with questions like these that the
process is truly reflective in nature.
In my work as a Mathematics Specialist with the Florida Bureau of School Improvement, my team and I worked with several school leadership teams to use the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process to decrease or eliminate school-wide barriers to student achievement. During the follow-up meetings with the school teams, it was my observation that following the initial use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, many of the leadership teams did not make it a priority to proceed collaboratively through all eight steps. The result left the schools without a completed action plan to motivate change. Later that year, the school leadership teams realized they had not accomplished their task and began the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process all over again.

Consequently, they wasted valuable time and misused resources. Steele and Boudett surmised that, “Schools that explore data and take action collaboratively provide the most fertile soil in which a culture of improvement can take root and flourish” (2008, p. 59). It was my goal to provide sufficient modeling of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process so that the individuals at Sunnyside Elementary School would have the tools they needed to complete the action plan they created and replicate this collaborative process with other barriers they identify in the future.

Collaboration

Collaboration and relationship building are paramount to the problem-solving process (Curtis, et al, 2008). Effective leaders are those who form relationships with a varied group of individuals. Including multiple stakeholders with distinctly dissimilar modes of thinking provides leaders with a strong basis on which to grow a productive team primed for change (Fullen, 2002). Glatthorn (2000) discussed the need to take a team approach when implementing new initiatives. He recommended that outlining the
manageability of tasks, harnessing others’ talents, and including multiple people in the decision-making process all help to ease transitions resulting from the process. Marzano (2006) also concluded that the principal should take a team approach to leadership when the desire or need for change should arise. Although it is the principal who guides the process and leads the charge for change, it is the leadership team who provides balance and voice for all stakeholders. Curtis, Castillo & Cohen, (2008) also advocate for the identification of all stakeholders, including those individuals in the problem-solving and implementation process. Bringing the necessary people to the table for collaborative processes increases accountability measures between the members of the team leading to an increase in idea generating and added actionable outcomes (Dimacali, 2003).

Curtis, Castillo & Cohen (2008) identify principals as “gatekeepers” (p. 892) whose job it is to distribute leadership responsibilities evenly amongst stakeholders to perpetuate change. Christopher R. Wagner states in his article The School Leader’s Tool for Assessing and Improving School Culture (2006) that, “School culture is the shared experiences both in school and out of school (traditions and celebrations) that create a sense of community, family, and team membership” (p.41). It is the trust that forms through collaboration of all members of the group that works to form the school’s culture. He also mentions that a school’s culture has the ability to affect all aspects of the institution. Student achievement is one of those key factors.

In order to effectively carry out the action plan developed during the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, the members of the school community would benefit from sharing in responsibility of implementing the action plan. As the faculty and leadership
team work together toward a specific goal, they will share an experience that will form a common or shared culture of problem-solving.

**Conclusion**

The shared responsibility of all stakeholders has the potential to accelerate the action plan derived from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving process. One person alone cannot solely drive the change. It is critical that all stakeholders work together toward the desired outcome. Through leadership providing a common vision, using problem-solving, collaborative change should positively impact student achievement.
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

I conducted a survey of all members of the leadership team. The principal identified these individuals. These members included the principal, assistant principal, literacy coach, mathematics coach, and a resource teacher. Members of the faculty took an identical survey. I conducted this survey twice within the same school year. I conducted the first survey during the first nine weeks of the 2012-2013 school year, with 58 teachers taking the survey. Participants took the survey again during the second nine weeks of school, with 24 teachers taking the survey.

I collected and compared referral data from both the previous and current school years. I did this four times; the first was December of 2011, the second was June 2012, the third was December of 2012, and the fourth was June 2013. This information helped to determine the effectiveness of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

Participants

Participants included all the members of the school leadership team including principal, assistant principal, mathematics coach, literacy coach, and a resource teacher. These individuals were key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the action plan developed during the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. All team members had vital perspectives to share during the process. The assistant principal was the person at the school who processed the majority of the referrals and input data into the district’s data management system. This individual was directly in charge of overseeing behavior issues within the school. The instructional coaches played a vital role in the day-to-day school-wide structures at the school. They were in many classrooms each day working
directly with teachers. They offered key perspectives of teacher and student needs, relevant to both academics and behavior. Instructional coaches also assisted with the collection and analysis of school-wide data.

While 58 teachers took survey one, 24 teachers took survey two. Teachers were an essential connection between the action plan developed as a result of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process and student outcomes. If teachers do not carry out the developed action plan, then the likelihood of positive outcomes is extremely low. In addition, if the leadership team engages teachers in future problem-solving activities, there may be greater teacher buy-in when they are asked to implement these types of tasks.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

**Data Management Systems.** I collected data on referral rates during the first three months of the 2012-2013 school year. I compared referral data to those from the same time period of the previous school year. The referral data was reported by the individuals at the school site and reported through their own data management system to the district office. I organized referral data within charts, so it was easy to understand and supply a narrative interpretation. A complete list of referral data from both the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years can be found in Appendix D. Table 4 provides a compilation of the Top Ten Referral Categories from 2011-2012. These are the data used during the Eight-Step Problem Solving Workshop by the leadership team at Sunnyside Elementary School to determine the goal and barriers.
Table 4

**Top Ten Referral Categories 2011-2012 at Sunnyside Elementary School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral Category</th>
<th>Total Number of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption on a school bus (BUS)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe acts (USA)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Disturbances or Disruptions (CLT)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Battery (BAT)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination (INU)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Insolent Attitude (INS)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate or Obscene Acts (IOA)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Defiance of Authority or Willful Disobedience (DEF)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Fighting (FIL)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Profanity or Abusive Language (PRO)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>316</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The 2011-2012 school year students generated a total of 421 referrals, rising by 124 from the previous year.*

As stated in Patton’s Utilization Focused Evaluation,

For information to be useful and to merit use, it should be as accurate and believable as possible. Limitations on the degree of accuracy should be stated clearly. This means they want data that are valid and reliable (2008, p. 396).

The referral and academic data was not collected from the school, but by reliable data management sources. By utilizing both sources, The Florida Department of Education Website to collect academic data (Table 5) and the district’s data management system to collect behavioral data (Table 4), my aim was to ensure accuracy in data collection.

Table 5 indicates the school grade and components of the school grade between the years 2008-2012 for Sunnyside Elementary School. Elementary school grades are calculated using a predetermined set of criteria; the points possible could add up to a total of 800 points. The percent of students earning a level three or higher in Reading for grades three through five is worth a total of 100 points. Sunnyside Elementary earned 52 points in this category in 2012. This is the least amount of points in this category (64...
points in 2008) Sunnyside had ever received. The percent of students earning a level three or higher in Mathematics for grades three through five is worth a total of 100 points. Sunnyside Elementary earned a total of 38 points in this category in 2012. This is the lowest Sunnyside had ever received in this category since 2008. The percent of students meeting the writing standard in fourth grade is worth a possible 100 points. In 2012, Sunnyside Elementary earned 85 points, which was the highest amount of points the school had ever earned in this category. The percentage of students earning a level three or higher in fifth grade science is 100 points. In 2012, Sunnyside Elementary earned 41 points in this category, which was 22 points higher than the lowest score they achieved in 2009, but nine points lower than the most recent score of 50 in 2011.

There are two categories that rely on learning gains (see Table 5) in order for the school to earn points. These points can only be earned by students moving from grade three to four or four to five or by students who were retained in the same grade level. The Florida Department of Education (2013b) indicates

Students make learning gains if they:

a. Improve one or more FCAT 2.0 achievement levels (e.g., from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, or 4-5) or Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) performance levels (for students with significant cognitive disabilities);

b. Maintain a proficient achievement level on the FCAT 2.0 or FAA (at least level 3 for the FCAT 2.0, level 4 for the FAA) without decreasing a level; or

c. Demonstrate more than one year’s growth when remaining in achievement level 1 or 2 on the FCAT 2.0 (or when remaining at performance level 1, 2, or 3 for the FAA) for both years. Under this alternative, one year’s growth on the
FCAT 2.0 is defined in terms of the difference between a student’s current year and prior year FCAT 2.0 vertical scale score. To make learning gains, students who remain at level 2 on the FCAT 2.0 have to score at least one point beyond a year's expected growth. Students who remain at level 1 have to score at least two points beyond a year's expected growth.

