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How Positive Behavioral Supports and Social-Emotional Curriculum Impact Student Learning

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Abstract

Many American students are subject to adverse effects of complex and chronic childhood trauma resulting in gaps within social-emotional competencies. This case-study research examined the impacts of one research-based proactive approach to student behaviour using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Second-Step Learning Curriculum, and staff trauma-informed/ACES training in one Midwest rural Kansas Elementary School. The over-arching research question was, *What are the impacts of implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system, in conjunction with the Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum?* Three sub-questions emerged: *1) What is the impact of PBIS and SEL Curriculum on disciplinary referrals? 2) How is PBIS/SEL affecting teaching/learning?* and *3) How is PBIS/SEL affecting building climate/morale?* Data collection and analysis included: Skyward-in-school/out-of-school suspensions; a Likert scale staff-questionnaire on PBIS and Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum (*Second Step*) implementation; staff open-ended questionnaire; principal interview and researchers' critical reflections. Analysis of ODRs data from the academic years (2015-2018) indicate a decrease of in-school/out-of-school suspensions. Data collection received a 78.6% response rate. Results confirmed 93% of staff agree or strongly agree that students understand the Trailway Ticket System (Tier 1 PBIS intervention that reinforces positive student behaviors indicated on the building matrix), while 87% of staff agree or strongly agree they understand and consistently enforce the incentive/Tier 1 system. 74% of staff reported a positive school climate, and 60% reported strong/positive teacher morale. Findings suggest more resources for optimal program implementation to continue student success.

Keywords: Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Second Step Social-Emotional Learning.

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1. Introduction

For the past three decades, the National Center of Educational Statistics reported serious problems with student attitudes and increases in student misbehavior in public schools regarding school climate and safety concerns (NCES, 2016; NCES, 2018). The 2011-2012 NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), cited in (NCES, 2016), concluded 40.7% of elementary through high school teachers (K-12-grades) indicated student behavior interfered teaching and learning, and 32% of Kansas teachers reported the same. The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) 2015-2016 report, which grew out of the Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES, 2018), found elementary through high school public teachers across the nation reported an even higher percentage (43%) of student misbehavior affecting their teaching (NCES, 2018).

According to Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich (2016), the frequency of student misbehavior in the classroom indicates substantial gaps in student social and emotional ability. At any time, at least two-thirds of America's public school students are subject to the adverse effects of complex and chronic childhood trauma now resulting in gaps within social and emotional competencies. Chronic trauma can manifest in the form of aggression, student misbehavior, poor attendance, and learning difficulties as the brain works to be in constant survival mode as a coping mechanism (Plumb et al., 2016). Today, more than any other time in history, teachers must recognize and understand how trauma affects the social, emotional, and academic skills of students (Terrasi & Crain de Galarce, 2017). With this expectation comes the requirement for educators to teach prosocial skills, social and emotional competence, and to build resilience in all students (Plumb et al., 2016). Children who have competent social and emotional skills are better able to manage emotions and behavior. Learning these skills at an early age equips students to communicate appropriately and form healthy relationships (Committee for Children, 2011).

The national education policy, updated in 2015, with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), influences classroom management through grants for implementing three-year training cycles of positive behavior interventions and supports to faculty and staff (Plumb et al., 2016). Professional organizations collaborate with the federal government to conduct research on social-emotional learning. With the inception of federal mandates and new state standards, schools are implementing programs designed to improve student behavior, and incorporate social-emotional learning to improve school climate, school achievement, and student life outcomes (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018).

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2. Problem Statement

Researchers conclude social-emotional learning programs implemented with fidelity, reveal positive effects on problematic and aggressive behaviors, and student attitudinal changes such as school connectedness and improved school/classroom climate. There remains a need for students with severe or complex social-emotional or behavioral difficulties to receive interventions beyond what *Second Step* can provide (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs., 2015). Efficacy studies of the *Second Step* curriculum support a positive impact to the social-emotional and executive functioning skills of children, especially those who are initially behind or disadvantaged in these areas (Top, Liew, & Luo, 2016).