The percentage of students making learning gains in Reading is 100 points. In 2012, Sunnyside earned 69 points in this category that was the highest the school had ever achieved. The percentage of students making learning gains in Mathematics is worth 100 points. Sunnyside Elementary earned 62 points in this category in 2012 that was the highest they had ever earned. The percentage of students in the lowest 25 percent making learning gains in Reading can earn a possible 100 points. Sunnyside Elementary earned 73 points in this category in 2012, which was the most they had ever earned by nine points. The percent of student in the lowest 25 percent making learning gains in Mathematics can earn a possible 100 points. Sunnyside earned 70 points in this category in 2012, which was the most points it had ever earned, and an increase from the previous year by 17 points. This data paints a picture of the work done at the school during the 2011-2012 school year. From the amount of points earned in the learning gains categories, it is obvious that a tremendous amount of effort was placed on working with students on areas where they had deficiencies. This includes pulling students out of classrooms during times when they are not taught core subjects (Reading, Mathematics or Science) to support them on remedial skills and concepts. This data also tells us that there was less focus placed on students’ current grade level Standards and holding students to high expectations in 2012. This is evident when looking at the percent of students at or
above level three in Reading, Mathematics, and Science. As noted in Table 5, the percent of students at Level three or higher in Reading dropped from 70 to 52%, Mathematics dropped from 61 to 38% and Science dropped from 50 to 41%. This indicates that fewer students met proficiency (at grade level) in 2012 than 2011. Lastly, this data indicates the high importance placed on writing instruction. Table 5 data show an increase in writing proficiency in 2012 among fourth graders from 62 percent to 85 percent, which is an overall increase of 13 percentage points for the school.

Table 5

*State-wide Test Results 2008-2012 at Sunnyside Elementary School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Reading</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Math</th>
<th>% Meeting the Writing Standard</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Science</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Please note that data from the 2011-2012 scores reflect more stringent scoring criteria.

**Surveys**

I conducted a survey with the leadership team prior to embarking on the problem-solving process, as well as following the ninth week of implementation of the formulated action plan. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the survey. I asked the leadership team a series of questions about how problems were evaluated and approached at their school. The survey included narrative portions for the participants to complete, as well as value responses regarding components related to school-wide problem-solving processes. It was important to determine the members’ knowledge of any past use of problem-solving.
The survey questions helped to determine this. Separating the leadership team surveys from the faculty surveys helped to determine perspective of each group of individuals.

I gave an identical survey to the entire faculty. This helped to determine the school-wide understanding of problem-solving. The survey results also provided knowledge of how the faculty values the problem-solving process in providing reasonable solutions to school-wide issues. I compiled, analyzed, and summarized the results of the surveys. This information was important to help assess the faculty’s prior disposition toward the implementation of school-wide action plans to improve systematic change. If the faculty has a negative attitude toward the process prior to implementation, this may negatively affect the outcome of the action plan that is developed during the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

In the survey, I asked questions to try to determine to what extent the leadership team and faculty used pieces of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Research question number four asked, “Do stakeholders in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report an increase in problem-solving behaviors in their school, as a result of their participation in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process?” and relates to the first three numerical response-based questions within the survey. Each of these three questions contained descriptors to assist the participant in answering the question with accuracy:

#1 Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?

#2 Do we promote goal attainment?

#3 Do we use the language of problem-solving?
The survey question #1, “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?” was aligned with steps one and two from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process (1. Identify a problem and 2. Identify resources and barriers). The survey question #2, “Do we promote goal attainment?” aligned with step five and six of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process (5. Develop multiple action plans to reduce or eliminate identified barriers and 6. Specify a plan for follow-up for each action plan). The survey question #3, “Do we use the language of problem-solving?” aligned with the entire Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

The second part of the survey contained two open-ended statements (questions #1 and #2) and one question (question #3). These correlated directly with the first three research questions: 1. Please describe any problem-solving strategies you believe are currently working well at your school. 2. Please describe any problem-solving strategies that you believe are not working well at your school. 3. What improvements could be made to the Eight-Step Problem-Solving process at your school? A copy of the survey is attached in Appendix A.

I also compared data on the amount and types of referrals given to students during the same time period from 2011-2012 (the year before the problem-solving process) to those similar data resulting from the weeks of the 2012-2013 school year following the implementation of the action plan generated from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving session. This provided comparison data to show any possible effects of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

In addition, I collected academic data from 2008 to 2012 (the year prior to the problem-solving process) and compared these data points to those from the 2012-2013
school year to illustrate any impact the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process had on academics.

By collecting survey information, I carefully considered all sources of information that would provide insight into the faculty and leadership team’s use of problem-solving (Dana, 2009). I collected, compiled, and organized all quantitative survey information within an Excel Spreadsheet. I collected survey data twice: once at the beginning of the school year and once during the second nine weeks. I also complied and summarized all stakeholder open-ended qualitative responses and narrative data within an Excel Spreadsheet. I grouped and summarized all similar responses. The groupings I used were based upon positive and negative responses. Positive responses indicated that some type of problem-solving was occurring. Negative responses included those indicating that participants were not knowledgeable of the problem-solving processes, or participants indicated they did not know how to respond to questions.

Survey data is found in Appendix A.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

I collected all surveys in a timely manner. The quantitative data from each survey was arranged within charts in several Excel Spreadsheets. I determined the mean, median, and mode of the leadership team members’ responses. I also determined the mean, median, and mode of the faculty members’ responses. I compared the mean, median, and mode of all responses from the initial survey to the mean, median, and mode of all responses from the final survey.
I arranged the qualitative data from each survey within charts in several Excel Spreadsheets. I tabulated responses based on similar terminology between answers. I kept the leadership team responses and the faculty responses separate.

I reported the data accurately without bias to provide insight on the fidelity of the process. I provided feedback from the survey to the leadership team of the school in its entirety following the completion of this project.

Referral data was collected through the school district’s data management system by the assistant principal, as a daily school practice. I accessed this data and charted all information to compare the number of referrals by month and year. I analyzed the data from the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school year to compare data prior to and following the use of the implementation of the action plan.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Participants**

I asked all members of the faculty to complete the participant survey. No one was excluded from the process on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sex, or any other discriminatory reasoning. Members of the leadership team who participated in the actual Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process were chosen by the principal and include the principal, assistant principal, the mathematics coach, literacy coach and resource teacher. I provided the participants with informed consent forms (see Appendix B) that assured them of their anonymity and privacy of the data collected. In this project report, I did not include the name of any participant or the name of the school where they were employed at the time of this project. I obtained information directly from the participants. This information remained strictly confidential throughout the project and will continue that way afterwards, as well.
As stated in Patton’s Utilization Focused Evaluation:

An *evaluation* is perceived as valid in a global sense that includes the overall approach used, the stance of the evaluator, the nature of the process, the design, data gathering, and the way in which results are reported. Both the evaluation and the evaluator must be perceived as trustworthy for the evaluation to have high validity (2008, p. 396).

In order to accomplish this, I ensured participants possessed full autonomy throughout the study. Participation was completely voluntary. Employees of the school who choose to participate were free to withdraw at any time without consequences.

**Data**

Any data I collected on behalf of students, faculty, or administrators remained confidential. I used school-wide behavioral and academic data to compare pre and post results of the use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Behavioral data was processed by the Assistant Principal and extracted from the District’s Data Management Warehouse. Academic data was generated by Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test. I used the State of Florida website, www.fldoe.org to locate all academic data. I accessed both academic and behavioral data from reliable sources and verified the data I used with multiple sources when they were available. I did not analyze any individual student data. It was not necessary for the purposes of this study. Nor did I share any individual student data with any outside person or entity during this project.

I kept any data derived from survey results confidential. Data from surveys was both quantitative and qualitative. Participants answered questions on a scale from one to five. Participants also completed free response portions of the survey. I compiled this
data in an excel spreadsheet. I used the data to determine the answers to the study questions.

1. What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what problem-solving strategies are working well for their school?

2. What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process strategies are not working well for their school?

3. Do stakeholders in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report an increase in problem-solving behaviors in their school, as a result of their participation in the Eight-Step Problem Solving Process?

4. Did the use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process produce a decrease in the identified barriers and assist the participants in achieving the identified goal?

I kept the data from the leadership team separate from responses from the faculty members. I analyzed and compared the data sets to see if the two groups had similar views to the questions posed in the surveys. I collected all survey data on information relevant to the parameters of the study.

**Eight-Step Problem Solving Session**

I provided outcomes of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Session to the school following the completion of this project. I gathered and recorded the information during the session for purposes of this program evaluation.
Summary

The numbered list of steps leading to the collection and use of data summarizes the academic standards and ethics maintained during the study. The list reflects the involvement of higher education faculty guidance and approval, as well as district level research review and approval prior to data collection, informed consent process, management and methods of data collection, and a considered professionalism which was maintained during the study in order to maintain high research standards. The process sequence includes:

1. Dissertation Committee approval of this study.
2. Institutional Review Board approval of this study. (Appendix E)
3. District Research Review Board approval of this study. (Appendix F)
4. Collection of publically available school and student data.
5. Collection of any school or student data for which permission is needed.
6. Informed consent form to survey the leadership team and faculty. (see Appendix B).
7. Compilation of quantitative and qualitative data with the appropriate analysis.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, I recommend further use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, recommend modifications to the process, and recommend further study be conducted on the use of the process. After reviewing the data, I formed a determination to decide the effectiveness of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. I accomplished this through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data.
SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

Findings

I met with the leadership team of Sunnyside Elementary School to hold a problem-solving session. From this process, the leadership team developed several action plans based on the problem they identified and clearly defined using behaviorally measurable terms. This action plan was carried out over a nine-week period. After this time, the Assistant Principal collected and supplied the referral data using the district’s data management system. I analyzed the referral data and compared it with that of the previous year’s referral data. A survey was also taken by the faculty and leadership teams prior to and following the implementation of the action plan. I collected the completed surveys from the participants. I analyzed the survey data and compared the post survey to the initial survey. I also collected academic data through to the end of the school year using the State’s online data system. The results of these data collection processes are found in this section of my report.

Problem-Solving Workshop

The Problem-Solving Workshop lasted a total of three hours. The members consisted of the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the Literacy Coach, the Mathematics Coach, the Learning Resource Specialist, and me (facilitating the process). After reading and signing the Informed Consent Forms, the leadership team members reviewed the referral data from the previous school year (2011-2012). During the next three hours, the team members advanced through the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Team members recorded their work on the Planning and Problem-Solving Worksheet, which can be located in Appendix C.
Step 1: Identify the problem, how it would be measured, and the desired outcome.

After examining the behavioral data provided for them from the previous school year, the leadership team stated that the overall problem was there were too many classroom referrals. The clarification of classroom was significant because the location of the incidents indicated these behaviors occurred either on the bus or in the classroom. The desired outcome (target) of the action plan and how it would be measured were completed following step eight of the problem-solving process. The target helps to determine the goal of the overall Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. The leadership team indicated the desired outcome following the application of the action plan. This target stated, “Reduce our classroom referrals by 50% from 194 to no more than 97” for the entire year. The number 194 was found by adding together the top ten referral categories where students earned referrals the previous school year and subtracting the total number of bus referrals. Although there were over 100 referrals not indicated in this list, the leadership team decided to concentrate on these specific types of referrals because as a group, they were the most common. The leadership team then indicated that this goal would be measured by using the district’s data collection system to count the number of processed referrals.

Step 2: List resources and barriers to achieving the desired outcome.

The leadership team listed resources as: a strong leadership team, the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) team, the IAT (Intervention Assistance Team is a group of school-based individuals whose priority is to use databased problem-solving to improve student achievement) was more focused, reallocation of duties of the guidance counselor, and school-wide expectations. The leadership team listed barriers as: communication of
school-wide expectations, trust between teachers, and the leadership team, communication of the referral process, time, district support, no true leadership representation on the PBS team, and limited number of teachers on the PBS team.

Step 3: Choose one barrier from step two and write it in behaviorally descriptive language. The barrier the leadership team chose was communication and described it as, “Teachers do not understand the foundation of PBS and what to do to fully implement it”.

Step 4: List strategies to reduce or eliminate the obstacle from step three. This list included, “Educating the PBS team, supporting the PBS team (leadership), educating the entire staff on the foundations of PBS, educating the entire staff on how to implement PBS, and leadership needs to define PBS implementation”.

The generated action plan from step five of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process indicates that teams will develop an action plan to reduce or eliminate the identified obstacle, identify who will complete each action and establish time frames to complete the action steps. Step six indicates teams will determine if the action plan was completed. Step seven states that teams will determine how to evaluate the outcomes of the action plan. Steps three through seven will be repeated multiple times until all barriers are addressed within the action plan. The outcome of this problem-solving session is illustrated in Table 6.
Table 6

Sunnyside Elementary School Problem-Solving Session – Steps Six, Seven and Eight Resulting in an Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Action</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When/How Often</th>
<th>Plan for Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership team will meet: to look at data, decide on behavior plan, ensure representation from every grade level.</td>
<td>Leadership team will deliver information, PBS team will attend</td>
<td>October 5th</td>
<td>Math/Science Coach will communicate outcomes with the PBS team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the PBS team; Making connections to MTSS</td>
<td>Leadership team will deliver information, PBS team will attend</td>
<td>Meet monthly to review data</td>
<td>PBS team will record minutes, communicate roles of the team to the entire staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review foundations of PBS, review school-wide expectations/data, define roles of team members, understand their line of defense</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly email sent to staff with referral data</td>
<td>PBS committee will be a continuing resource for faculty through monthly email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate behavior plan with the faculty</td>
<td>Leadership team and PBS team will deliver information to faculty and attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step eight requires problem-solving teams to use data generated by carrying out the action plan to evaluate progress toward desired outcomes. In other words, this data should provide evidence that the team met the overall goal (Curtis, Castillo & Cohen, 2008). The leadership team decided that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the action plan to reach their ultimate goal that, “The PBS team would review data monthly and communicate the outcomes with the faculty.” The leadership team chose to review referral data with the faculty. When presented, this data would be differentiated by grade level.
Referral Data

Referral data was collected using the School District’s Data Management System by the Assistant Principal of Sunshine Elementary School. The Assistant Principal provided it to me; I then disaggregated it for the purposes of this study. Table 7 depicts the ten referral categories that the majority of the referrals were given during the 2011-2012 school year. As indicated by the data presented in Table 7, disruptions on the bus earned the most referrals with 122. There were 316 referrals within the top ten categories from 2011-2012. There were a grand total of 421 referrals in the original list. This number rose from 124 during the 2010-2011 school year.

At midyear, after the first semester of school, the total referrals for the 2012-2013 school year (using the top ten reporting categories) were 128 compared to 150 from the same timespan the previous year 2011-2012. This was a decrease of 22 referrals overall. If the midway point was used as a predictor for the grand total of referrals for the 2012-2013 school year, and a 53 percent increase was applied to the midway point of 128 referrals, a predicted total would equal 272. The actual number of referrals at the end of the 2012-2013 school year from the top ten referral categories was 331. This was an overall increase in the top ten referral categories of 59 from the 2011-2012 school year to the 2012-2013 school year.

Table 7 illustrates a comparison of referrals in the top ten most reported categories from Sunnyside Elementary School using those data from 2011-2012 as a benchmark. Those same referral categories were identified from the 2012-2013 data and compared. The top ten referral categories in 2012-2013 changed from the previous year. For the purposes of this study, I found it important to continue with the 2011-2012 data.
Table 7

*Top Ten Referral Categories Comparing 2011-2012 and 2012-2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral Categories</th>
<th>August-December 2011</th>
<th>August 2011-June 2012</th>
<th>August-December 2012</th>
<th>August 2012-June 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption on a school bus (BUS)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe acts (USA)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Disturbances or Disruptions (CLT)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Battery (BAT)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination (INU)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Insolent Attitude (INS)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate or Obscene Acts (IOA)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Defiance of Authority or Willful Disobedience (DEF)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Fighting (FIL)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Profanity or Abusive Language (PRO)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
<td><strong>316</strong></td>
<td><strong>128</strong></td>
<td><strong>331</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The 2011-2012 school year students generated a total of 425 referrals, rising by 128 from the previous year, 2010-2011.*

The data illustrates very similar outcomes for the two school years. Although Sunnyside Elementary School enrolled approximately 50 less students in 2012-2013 (1,062) than in the 2011-2012 (1,106) school year, this data does not reveal any significant change in referral numbers during this time frame. The list of top ten referral categories was generated based on the areas of highest need of improvement from 2011-2012. When compared to the same categories the following year, 2012-2013, there was an increase by 15 reported referrals in the total number (from the top ten categories) of referrals. The number of instances of school bus referrals increased by 20 from 2011-2012 to 2012-
2013. The number of referrals on the school buses was not an area the leadership team chose to address within the action plan of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. In addition, the largest increase from these categories was in the area of minor battery from 22 to 41 total instances. This category indicates instances when students harm each other physically (hit, bite, push, etc.). The category, which decreased the most out of the top ten, was the incidence of unsafe acts, by ten. This category is general in nature and could include incidences ranging from taking unsafe risks on the playground to running with a pencil in his hand.

**Surveys**

**Quantitative Data.** The surveys asked questions of the leadership team and faculty about their knowledge and use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process and problem-solving in general. Members of the leadership team (administrators and instructional coaches) and faculty (teachers) demonstrated responses with a limited knowledge of school-wide problem-solving. Both the initial and final surveys were identical. Both surveys asked participants value laden and open-ended questions. There were three sets of value laden questions on the survey labeled as: “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?” with six sub questions to attain further clarification, “Do we promote goal attainment?” with six sub questions to attain further clarification, and “Do we use the language of problem-solving?” Each of these main questions had sub questions to attain further clarification from participants.

**Initial Survey Results.** I distributed initial survey to five administrators, with five administrators completing the survey for a 100% response rate. I distributed surveys to 76 teachers, with 58 teachers completing the survey, for a 76 percent response rate.
The first part of the survey contained value-based questions. Possible responses ranged from one to four indicating: 1 (not at all), 2 (partially), 3 (substantially), or 4 (fully). The initial survey given to both leadership and faculty was identical to the final survey. There were three overarching questions: “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?”, “Do we promote goal attainment?”, and “Do we use the language of problem-solving?” Each of these questions were then were layered with descriptive statements labeled as sub-questions to help gain further description about each question. The complete survey is found in Appendix A.

Within the initial survey, cluster one, with questions involving the identification of problems and barriers there was one main question and a total of six sub questions. Data from these questions are located in Table 8. Question 1 asked, “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?” Leadership team members’ responses fell between partially and substantially at a mean of 2.6. The faculty responses also fell between not at all and substantially at a mean of 2.4. These results may indicate that both leadership team members and faculty members do not talk enough about real barriers to their students’ success.