3. Review of Literature

Providing quality education necessitates that school administrators' first priority is to be judicious in operating safe and orderly schools. This ominous responsibility demands discipline designed to stop misbehavior and change it into acceptable conduct. Traditional reactive punitive discipline, such as suspension and expulsion works only at a band-aide level, temporarily stopping misbehavior at best; particularly at the high school level (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013). These approaches adversely affect academic skills (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010), school connectedness, dropout rate, and school climate (Flannery et al., 2014).

Losen and Martinez (2013) estimate one of every nine secondary students received one suspension during the 2009-2010 school year. The majority of those suspensions were for minor school rule infractions rather than serious or criminal offenses. Punitive discipline can trigger backlash from students, making behavior worse. Schools need to administer proactive, not reactive discipline (Morrissey et al., 2010). Proactive programs that promote healthy, productive, and safe learning environments show increases in graduation rates, achievement scores, and life outcomes (Losen & Martinez, 2013). One research-based approach that proactively addresses student behavior is the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model

3.1. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based practices and organizational systems disciplinary approach that encourages and rewards positive behavior to shape student behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and increase social competence

(Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, & Fenning, 2013; Horner et al., 2009). The goal of PBIS is to establish social culture and behavioral modifications and supports necessary to improve social and academic behavior and success of all students (Flannery et al., 2013). School-wide PBIS implementation establishes predictable, efficient, safe, and effective school climates for students (Flannery et al., 2014). Decreases in high school dropout rates are reported among student outcomes (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016), as are improvements in student behavioral and attendance outcomes (Freeman et al., 2016). Schools having implemented school-wide PBIS report decreases in student office disciplinary referrals (Horner et al., 2009; Morrissey et al., 2010 & Romero, 2015).

According to Flannery et al. (2013), school wide PBIS implementation is not a "packaged program but...a structured framework that a school team uses to guide the adoption of practices" (p. 268), consisting of three tiers of behavioral supports. Tier 1 includes universal supports for all students and staff across academic settings designed to support 80% of all students successfully. Tier 2 supports are targeted, small group supports that address needs within subgroups of students needing additional interventions beyond Tier I. It accounts for nearly 15% of a school's FTE (Flannery et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2016). Targeted supports can include social skills improvement, behavior management, attendance, dropout prevention, or study skills. Tier 3 behavioral interventions are the most time-intensive, inclusive of individualized supports as needed, and accounts for the top 5% of students with significant behavioral problems not efficiently addressed through Tier 1 and 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions can include personalized behavior plans or wraparound supports to reduce or eliminate adverse student behavior (Flannery et al, 2013; Freeman et al., 2016).

Core components of successful PBIS implementation consist of four critical practices. They are identification of school-wide outcomes or expectations of student learning and behavior; development of organizational practices and consistent procedures to support the implementation of PBIS; explicit teaching of expectations and application of evidence-based systems to create a positive learning environment and social climate, and data collection to monitor progress of interventions (Flannery et al., 2013; Morrissey et al., 2010).

Elementary and middle schools report that PBIS is an effective framework in improving school climate and student behavior (Morrissey et al., 2010). Longitudinal studies document decreased office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) (Flannery et al., 2013 & Flannery et al., 2014) and significant reduction in student suspensions and office disciplinary referrals over a five-years of PBIS implementation with high fidelity identified as the outcome (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Implementation of school wide PBIS requires regular communication, consensus, and collaboration

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among staff, students, and administration. Teacher professional development is essential to effective PBIS implementation (Flannery et al., 2013).

3.2. Social-Emotional Learning and the Second Step Curriculum

The randomized, controlled effectiveness trial conducted by Bradshaw et al. (2010) concluded that in addition to PBIS, schools that implemented additional student support programs reported the greatest success. These programs focused on *character education, bullying prevention, drug prevention, social skills, and social-emotional learning/development*. Social-emotional learning programs promote a safe and supportive school climate by attempting to decrease problem behaviors while increasing prosocial behaviors (Top, Liew, & Luo, 2016). The *Second Step* Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum is a research-supported, universal social-emotional learning program for Pre-K-8th grade. It explicitly incorporates classroom-based instruction and activities that address social-emotional (SE) and executive functioning (EF) skills, including but not limited to emotion knowledge and regulation, empathy, perspective taking, and social problem skills (Upshur, Heyman, & Wenz-Gross, 2017). These skills develop dramatically between the ages of 3½ to 7. Healthy social-emotional and executive functioning skills, have been linked to early school readiness and adjustment (Upshur et al., 2017), and student success (Top et al., 2016). Classroom interventions and parental involvement during early childhood helps to develop social-emotional and executive functioning skills, and improve emotion regulation (Upshur et al., 2017).

The 20-year *Second Step* program is one of the most widely used social-emotional learning programs, with the 4th edition addressing executive functioning and self-regulation skills (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015). Designed to increase children's school success and decrease problem behaviors, PreK-5th grade curriculum promotes social-emotional competence and self-regulation skills (Second Step, 2011). The middle school curriculum equips students with the appropriate skills, knowledge, and mindset necessary for handling strong emotions, understanding and connecting with peers, avoiding and resolving conflicts, and promoting academic achievement (Second Step, 2017). The social-emotional learning grows school success, school connectedness, positive-respectful school climate and decreases problem behaviors, peer rejection, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and low academic achievement (Second Step, 2011; Second Step, 2017).

An established body of research assesses the efficacy of *Social-emotional learning* showing significant increases in both social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk following *Second Step* implementation in a moderate PreK-4th grade samples (Brown, Jimerson, Dowdy, Gonzalez, & Stewart, 2012). Upshur et al., (2017) examined the efficacy of the *Second*

Step Early Learning Curriculum in 492 preschool children and observed children in poverty. They found that those exposed to stressful or adverse childhood experiences have limited opportunities to learn and practice the executive functioning skills essential to positive classroom behavior. Unsafe home environments or lack of learning or parenting resources necessary to develop executive functioning or social-emotional skills help to explain this outcome. Significant improvements in executive functioning (EF), including attention, engagement, think time/inhibition control, and social-emotional (SE) skills (primarily with calming down) were found in those preschool children who received instruction through *Second Step*. Children from disadvantaged environments (low SES, single-parent homes, stressful home situations) entered preschool significantly behind their peers in social-emotional and executive functioning skills, because negative environments prevent practice with behavioral regulation (Upshur et al., 2017).

Top et al. (2016) examined the effects of the at the *Second Step curriculum* at the upper elementary and middle school levels. Consistent with the Upshur et al. (2017) and Low et al. (2015) study, Top et al. (2016) found students who progressed through the social-emotional curriculum in later elementary and middle school grades exhibited fewer problem behaviors and higher grades. More prosocial behaviors (i.e. cooperation, sharing, and helping others) were observed in the treatment group, although not significant. These findings highlight the cultivation of a positive school and classroom climate, and that a social-emotional learning program such as *Second Step* is a valuable investment to improving school culture by reinforcing school engagement, social learning, and academic achievement, particularly for high-poverty or high-needs schools.

3.3. Parental Involvement in Second Step

Evaluating specific social-emotional and executive functioning skill activities of *Second Steps* revealed that Home Links is an essential component of the Pre-K-8th grade *Second Step* curriculum. Home Links is a parent-involvement segment designed to teach parents and caregivers how to reinforce skills learned at school, at home (Second Step, 2017). Implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as well as an evidence-based social-emotional learning curriculum such as *Second Ste*p and Home Links, improve student behavior and school connectedness with students/families for a desirable school climate.

4. Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was "*What are the impacts of implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system, in conjunction with the*

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Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum?" Three sub-questions emerged: *1) What is the impact of PBIS and SEL Curriculum on disciplinary referrals? 2) How is PBIS/SEL affecting teaching/learning?* and *3) How is PBIS/SEL affecting building climate/morale?*

5. Purpose of the Study

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum are two programs designed to improve student behavior and school climate by creating a safe, respectful learning environment. The purpose of this case study research was to determine the impact of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum upon academic learning time of Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade (PreK-5th) elementary school students at one Midwest Unified School District (USD) located in rural Kansas. Data collection and analysis included disaggregation of office disciplinary referrals, building climate staff surveys, and teacher morale open-end questionnaires, principal interview, and researcher critical reflection. Prior to implementation of PBIS at a Midwest-Elementary, office disciplinary referrals and classroom disruptions due to student misbehavior negatively affected the quality of student learning and academic learning time, as reported by building administration and teachers. Implementation of PBIS and the Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum provided district staff and administration positive approaches to student discipline for an improve building climate and increased student learning skills for positive interactions.

6. Research Methods

6.1. Case Description and Research Methodology

According to the Kansas Department of Education, Geographical Information System (GIS) and Kansas K-12 reports, the 2017-2018 enrolment for Midwest Unified School District (USD), situated in rural Kansas, has a full-time-enrolment (FTE) of 488 students, with 235 (FTE) attending Midwest-Elementary School, (a preschool through fifth (PreK-5th) grade building) (KSDE, 2018). The majority student population is white (90%). The minority student population is multiracial, disaggregated as Hispanic/Latino (8.4%), African American (0.4%), Asian (0.4%), and American Indian (0.4%). The district employees 44 certified staff with 21 located at Midwest-Elementary School. Midwest-Elementary has one preschool classroom, with two sections for each grade K-5. Support staff include two special education teachers, two Title I teachers (math and reading), a music teacher, and a physical education teacher. Midwest School District serves a high-need, low-

income population. Attendance rates are higher than the state average for Midwest-Elementary School, with district averages lower than the state average (KSDE, 2018).

The Midwest District average for students on Free and Reduced Lunch for 2017-2018 was at 67.4% (55.7% Free), with 71.1% of the elementary students on Free and Reduced Lunch (58.3% Free). These averages are higher than the 46.4% Kansas average for students on Free and Reduced Lunch (with 39% of Kansas kids receiving free meals).

6.2. Program Interventions and Implementation

The Kansas Department of Education Technical Assistance System Network (TASN) team, provided staff professional development for this intervention which consisted of one-day introducing the concepts of PBIS beginning the 2016-2017 school year. Fall 2016 semester, building-level leadership teams developed a matrix of expected behavior for each building during Building Leadership Team meetings. For Midwest-Elementary School, this matrix indicated all preschool through fifth grade students were expected to 1) Be Safe, 2) Be Responsible, and 3) Be Respectful, in identified school locations. The Midwest-Elementary School locations include: 1) Arrival/Dismissal, 2) Hallway, 3) Classrooms/Activity Rooms, 4) Cafeteria, 5) Bathrooms, 6) Bus, and 7) Playground. Once the Elementary Building Leadership Team developed the matrix, along with behavioral expectations for each location, the matrix was shared with staff, December 2016. Qualitative feedback allowed the Building Leadership Team to modify the behavioral expectations matrix. Dissemination of the matrix occurred, March 2017, and student introduction to Tier 1 behavior commenced spring 2016-2017. The matrix was posted in hallways and students rotated through "expectation stations" Mid-spring semester, 2017. Staff members described and demonstrated appropriate behavior for each of the seven locations per behavioral matrix. A ticket incentive system, named the Trailway Ticket System, rewarded students for displaying expected behaviors. Students apply earned tickets toward special rewards, including the purchase of items in the school store or earning access to other motivating honors/activities (lunch with a friend in the classroom, read to a younger student, etc.). Used tickets were returned to the main office and logged to determine where (seven locations) and how students were earning tickets (safety, respectful, responsible). This data recorded specific actions and/or locations to improve behavior, building-wide.

The first year of Tier I PBIS intervention was conducted in 2017-2018. Explanation of Expectation Stations to elementary students occurred in August 2017, with Expectation Station reviews following in December of 2017 and March of 2018. Implementation of the Trailway Ticket System allowed staff to award tickets to students demonstrating expected positive behaviors.