Question 1a stated, “We understand our students’ community and family structures.” Leadership team members’ responses fell between substantially and partially at a mean of 2.8. The faculty responses were similar to the leadership team falling between substantially and partially at a mean of 2.9. These results indicate a working knowledge of community and family structures of the surrounding community.

Question 1b stated, “We gather academic achievement data about our students.” Responses yielded a mean result of 3.4 indicating substantially or fully for the leadership
team. The faculty responses fell between partially and fully for a mean of 3.5. These results indicate that members of the faculty and leadership team use data to make instructional decisions for their students.

Question 1c stated, “State and district data are used to validate instructional practices.” Responses for the leadership team yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating partially to fully for the leadership team. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.9 indicating between partially and fully. These results indicate that although faculty and leadership team members use data to make decisions (as noted in the previous question), they do not verify these instructional decisions using data other than that generated by the school itself. In other words, the school may use formative assessment at the school-based level; summative data from outside sources is not as widely utilized.

Question 1d stated, “We gather behavioral data about our students.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.2. Participants indicated “not at all” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.5 indicating not at all to fully. Comparing these results to that of questions about academic data, this information indicates behavioral data is not a strong emphasis.

Question 1e stated, “We address behavioral issues consistently while differentiating based on student need.” Leadership team responses yielded a mean result of 2.2 indicating not at all to fully. Faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.5 and indicated “not at all” to “fully”. Similar to question 1d, these results indicate that either there is not a strong need for a focus on behavioral support for students or that behavior support is not as emphasized as academic support for students.
Question 1f stated, “We move swiftly from identifying problems to taking steps that make a difference school-wide.” Responses produced from the leadership resulted in a mean response of 3. Participants’ responses indicated “partially” to “fully”. Responses from the faculty resulted in a mean of 2.3 and indicated “not at all” to “fully”. There was a .7 difference between responses of the leadership team and that of the teachers. The leadership team generally agrees that they are focused on solving problems that may arise. The faculty seems to disagree with this outlook indicating a need for swifter action when problems arise.

The results for the first cluster of survey questions indicate that for the most part, the leadership team and the faculty feel the same way about the use of academic and behavioral data. Both groups indicate a focus on school-based academic data. Both groups also indicate a lesser focus on behavioral data rather than academic data. This data is significant because it illustrates a possible need for problem-solving to reduce negative student behaviors.

The overall results of these initial survey questions are found in Table 8. Survey questions are found in Appendix A.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MEDIAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEDIAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MODE LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MODE FACULTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1A</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1B</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1C</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1D</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1E</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale: 1 Not at all, 2 Partial, 3 Substantial, 4 Fully
Within the initial survey cluster two and questions involving goal attainment, there were questions about the use of both academic and behavioral data. Data from these questions are located in the Table 9. Question 2 asked, “Do we promote goal attainment?” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.4. Participants indicated “not at all” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating “not at all” to “fully”. There was a large variation in participant responses. Overall, the faculty responded more favorably toward the focus on goal attainment indicating a possible greater satisfaction in meeting the goals by the faculty than the leadership team.

Question 2a stated, “Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine behavioral data.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 1.8. Participants indicated not at all to partial. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.4 indicating not at all to fully. This information indicated a consistent outlook by the leadership team and faculty that there is a lesser focus on behavioral data.

Question 2b stated, “Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine academic achievement data.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.2. Participants indicated “partially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.4 indicating not at all to fully. These responses indicate that professional learning communities exist on the school campus. The leadership team clearly feels a more strong connection to the use of academic data during professional learning communities than the staff.

Question 2c stated, “Our focus is on what’s best for students and what needs to be done to reach academic goals.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of
3.4. Participants indicated “substantially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.1 indicating partially to fully. Although the leadership team feels more strongly, both groups of individuals agree that their focus is on what is best for students academically.

Question 2d stated, “Our focus is on what’s best for students and what needs to be done to reach behavioral goals.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.0. Participants indicated “not at all” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.7 indicating not at all to fully. These responses indicate the leadership team’s overall recognitions that they do not focus on behavioral needs of students.

Question 2e stated, “Leadership team and faculty work collaboratively to address school-wide issues.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Participants indicated “partially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating not at all to fully. This survey data indicates the leadership team and faculty collaborate to solve problems.

Question 2f stated, “The principal is present in the classroom, offers meaningful support, and holds staff accountable for results”. Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.8. Participants indicated “substantially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.1 indicating partially to fully. Although the leadership team is more convinced, both groups agree that the principal is the clear leader of the school.

In terms of goal attainment, the leadership team and faculty seem to have very different views on their ability to accomplish this. The only topic they seemed to agree on was that they together, the leadership team and faculty, work collaboratively to address
school-wide issues. This concept is very important in the problem-solving process. If teams do not work collaboratively to solve problems, many factors such as communication, time management, and individual responsibilities can collapse.

Table 9

**Survey Initial Cluster 2 Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MEDIAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEDIAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MODE LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MODE FACULTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2A</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2B</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2C</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2D</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2E</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2F</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Scale: 1 Not at all, 2 Partial, 3 Substantial, 4 Fully*

Questions in cluster three focused on the actual language of problem-solving and how the basic concepts contribute to goal attainment. There were only five clarifying questions in this cluster. Both clusters one and two each had six clarifying questions. Data from these questions are located in Table 10.

Question 3 asked, “Do we use the language of problem-solving?” Responses from the leadership team resulted in a mean of 2.4. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating not at all to fully. Both groups responded similarly that they have a common use of problem-solving language.
Question 3a stated, “Key data and information is shared with appropriate stakeholders.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.0. All leadership team participants indicated partially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.5 indicating not at all to fully. Responses from the leadership team indicate a possible need for better communication with parties outside of the school-based environment, such as families and community members.

Question 3b stated, “We are encouraged to share our ideas and opinions in a proactive manner.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. Participants indicated “partially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.9 indicating not at all to fully. Both groups indicate that in general, conversations where individuals share ideas and opinions are encouraged. Question 2e, regarding the collaboration between faculty and staff yielded a mean response from both groups of a 2.6. These data indicate that although collaboration may not happen frequently, when it does occur, people are encouraged to share their ideas and opinions.

Question 3c stated, “When conflicts arise, we recognize the role we play in solving problems and the importance of finding solutions.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. Participants indicated “partially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating not at all to fully. These responses indicate participants do not dwell on negative issues or barriers to success when problem-solving, but rather look towards solving problems.

Question 3d stated, “We solve problems and work collaboratively for the best interests of students”. Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. Participants indicated “partially” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result
of 2.9 indicating partially to fully. Again, question 2e, regarding the collaboration between faculty and staff yielded a mean response from both groups of a 2.6. These data indicate that although collaboration may not happen frequently, when it does occur, people are focused on doing what is needed for students’ best interests.

Question 3e stated, “We follow a consistent problem-solving process including areas such as: problem identification, problem and data analysis, develop resolutions, addressing problems, and monitoring results.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.2. Participants indicated “not at all” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.4 indicating not at all to fully. This data may indicate that further professional development may be needed on problem-solving processes. In addition, outcomes of problem-solving sessions and the resulting data may need to be shared with both the leadership team and faculty to help them gain understanding for the importance of using a consistent process for problem-solving.

Question 3a asked participants if key data was shared with stakeholders. In order to monitor the results of the action plan resulting from the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, this element of data analysis and communication is key. Neither the leadership team nor the faculty’s responses averaged higher than 3.0 on a 1-4 point scale. The data from this group of questions indicates that although the groups are focused on the best interest of students, they do not consistently follow a specific problem-solving process nor do they understand the need to use one.

In looking at the data from all three sections there seem to be common themes. Although initial academic data is used to make decisions for students’ best interest, summative data is not used consistently to determine if these actions actually improved
student achievement. In addition, both behavioral data and academic data are not used consistently during collaborative conversations between the leadership team members and the faculty, which may be an area of need. Lastly, it may also be necessary for professional development on the use of problem-solving especially in steps where accountability measures are strategically used to ensure goals were achieved.

Table 10

*Survey Initial Cluster 3 Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MEDIAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEDIAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MODE LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MODE FACULTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3A</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3C</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3D</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3E</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Scale: 1Not at all, 2 Partial, 3 Substantial, 4 Fully*

**Final Survey Results.** Following the Problem-Solving Workshop, the final survey was completed by both the leadership team (2 administrators and 3 instructional coaches) and the faculty (24 teachers). I distributed surveys to five leadership team members, with five leadership team members completing the survey for a 100 percent response rate. I distributed surveys to 76 teachers, with 24 teachers completing the survey, for a 31% response rate. Data from this set of questions is located in Table 11.

Question 1 asked, “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success? Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. All leadership team participants indicated partially or substantially on the final survey. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating partially to fully. These results
are higher than survey one for both the leadership team and faculty (mean increase of .4 leadership and .4 faculty). These results may indicate an increase of problem awareness, which is the first step in the problem-solving process.