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Inservice trainings addressed fidelity of Tier 1 behavior interventions in September 2017. Fidelity of reporting behaviors through the new Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR) Form followed in March 2018. Training for staff took place on examples and definitions of major/minor behaviors, and the prescribed discipline referral process for use. A flow-chart outlining the classroom and office referral process disciplinary referrals was designed for consistency.

Training from the Kansas TASN team on the social-emotional learning occurred in August 2017. Teachers addressed the *Second Step* lessons in their classrooms each week for 30 minutes. Staff provided feedback later in the process. In addition to *Second Step* training and PBIS follow-up training for Tier I, the Midwest School District, under guidance from Kansas TASN, provided two and a half days of trauma-informed, adverse childhood experiences (ACES) training over the course of the 2017-2018 school year. Professional development training for staff included the effects of poverty, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences have on brain function and child development, behavior, and learning. Training also focused on the importance of resiliency, increasing parent and community involvement, and building positive relationships with students.

6.3. Data Collection

This study examined data from student-behavior office disciplinary referrals over the 2015-2016 school year (baseline year), 2016-2017 school year (where PBIS was introduced and Tier 1 interventions were implemented during the 4th nine weeks only), and 2017-2018 school year (first full year of PBIS implementation and *Second Step* implementation, while staff also received trauma-informed/ACES training). Total incidents, as well as in-school and out-of-school suspensions were collected via the Skyward program for this three-year period. Administration of a staff-questionnaire over PBIS and Social-Emotional Curriculum (*Second Step*) implementation at the end of the third nine weeks was conducted in March 2018. This 11-item questionnaire asked teachers to rate items on a 5-point Likert Scale, and provide open-ended feedback on implementation, likes/dislikes of the programs; how they felt the building was doing implementing the programs; and if they felt the programs were helping improve student behavior. The questionnaire addressed building climate, teacher morale, and overall teacher perceptions of increases in academic learning time. A principal interview obtained administrative perceptions of the program. Researchers' critical reflections concluded the data collection.

7. Findings

7.1. Office Disciplinary Referrals

The Skyward Information System provided the means to collect and disaggregate office discipline referrals (ODRs) from 2015-2018 spring semester with 2015 as baseline. Analysis of the ODRs data from the academic years 2015-2018 indicate a decline in the number of total in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Reports during 2015-2016 identified 172 total incidents involving 14 incident categories involving 48 students. In 2016-2017, reports identified 205 incidents involving13 incident categories, involving 39 students. Reports for 2017-2018, through the 3rd nine weeks, documented 142 incidents of 16 different categories involving 45 students.

Four categories of student misconduct, reported as incidents resulting in ODRs, consistently show up in the top 5 from 2015-2018. They are identified as: bus referrals-149-incidents, defiance of authority-109-incidents, hitting-53-incidents, and failure to comply-52-incidents. The category of threat that reported 13 incidents in year 1, did not make the top five in years 2 or 3. Activity misbehaviour totalling 29 incidents defines minor student behaviors not clearly identified by another category such as general misbehavior.

7.2. Teacher/Staff Questionnaire

Staff perceptions of PBIS and *Second Step*, were collected using an 11-item questionnaire with an open-ended section. Elementary staff rated questions using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree-1 to Strongly Agree-5, on the fidelity of implementation, building climate, teacher morale, and perceived effects on student behavior and classroom disruptions. Staff also shared their feedback on the implementation process. Data collection received a 78.6% response rate. For ease of discussion, the categories of Agree and Strongly Agree were collapsed into a single category Agree. Results confirmed 93% of the staff agree that students understand the Trailway Ticket System (Tier 1 PBIS intervention that reinforces positive student behaviors indicated on the building matrix), while 87% of staff agree they understand and consistently enforce the incentive/Tier 1 system. 33% of staff agree that the *Second Step* is helping students understand concepts such as empathy, self-control, emotion-management, assertiveness, and taking responsibility, while 26% agree that *Second Step* is helping students apply these concepts in their interactions with adults and peers at school. Approximately 20% of staff agree that PBIS and *Second Step* have been helpful in decreasing/eliminating adverse student behavior during year-1-implementation, with another 40% indicating they neither agree nor disagree. Regarding student referrals, 40% of staff agree they have referred fewer students to the office since the initiation of

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PBIS and *Second Step*, with 33% indicating they neither agree nor disagree they have referred fewer students.