Question 1a stated, “We understand our students’ community and family structures.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. All leadership team participants indicated substantially on the final survey. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating partially to fully. These results are slightly higher than survey one for both the leadership team and faculty (mean increase of .2 leadership and .1 faculty). These results may indicate a greater knowledge of their community and family structures. This understanding is important when identifying barriers to goal attainment in the problem-solving process.

Question 1b stated, “We gather academic achievement data about our students.” Responses yielded a mean result of 3.4 indicating substantially to fully for the leadership team and 3.5 for the faculty respondents. Faculty responses indicated a range from “partially” to “fully”. These results are the same for both the leadership team and faculty members. The results from survey one were already within the range of substantially on the scale of “not at all”, “partially”, “substantially” or “fully”. Results indicate the leadership and faculty maintained their use of academic data at the same rate.

Question 1c stated, “State and district data are used to validate instructional practices.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. All leadership team participants indicated substantially in response to question 1c. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating not at all to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .2) and lower for the faculty (mean
decrease of .3). These data indicate an increase in separation of opinion on the matter of using state and district data to ensure instructional decisions were sound. This may also indicate that the leadership is using state and district data at an increased rate, but not necessarily with all the faculty members.

Question 1d stated, “We gather behavioral data about our students.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.8. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating partially to fully. These results are higher than survey one for both the leadership team and for the faculty (mean increase of .2). This shows a slight increase in the use of behavioral data on the school campus.

Question 1e stated, “We address behavioral issues consistently while differentiating based on student need.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.8. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating partially to substantially. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .6) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .1). These data also show an increase in attention toward behavioral issues.

Question 1f stated, “We move swiftly from identifying problems to taking steps that make a difference school-wide.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.8. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.6 indicating partially to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .1) and lower for the faculty (mean decrease of .1). These data do not show significant change from survey one.
Table 11

Survey Final Cluster 1 Results

<table>
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<tr>
<th>QUESTION NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEAN FACULTY</th>
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<th>MEDIAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MODE LEADERSHIP</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Q1B</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Q1C</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1D</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1E</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Q1F</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Overall</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale: 1 Not at all, 2 Partial, 3 Substantial, 4 Fully

Data from the next set of questions is located in Table 12. Question 2, which asked, “Do we promote goal attainment?” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.8. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.0 indicating partially to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .4) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .2).

Question 2a stated, “Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine behavioral data.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Participants indicated “not at all” to “fully”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.3 indicating not at all to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .8) and lower for the faculty (mean decrease of .1). Although the results of this data are closer together than in survey one and the leadership
team believes overall that they examine behavioral data with teachers, the faculty members’ results indicate a similar response to the first survey, which is lower than the leadership team.

Question 2b stated, “Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine academic achievement data.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. All leadership team participants indicated substantially. The faculty responses yielded the same mean result of 3.0 as the leadership team, but indicated a range of responses from partially to fully. These results are lower than survey one for the leadership team (mean decrease of .2) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of.6). Survey two data now indicates agreement between the leadership team and faculty that academic data is examined during professional learning communities. These data indicate that academic data is examined on a more consistent basis.

Question 2c stated, “Our focus is on what’s best for students and what needs to be done to reach academic goals.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.1 indicating partially to fully. These results are lower than survey one for the leadership team (mean decrease of .8) and the faculty response remained the same. This decline in leadership team responses may indicate that their priorities have shifted since the beginning of the year when survey one was administered.

Question 2d stated, “Our focus is on what’s best for students and what needs to be done to reach behavioral goals.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Participants indicated “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.8 indicating partially to fully. These results are higher than survey one
for the leadership team (mean increase of .6) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .1). This change in responses, especially from the leadership team, shows a greater emphasis on behavioral issues.

Question 2e stated, “Leadership team and faculty work collaboratively to address school-wide issues.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. All members of the leadership team indicated substantially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.9 indicating not at all to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .4) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .3). This increase in both the leadership team and the faculty’s responses show a greater emphasis on collaboration between the two groups at the end of the year than at the beginning of the year. This collaboration is an important part of problem-solving.

Question 2f stated, “The principal is present in the classroom, offers meaningful support, and holds staff accountable for results”. Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.4. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from substantially to fully. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.2 indicating a range of “partially” to “fully”. These results are lower than survey one for the leadership team (mean decrease of .4) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .1). Although the faculty results from survey two show a decrease in responses from 3.8 to 3.4, these data still show a mean result between substantial and fully. These data also indicate the principal still holds the faculty accountable for results.
Within the initial survey set, the third group of questions involved the use of problem-solving language among the leadership team and faculty. These data are displayed in Table 13. Question 3 asked, “Do we use the language of problem-solving?” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from partially to substantially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.0 indicating a range of partially to fully. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .2) and higher for the faculty (mean decrease of .4). These data indicate an increased level of problem-solving language following the initial problem-solving session at the beginning of the year.

Question 3a stated, “Key data and information is shared with appropriate stakeholders.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from “partially” to “substantially”. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.0 indicating a range of “partially” to “fully”. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .6) and
higher for the faculty (mean increase of .5). These data indicate an increase in communication with stakeholders regarding important data and other information.

Question 3b stated, “We are encouraged to share our ideas and opinions in a proactive manner.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.4. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from substantially to fully. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.3 indicating a range of “partially” to “fully”. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .4) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .4). These data indicate a strong relationship of trust between the faculty and leadership team. This relationship is crucial when teams engage in problem-solving sessions. The more trust between individuals, the more transparent they will be when discussing issues during problem-solving sessions.

Question 3c stated, “When conflicts arise, we recognize the role we play in solving problems and the importance of finding solutions.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.6. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from partially to substantially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.0 indicating a range of “partially” to “fully”. These results are lower than survey one for the leadership team (mean decrease of .4) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .2). Again, these data from the faculty may indicate even further trust growing on the part of the faculty toward the leadership team.

Question 3d stated, “We solve problems and work collaboratively for the best interests of students”. Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 3.0. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from partially to substantially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 3.0 indicating a range of
“partially” to “fully”. These results are the same from survey one for the leadership team and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .1). These data show that both the leadership team and faculty have a mutual respect and focus on the needs of students. This collaboration is essential for the problem-solving process.

Question 3e stated, “We follow a consistent problem-solving process including areas such as: problem identification, problem and data analysis, develop resolutions, addressing problems, and monitoring results.” Responses from the leadership team resulted in mean of 2.4. Leadership team participants indicated a range of responses from partially to substantially. The faculty responses yielded a mean result of 2.7 indicating a range of “not at all” to “fully”. These results are higher than survey one for the leadership team (mean increase of .2) and higher for the faculty (mean increase of .3). Although these data show an increase in the understanding of problem-solving methodology from the beginning of the year, the increase is not significant.

Table 13

Survey Final Cluster 3 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEAN FACULTY</th>
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<th>MEDIAN FACULTY</th>
<th>MODE LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MEDIAN LEADERSHIP</th>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3B</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3C</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3D</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Overall</td>
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<td>2.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale: 1 Not at all, 2 Partial, 3 Substantial, 4 Fully
Free Response Survey Questions. The second section of the survey required participants to formulate their own replies to questions. Both the leadership team and the faculty were responsible for completing this section of the survey. In general, the leadership team generated more complete answers and had a better overall understanding of the problem-solving process than the faculty. I was able to identify common themes within the answers to each question which varied between the two groups; faculty and leadership team.

Faculty Initial Survey – Free Response Questions. Members of the faculty answered positively to question number one on the initial survey, “Please describe problem-solving strategies you believe are currently working well at your school”, with out of 58 people who took the survey, 33 people responded to this question. Twenty-five participants from the faculty did not respond to the question. Common themes in faculty responses included little knowledge of problem-solving, PBS, those who attempted to answer and those who did not attempt to answer the question.

There were two responses, which indicated little knowledge of problem-solving, “I do not see many at this time”, “Most teachers do not know the 8 step (problem-solving) process”. These answers were expected but not typical. Positive Behavior Support (PBS) was mentioned the most by the faculty. Most of the time this was mentioned positively or neutrally. Thirteen responses referred to PBS; eight people simply wrote “PBS,” “PBS monthly reward days,” “PBS and support from administration”, and “positive behavior support holds students accountable.” The only comment about PBS, which noted something possibly negative, included; “PBS activities really motivate students. The times chosen are hard to attend”, PBS could be considered a
method of problem-solving, which is focused on school-wide behavior. Although PBS is a school-wide program as is the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, it focuses only on student behaviors. The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process is a method to identify any problems, which exist and explore ideas to overcome these.

Eleven faculty members made mention of items other than PBS as a means of problem-solving including; “things seem to be going well”, “My problem solving strategy is to go straight to the principal”, “Most of the time administration backs up the teachers. A majority of time we do try to solve problems as a group,” “working closely with the grade level and listing solutions,” “being consistent,” “expectations put on student, immediate rewards,” “we currently try various interventions in our instruction to find a method that works to help students that are struggling academically,” “teachers continuously provide support to each other and collaborate ways to help specific students,” and “expectations.” While these responses seem positive and in favor of the current administration they do not indicate a strong grasp of problem-solving strategies.