Despite some less than positive staff perceptions on the efficacy of PBIS and *Second Step*, 74% report a positive school climate, and 60% report strong/positive teacher morale in the building. The District Leadership Team introduced a new Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR) Form. Staff received training for definitions of major/minor behaviors, and flow-chart introduction to distinguish an office referral from classroom referral. With regard to post inservice staff, 74% agree that this new ODR form, along with behavior definitions and flow chart referral process will increase discipline clarity and consistency. 33% of staff agree that the implementation of PBIS and *Second Step* have increased academic learning time; 47% neither agree nor disagree, and 20% disagree that implementation has produced increases in academic learning time. 67% of staff believe behavior can improve through *Second Step* and PBIS. 20% do not believe behavior can improve through social-emotional learning and positive behavior interventions/supports, while 13% neither agree nor disagree that behavior can improve. These findings suggest investing in more time and training for teachers to implement these programs for optimal student success by increasing teaching time and improving student achievement.

7.3. Open-Ended Feedback

The open-ended section of the staff questionnaire solicited staff feedback to improve the process and to determine success in meeting projected program outcomes. Staff shared their views on PBIS and *Second Step*, as well as their beliefs on the system implementation. Their feedback revealed that they perceive PBIS/Trailway implementation as successfully establishing clear student behavior expectations. They value re-teaching the expectation stations and remark that consistency is an absolute for successful implementation. Some explained how incentives/rewards have lost their appeal. Many expressed a desire to work toward improving the process. Some need more time to teach/reinforce the *Second Step* lessons. Others note student buy-in for the social-emotional learning was more difficult for older students. They believe consistency of *Second Step*, over time will improve student behavior.

Constructive ideas emerged from the qualitative data to inform future implementation. The feedback reveals that staff have not completely owned the process, but are positive and open to continue. Regular communication with staff will facilitate this process. Staff anticipate identified outcomes will continue with diligent attention to implementation and follow-up.

7.4. Principal Interview

The principal reported inconsistencies with teachers' use of Tier 1 behavior interventions and inconsistencies with teachers logging Office Disciplinary Referrals on the Skyward School Management System. She conveyed limitations of not being able to provide faculty consistent quality feedback/support being the sole administrator while implementing new initiatives. The principal restated the goal of PBIS was to provide a positive feedback ratio to students, and the goal of Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum was to provide students social-emotional skills for positive interactions.

8. Conclusion

While ODR incidents per quarter were less in 2017-2018 compared to 2016-2017, they were higher than 2015-2016. It is difficult to determine from the data that one year of PBIS and social-emotional curriculum implementation has resulted in fewer suspensions and office disciplinary referrals, but 2017-2018 reported fewer in-school suspensions than the previous two years. Data suggest efficacy of PBIS and *Second Step* in improving student behaviour. The recommendation of ongoing longitudinal data collection for implementation with high fidelity needs to continue before concluding if PBIS and *Second Step* results in fewer suspensions and office disciplinary referrals, and improvements in student behavior at Midwest-Elementary School. Faithful PBIS implementation increased effectiveness confirmed in the 5-year longitudinal research of Bradshaw et al. (2010), the 3-year work of Horner et al. (2009), and the 6-year research of Freeman et al. (2016). Findings indicate increased executive functioning skills in preschool children completing two years of Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum (Upshur et al., 2017). Decreased problem behaviors, increased prosocial behavior in older students completing the Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum resulted over a two-year period (Top et al., 2016).

At Midwest-Elementary School, PBIS and Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum is impacting teaching. Teaching prescribed lessons 30-minutes per week with time for social-emotional learning in PreK-5th grades is having a positive effect on anticipated outcomes. A decrease in suspensions and a lower average number of referrals in 2017-2018 compared to 2016-2017 indicate fewer classroom disruptions. Data analysis of PBIS and *Second Step* increasing learning time, indicate the need for longer implementation to determine program efficacy in producing lower classroom disruptions, student behavior, and increases in academic learning time.