Six people indicated that they did not know how to respond to the question posed to them. Two responded with a question mark, one said; “not sure” and three faculty members responded with, “na”. These individuals signaled they had no knowledge of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

The second question asked, “Please describe any problem solving strategies that you believe are not working well at your school”. There were twenty-three responses to this question. Common themes included issues with behaviors, negative general thoughts and some neutral comments. There were also faculty members who indicated they did not
know how to respond to the question. Twenty-nine participants did not respond to the question.

Fourteen faculty members indicated their displeasure with things associated with student behaviors or reactions to behaviors; “There is not always consistency with regards to minor and major infractions,” “minor infractions and referrals,” “taking away sunny funds should never be allowed,” “Students are not held accountable for their behavior,” “nothing changes after referrals,” “No consequences for bad behavior,” “consequences received do not match poor choices,” “Sometimes the students get referrals for behaviors, but nothing is done or it takes a long time to have anything done about the incident. There is also a lack of understanding as to which offences are considered minor infractions and which need to be office referrals,” “Consequences are not always consistent or even exist,” “Minors and major infractions are not being addressed in a timely manner. Some office referrals are taken care of a week after event happens and the consequence is not effective after that day,” “referrals addressed in a timely manner,” “Administration needs to be aware of the severe behavior issues that occur among students on a daily basis,” “rewards have to wait,” “bus problems,” “Access to sunny funds and immediate consequences for referrals,” and “consequences being received in a timely manner.” Four of these comments also mentioned addressing behavior issues in a timely manner. Answers to this question, although many of them centering on responses to behavior issues at the school, they do not specifically speak to concerns with problem-solving methodology at the school. I would contend that these individual faculty members do not have a clear definition of problem-solving. I would also contend that administrative responses to behavior issues at the school might be a
good concept to take through the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process, given the
responses to question one and two by the faculty.

Four faculty members responded in a negative fashion to problem solving. The
responses were, “Takes too long to get plans into action”, "Having everyone aware of
what’s happening and how to react to it,” “Not consistent”, “No identified problems”,
“Data are not being shared”, and “Consequences don't apply and aren't effective”. These
four comments not only indicate these faculty members have knowledge of the problem-
solving process, they also specifically signify elements of the problem-solving process
that need improvement at the school. These responses identify areas of further study,
which may improve problem-solving processes at the school.

One teacher mentioned that, “sunny funds, meetings and school involvement
teachers are supportive to one another”, while yet another stated, “there has not been a
problem solving strategy that has been communicated”. These comments could be
thought of as neutral with respect to problem-solving and do not have an impact on the
study. At the same time, twelve faculty members indicated a question mark, na or not in
response to question two indicating they had little awareness of problems with the
problem-solving process.

Question three asked, “What improvements could be made to the Eight-Step
Problem-Solving Process at your school?” One faculty member responded to this
question during the initial survey indicating that employees of the school could, “try to
work harder to improve situation for students.” While this is a valiant answer, it has little
bearing on the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process and the improvements that can be
made other than to focus on student needs.
Faculty Final Survey – Free Response Questions. Three faculty members out of a total of 24 consistently responded to the second administration of the survey to the free response survey questions. Question number one which asked, “Please describe problem-solving strategies you believe are currently working well at your school,” yielded two responses indicating, “PBS” or Positive Behavior Support. Two faculty members stated there was an, “open door policy”. One person said, “PLC’s are great too!” Although these responses may take a favorable tone towards the school atmosphere and the work of the leadership team, they do not indicate an increased understanding or use of problem-solving strategies.

One last faculty member wrote in response to question number one, “There is a great openness at FRES. Identifying and addressing problems are used.” Again, this response could be grouped with the previous statements indicating a favorable response towards the leadership team. This one response does allude to knowledge of problem-solving language. Although it does not clearly outline a keen sense of problem-solving methodology, this response does indicate some positive aspects of problem-solving going on at the school. Unfortunately, this was not a theme, but the response of one individual.

Question number two stated, “Please describe any problem-solving strategies that you believe are not working well at your school”. This question generated three total responses out of 24 total participants who took the survey. Only one participant indicated “PLC meetings” another answered “consistency” and the last wrote “Need problem-solving established among grade levels to address issues that become politicized.” While there were no consistent themes generated by these answers, the third answer clearly indicates a substantiated understanding of problem-solving processes in general.
Question number three asked, “What improvements could be made to the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process at your school?” One of three participant responses included, “Teamwork needs to be made to make things work,” another stated “consistency,” and yet another stated, “Establish it for staff and faculty use.” From these three responses, there are no consistent themes that can be identified, but they do suggest relevant ideas toward moving forward with problem-solving strategies.

This second round of responses was much less substantial than the first simply because less faculty members commented on the three open-ended questions. Responses were similar to the initial survey and included words like consistency, and teamwork. All in all, the biggest thing that stood out was that faculty members still do not have a clear understanding of the problem-solving process. Yes, PLC’s have a component of problem-solving within them, but they are not the only time when problem-solving takes place.

**Leadership Team Initial – Free Response Questions.** All five members of the leadership team responded to all three open-ended questions. In response to question one, “Please describe problem-solving strategies you believe are currently working well at your school”, all initial comments from the leadership team reflected a positive to neutral response. One respondent indicated, “We base many decisions on data, but I wouldn't say there is an official problem solving process”. Responses also indicated that these processes were in the beginning stages of implementation at the time of the initial survey. One respondent indicated, “We have just created a system for RtI and have shared these expectations with the staff. We are in the initial stages.” The next leadership team member stated, “We are currently implementing new problem solving strategies for MTSS. Working on students' academic needs in all tiers.” This response indicates a
limited view of problem-solving, which focuses only on student’s needs rather than the needs of the school as a whole. Another indicated, “Re-teaching our school-wide expectations individually to students and keeping them accountable for their behaviors”. Again, this response focuses on the needs of students, but mostly in the area of behavior. The last of the five leadership team members wrote, “We are getting better at identifying the problem and creating an action plan than we have in the past”. It is clear that the leadership team members have a good grasp of general problem-solving strategies. These may be limited only to the needs of students. They also realize the importance of problem-solving and share a desire to implement specific strategies with the faculty. They also recognize that the faculty shares a need to learn these same strategies and they will need training.

All five leadership team members responded to open-ended survey question two on the initial questionnaire. Question two asked participants, “Please describe any problem-solving strategies that you believe are not working well at your school”. The leadership team indicated that they had not addressed behavior issues at the school with the lens of problem-solving. One respondent indicated, “I don't feel that we have a handle on the behavioral piece and that is consistent throughout the classrooms.” Another stated, “Students with behavioral issues”. This response indicates the ability to identify school-wide barriers to success. A third leadership team member wrote, “To follow regarding minor and major infractions. Teachers are still very quick to write district referrals without really implementing PBS or their classroom behavior management plan in their room.” These three answers also illustrate a need for changes in response to behavior. The next participant stated, “We need to work on implementation of the 8 step process.”
and yet another also mentioned, “We don't have any specific problem solving structures.” This answer displays transparency and again indicates a school-wide need.

The next question was answered by all five members of the leadership team. Question number three asked, “What improvements could be made to the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process at your school?” The leadership team collectively responded that they did not use the Eight-Step Problem-Solving process to address school-wide barriers. Responses included, “We have not been using the eight step process so starting this would be an improvement,” “We are not currently using the 8 step problem solving process,” “not using,” and “We have not been using the eight step process so starting this would be an improvement.” The last individual indicated, “Re-teaching or teaching and modeling the process with the teachers or RtI team (behavioral committee).” This individual has a different perspective than the other four leadership team members indicating that there are aspects of problem-solving occurring at the school. Although this is a form of problem-solving, the comment does not necessarily indicate the use of Eight-Step Problem-Solving.

**Leadership Team Final – Free Response Questions.** Similar to teachers, the leadership team’s responses to the second survey were sparse. Two leadership team members responded to the first question. To question number one, which asked participants to describe problem-solving strategies currently working well for their school, members of the leadership team did not respond with specific strategies but listed names of groups or meetings that use problem-solving such as RtI, PBS, and PLCs. One respondent did indicate that during Academic Intervention Team (AIT) meetings, team members presented data and came up with solutions for interventions, “Our AIT
meetings, we present data and talk through to come up with solutions for interventions for students”. The other individual responded by stating, “Grade level PLC’s, RtI behavior team, RtI academic team, and PBS team.”

Only one member of the leadership team answered questions number two, which asked about problem-solving strategies that were not working, stating that there was not enough time to discuss or problem-solve, “Not enough time to discuss or problem-solve, need more hours in the day!” No member of the leadership team responded to question number three on the second survey.

**Academic Data**

According to State test results, Sunnyside Elementary School had never earned more than a grade of C since its inception in 2008. Table 14 presents a comparison of multiple years of test results. During the 2011-2012 school year, the school earned its lowest percentage of students at level three or higher in reading (falling from 70 to 52 percent) and students at level three or higher in mathematics (falling from 61 to 38 percent). A new scoring criterion was established during the 2011-2012 school year, which was partial cause of the drop in scores.

The 2012-2013 test results showed an overall drop in student achievement. Although most results were similar to that of the previous school year from one point in Reading to writing scores, which took the largest down, turn by 21 percentage points. In the spring of 2013, State legislation changed the scoring criteria for the writing test, raising the proficiency level on fourth grade writing from 3.0 to 3.5 on a six-point scale. This was a contributing factor to lower writing scores in many schools throughout the state.
Overall, academic improvements at Sunnyside Elementary were not made during the 2012-2013 school year. In fact, the scores in all testing areas decreased during the 2012-2013 school year: the percent of students at level three or higher in Reading decreased by 1%, the percent of students meeting the Writing standard decreased by 21%, the percent of students at level three or higher in science decreased by 4%, and the percent of students in the lowest 25 percent making learning gains in Mathematics decreased by 8%.

Table 14

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<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Math</th>
<th>% Meeting the Writing Standard</th>
<th>% Level 3 or Higher in Science</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
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<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
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<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Please note that data from the 2011-2012 scores reflect more stringent scoring criteria.*

**Interpretation**

Teachers had narrow responses to the free-response questions. Those who did respond cited Positive Behavior Support (PBS) as the extent of their knowledge of problem-solving. Positive Behavior Support is a proactive system-based approach, which uses a tiered framework to address problem behaviors (MTSS, 2013). Each participating district is required to complete several items prior to any school receiving PBS Training. Completion of this checklist (within the established timeframe as indicated by your PBS District Coordinator) insures more positive outcomes and allows your school to participate in upcoming PBS Training sponsored by the Florida Positive Behavior
Support: Multi-Tiered System of Support (FLPBS:MTSS) Project. When comparing these reactions to how participants responded to the quantitative portion of the survey, responses seems to somewhat contradict each other. Faculty members responded quite favorably to problem-solving processes, but could not sufficiently express ways in which it was applied at the school site.

Members of the leadership team were able to better articulate their problem-solving knowledge with the free-response questions, but like the teachers, displayed limited knowledge of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

For all the scaled response questions, the average leadership team response and the average teacher response was greater than 2 (on a 1-4 point scale), indicating participants answered more favorably than negatively overall. The three highest scoring questions from the three scaled response portions of the survey for both groups of participants were not at all related, “We are encouraged to share our ideas and opinions in a proactive manner,” “The principal is present in the classroom, offers meaningful support, and holds staff accountable for results,” and “We gather academic achievement data about our students.”

The results of the second survey indicated the faculty had a more favorable opinion of administrative decisions than the survey taken at the beginning of the school year. Reflecting back, 2012-2013 was the Principal’s first year in her position. Members of the school faculty had little interaction with the Principal as of the initial survey date. This may also reflect that the faculty had a negative view of the previous administration in respect to the use of problem-solving.

I discern two key interpretations out of the data on aspects of the Eight-Step
Problem-Solving Process. First, both leadership and teachers had limited knowledge of school-wide problem-solving concerning behavioral issues as shown on both the first and second surveys. Second, both the leadership team and faculty members believed that additional use of problem-solving strategies could benefit overall student performance. While it seems that data was collected and analyzed on an individual student basis, responding to school-wide issues such as discipline was a hasty process, according to teacher feedback. In other words, school-wide systems-based issues were not generally discussed with the faculty, nor were they a priority from the teachers’ standpoint.

Behavioral data indicated a slight drop in the occurrence of overall referral numbers between December of 2011 and December of 2012. This data transpired during the same time as the faculty’s limited growth in their knowledge of problem-solving between the two survey dates. The leadership team indicated on the second survey that having enough time to problem-solve was a concern. This may indicate a reason for the lack of growth of teacher knowledge of problem-solving, and the higher than desired number of referrals. If the leadership team did not place problem-solving activities as a high priority and provide the time necessary to have problem-solving discussions with faculty, there would be limited growth in understanding of problem-solving processes.

The leadership team did not meet their overall goal, which was to reduce the number of referrals by fifty percent. With a total of 128, this was 31 referrals more than the target set by the leadership team. The results of both the surveys and the referral data indicated that the leadership team was not successful in implementing the action plan developed during the Problem-Solving Workshop.
SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgment

The guiding question of my inquiry was: Can participation in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process lead to a decrease in referral rates, as measured by changes in the numbers of referrals? The referral data were collected during the course of the project from September to June 2013. The overall number of referrals increased from the previous school year (2011-2012) to the current school year (2012-2013). I believe the outcome was the result of the leadership team not following the action plan they developed during the Problem-Solving Workshop. The following information provides further explanation for this conclusion.

The outcomes did not definitively reveal that use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process generated a reduction in the number of referrals. Other variables may have contributed to the outcomes. Around 300 additional students were enrolled at Sunnyside Elementary during the 2012-2013 school year than in 2011-2012. The Assistant Principal, responsible for discipline and the leadership team may not have completely implemented the action plan as it was written.

There were four secondary questions in my inquiry. Question one asked, What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what problem-solving strategies are working well for their school? On the second survey, some faculty members who responded to the survey indicated that PBS, or the Positive Behavior Support program, which is a school-wide behavior program, was evidence of successful problem-solving processes within the school. Three members of the faculty indicated that the open-door policy supported problem-solving processes. One member of the faculty
also indicated that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) also embraced problem-solving behaviors. These answers were relatively indicative of the leadership team’s responses, who also indicated PLC’s as an outlet for problem-solving. In addition, the leadership team also mentioned Response to Intervention (RtI) meetings as an outlet for using problem-solving strategies.

The next secondary research question asked, What do participants in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report as to what Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process strategies are not working well for their school? The faculty indicated three elements in which problem-solving practices could be improved including consistency, politicized issues, and PLC’s. The leadership team indicated that they generally need more time in order to improve the use of problem-solving.

In response to the third secondary research question, faculty members indicated consistency and teamwork as methods to improve problem-solving processes school-wide. One faculty member also indicated that simply expanding the use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process to the faculty and staff would improve its use. No members of the leadership team responded to question three on the second survey.

Secondary research question four asked, Do stakeholders in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process report an increase in problem-solving behaviors in their school, as a result of their participation in the Eight-Step Problem Solving Process? Overall, participants indicated a more favorable response to elements of problem-solving when responding to the final survey compared to the initial survey, as indicated in Table 15. Faculty members indicated consistency and teamwork as methods to actually improve problem-solving processes school-wide. One faculty member also indicated that simply
expanding the use of the Eight-Stop Problem-Solving Process to the faculty and staff would improve its use. All in all, when examining the survey data (Table 15), participant responded more favorably toward problem-solving on the final survey than on the initial survey. Examining the survey data in Table 15, it appears that the faculty’s understanding of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process grew more than the leadership team. In reference to Table 15, survey question one asked, “Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?” Survey question two asked, “Do we promote promoting goal attainment?” Survey question three asked, “Do we use the language of problem-solving?”

Table 15

Pre and Post Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Leadership Team</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6 3.0</td>
<td>2.4 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4 2.8</td>
<td>2.8 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4 2.6</td>
<td>2.0 3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question five asked, Did the use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process produce a decrease in the identified barriers and assist the participants in achieving the identified goal? The goal, determined by the leadership team, was to reduce the number of referrals in the top ten reporting categories from the 2012-2013 school year. The overall number of referrals in these reporting categories actually increased from 316 during the 2011-2012 school year to 331 in 2012-2013. In addition, the overall number of referrals also increased from 425 to 443. It seems, by looking at the raw data, that the
Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process did not support a decrease in the number of referrals.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the absence of ongoing coaching and support for the faculty and leadership team to support the implementation of the action plan generated by the Problem-Solving Workshop. It is my opinion that the outcomes of the faculty and leadership team’s actions toward behavior referrals are the result of the lack of a problem-solving facilitator on the school campus all year long. This is consistent with the recommendations of Curtis, Castillo, and Cohen (2008) in their work Best Practices in Systems Level Change who recommend, “identify(ing) an on-site facilitator of the change process” to “monitor system-level initiatives and, when necessary, refocus the group on the change process (p 894). If there was a consultant on campus to support the implementation of the Action Plan, the results may have been more significant in the positive direction.

Another limitation was the minimal training provided for leadership and staff on problem-solving in general. The only professional development provided to the leadership team on the eight-step model occurred on the day I provided the actual problem-solving workshop. To increase their knowledge in the future, the leadership team could seek out training on problem-solving so the process could be modeled for them and practiced prior to partaking in the actual process themselves.

Yet another limitation was that this was the first year with the current Principal at Sunnyside Elementary. The outcomes of the problem-solving workshop may not have been a priority of the Principal in her first year as the leader of her school. With academic
achievement low, there may have been higher priorities that took precedence over referral rates. In addition, behavior challenges were not mentioned in the School Improvement Plan as an area of focus.

The School Improvement Plan for Sunnyside Elementary states, “The IAT (Intervention Assistance Team) makes sure that all teachers and students are familiar with the school-wide behavior plan and expectations.” The wording on the document does not expand on this notion specifically. It does however indicate the school’s trainings for the year to include; differentiated instruction, RtI process, the difference between struggling learners and learning disabilities and individualized support for teachers who have continued difficulty implementing RtI (In order to protect the anonymity of the school and participants, I am omitting the reference citation for this source.).

None of these actions indicates professional development on problem-solving of any kind nor do they mention discipline procedures or referrals. This information informs me to conclude that discipline and minimizing referrals were not set as a priority for the 2012-2013 school year within the School Improvement Plan and therefore were not a priority of the leadership team or faculty. Although survey two showed an increase in the use of behavioral data to make decisions, this may have been the result of an increase in behavior issues that forced these discussions.

An additional limitation to this study was the number of surveys completed during the final administration. I, the researcher, was not able to be present during the completion of either survey by the faculty. Therefore, I had no control over when the survey was taken or to whom it was given. The sample size during the two surveys was dissimilar (initial; 58 faculty members, final; 24 faculty members). As a result, the
number of responses in survey two does not provide conclusive data to the faculty’s overall thoughts toward the effectiveness of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

**Recommendations**

If the original goal of this program evaluation was to use the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process to confront the issue that there were too many referrals and the overall number of referrals was not reduced, I have a number of recommendations.

It is my recommendation that someone trained in the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process should oversee the implementation of these processes at the school site. As the facilitator of the process, I had a stake in addressing school-wide problems and using the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process as a means for reducing those barriers. There were no individuals with the same knowledge and passion for the process within the school leadership team or on the school’s campus on a regular basis. This could be a current member of the leadership team or faculty. It could also be someone at the district level who has at least bi-weekly access to the school and its data. Again, as the facilitator, I was only on the school’s campus to conduct the initial problem-solving, hand out surveys and collect surveys. I was not on the school grounds on an ongoing basis to support the team in their goal of reducing the number of referrals. I believe this recommendation is necessary in order for the overall process to yield results.

I also recommend that the entire faculty have professional development on the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. This is necessary so that teachers understand the process they are actually using to address a school-wide problem. In addition, teachers will not totally buy-into a program unless they fully understand it. Many teachers have access to the Four-Step Problem-Solving Process because of working through barriers
with groups of students and individual students. This method is often used in cases of classroom behavior and academic interventions such as those with Tiers of interventions within RtI and MTSS. Some teacher responses on the survey to their knowledge of problem-solving indicated PBS. PBS does address school-wide barriers to students’ behavioral success but there are many elements of the program that are classroom-based as well.

**Conclusion**

The Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process provides an avenue for teams to identify school-wide issues and implement a plan of action to reduce barriers and solve problems in order to meet determined goals. Working together in a collaborative group is an essential piece to begin the process. I conclude that that without a school-based consultant to monitor the implementation of the action plan, significant results have a lesser likelihood of occurring.

In addition, teams must be vested in the process. In other words, they must have the goal or desired outcome as a priority. There must be some type of follow-up and itinerant measures to revisit data and hold individuals responsible for the success of the plan. These accountability measures are at the heart of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process and indicated in steps six through eight.
REFERENCES


Forster H. (2010). *Beyond the abc’s and 123’s: The effect of social competence on early academic achievement*. (Doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University). Retrieved from https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/553729/forsterHilary.pdf?sequence=1


APPENDIX A – Survey Information

Self-Study Survey: School-Wide Problem-Solving

Directions: Please rank statements according to the rubric below. Then, complete the questions which follow to the best of your ability.

Please check all that apply: Leadership Team Member □ Faculty Member □

Please indicate either 1, 2, 3 or 4 to the following questions.

Rubric: 1-Not at all  2-Partially  3-Substantially  4-Fully

☐ 1. Do we confront the facts and identify the problems that are barriers to our success?
   a. We understand our students' community and family structures.
   b. We gather academic achievement data about our students.
   c. State and district data are used to validate instructional practices.
   d. We gather behavioral data about our students.
   e. We address behavioral issues consistently while differentiating based on student need.
   f. We move swiftly from identifying problems to taking steps that make a difference school-wide.

☐ 2. Do we promote goal attainment?
   a. Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine behavioral data.
   b. Staff participates in professional learning communities to examine academic achievement data.
   c. Our focus is on what's best for students and what needs to be done to reach academic goals.
   d. Our focus is on what's best for students and what needs to be done to reach behavioral goals.
   e. Leadership team and faculty work collaboratively to address school-wide issues.
   f. The principal is present in the classroom, offers meaningful support, and holds staff accountable for results.

☐ 3. Do we use the language of problem-solving?
   a. Key data and information is shared with appropriate stakeholders.
   b. We are encouraged to share our ideas and opinions in a proactive manner.
   c. When conflicts arise, we recognize the role we play in solving problems and the importance of finding solutions.
   d. We solve problems and work collaboratively for the best interests of students.
   e. We follow a consistent problem-solving process including areas such as: problem identification, problem and data analysis, develop resolutions, addressing problems, and monitoring results.
Directions: Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Please describe any problem-solving strategies you believe are currently working well at your school.
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Please describe any problem-solving strategies that you believe are not working well at your school.
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What improvements could be made to the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process at your school?
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
INFORMED CONSENT

Individual Participant - Leadership Team and Faculty Members

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Edie Sohigian, student at National Louis University, Tampa, Florida. The study is entitled *Utilizing a Systematic Approach to Problem-Solving in the Elementary School Setting: A Case Study*. The purpose of the study is to explore the use of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process to analyze its effectiveness on school-wide issues.

With your consent, you will be asked to complete a survey (approximately 15 minutes long) regarding the problem-solving processes at your school. The survey will be given twice - between eight and twelve weeks apart. A third identical 15 minute survey may also be given following the completion of the 2012-2013 school year. The purpose of the survey is to collect information related to the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process. Results of the survey will be available to participants one year from the start of the research study. The leadership team will also participate in a two-hour Eight-Step Problem-Solving workshop which will generate an action plan. The leadership team will be asked to carry-out the steps of the action plan as a part of the research study. Results of the action plan will be available to participants one year from the start of the research study.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Your identity will be kept confidential by the researcher and will not be attached to the data. Only the researcher will have access to all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview(s). Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the implementation of the Eight-Step Problem-Solving Process.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed.

In the event you have questions or require additional information you may contact the researcher: Edie Sohigian, National-Louis University doctoral student, address: 2159 Victoria Falls Drive, Orlando, Florida, 32824; phone: 321-443-4233; esohigian@nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Carol A. Burg, Ph.D. at cburg@nl.edu, phone: 813-491-6109, or the chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Christine Quinn, National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603; phone, 312-261-3135; email: christine.quinn@nl.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and participation!

Participant Name (Print)  
Participant Signature  Date  
Researcher (Print)  
Researcher Signature  Date
APPENDIX C – PLANNING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

Planning and Problem-Solving Worksheet

Date ______________________________________________________________

1. Problem Selected:

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Desired Outcome

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

How will it be measured? (complete following step #5 and #6)

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

2. Resources:  
Positive factors that might facilitate achievement of desired outcome  
Barriers:  
Negative factors that might prevent achieving the desired outcome

3. Select one barrier from #2 to address first and identify it in behaviorally descriptive terms.

________________________________________________________________

4. Brainstorm strategies to reduce or eliminate only the barrier identified in #3 and record them below.

________________________________________________________________

5. Using the list generated in #4 as a stimulus, but not as a limit to ideas, develop multiple action plans to reduce or eliminate only the barrier identified in #3.

6. Specify a plan for follow-up for each action plan. Who will check progress?
7. Develop a plan for evaluation of reduction or elimination of the barrier identified in #3 data collection.

8. Develop a plan for evaluating progress toward achievement of desired outcome specified in #1. Is satisfactory progress being made toward reduction/elimination of the problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Plan 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/How Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for Follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Plan 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/How Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for Follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Plan 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/How Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for Follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Return to and complete step #1
## APPENDIX D – REFERRAL DATA

**Table 15** Referral Categories 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 at Sunnyside Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault (AAS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault (AST)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battery (BAT)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying (BUL)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Disturbance/Disruption (CLT)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Rules (CLR)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Network Policy Violation (DNP)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior (DRP)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption on a school bus (BUS)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty (DIS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to Follow Directions (FFD)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Accusation of Classmate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting (FIL)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireworks (FIW)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment (Bullying) (HRB)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment (SESIR)</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseplay (HRP)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Printed Material</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate or Obscene Acts (IOA)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Defiance of Authority or Willful Disobedience (DEF)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Insolent Attitude (INS)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents of Profanity or Abusive Language (PRO)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination (INU)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Supplies (LAC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving School Grounds (LEA)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying/Misrepresentation (LMR)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Battery (BAT)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Offense (OTH)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of Disruptive Item</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Display of Affection (PDA)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex Related Offenses</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Assault (SAS)</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping Class (SKC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steal Larceny Theft (LOC)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat or Threatening Behavior (TRL)</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat or Threatening Behavior to Staff (TTS)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throwing Objects (THR)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorized Area (UNA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe Act (USA)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism (VAL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon (WPL)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>425</strong></td>
<td><strong>443</strong></td>
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</table>