Midwest-Elementary Staff completing the questionnaire (with 78.6% of teaching staff and support staff reporting) indicate the overall building climate and staff morale is positive or strong. Results are inconclusive as to if this comes from PBIS and *Second Step* implementation. It is

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encouraging that 67% of staff agree student behavior can improve through the PBIS/*Second Step* curriculum. Staff buy in will increase with additional support, training feedback, and attempts to increase fidelity of implementation longitudinally with PBIS and *Second Step* completion

8.1. Researchers' Critical Reflection: Circling Back

Schools are social places; by, for and about people. They are microcosms of society and reflect the ripple of problems that exist within communities; within our world. Understanding this dynamic, the researchers critically reflected upon this study purporting increased roles and responsibilities of educators necessitate acknowledgment that school–has both a social and academic function. Collaborative school and mental health programs have shown positive results for students and families (Sigler, 2016). Society must consider the social realm of schooling and integrate interventions to counter social issues for the establishment of safe learning environments. Areas demanding greatest attention for correction include the effects of toxic stress on students and families; adverse student behavior; social-emotional development; teacher classroom-management capacities; student demographics/socio-economic status; parent and community involvement in the schools; relationship building between students, adults, and families; and student mental health services (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013).

Selected to participate in a new $10,000,000 state of Kansas mental health intervention program, Midwest USD is a pilot of a school district that will make readily available mental health services to students in public schools. Beginning fall 2018, Midwest USD is one of four rural districts served by Central Kansas Cooperative in Education collaborating with Central Kansas Mental Health to provide mental health services to students meeting at-risk criteria. Prior to this pilot program, mental health programs could collaborate with schools to provide services to students who met specific Emotional/Behavioral Disturbance (EBD) eligibility criteria set by the State Department of Education. This particular pilot program allows students who meet at-risk criteria, rather than EBD eligibility guidelines, to receive mental health services from counselors and social workers. The Mental Health Intervention Team Pilot Program, enacted by Kansas Senate Bill 423, increases number of students who receive mental health services within the public school system. Families will no long need to drive children to appointments in larger communities, or go without receiving services. Students will receive mental health services within the rural school community. They will receive help to promote living healthy lifestyles.

Moreover, students and families will receive outreach and awareness beyond what school counselors can solely provide, and thereby further address, adverse student behaviors inclusive of the effects of toxic stress and/or mental illness. The program goal is to improve social-emotional

wellness, and student academic and life outcomes through readily available access to counselors, psychologists, and social workers beyond past practice within public schools. Anticipated statewide implementation of this program is 2020. Sigler (2016) suggested that schools providing families needed supports increase healthy student development and success. Initiatives enacted by Midwest USD and Midwest-Elementary School, increases the likeliness of ensuring safe, positive, non-threatening learning environments conducive to optimal teaching and learning emotional learning was more difficult for older students. They believe consistency of *Second Step,* over time will improve student behavior.

Constructive ideas emerged from the qualitative data to inform future implementation. It is clear that although staff have not completely owned the process, they are positive and open to continue. Regular communication with staff will facilitate this process. Staff anticipate identified outcomes will continue with diligent attention to implementation and follow-up.

9. Recommendations

Implementing school-wide PBIS systems does not guarantee successful student behavior or academic outcomes, but implementation with fidelity will contribute towards attaining these goals. Furthermore, implementation demands additional time, resources, ongoing-professional-development, and commitment to the PBIS framework. Schools can become safe and supportive learning environments, and foster climates of social-emotional safety with faithful implementation of the *Second Step* program (Committee for Children, 2016).

To achieve the hoped for outcome of the Second Step program, schools must enlist the help of communities and parents. The Kansas TASN team collaborating with Midwest USD has shown increases in parent and community involvement; a requirement for Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA). Investing in parent/community partnerships can help Midwest-Elementary School and Midwest USD provide social, emotional, and educational supports to students. *Second Step* offers a parent involvement segment in its PreK-8th grade curriculum (Home Links) designed to increase a positive school image with all-stakeholders.

Midwest-Elementary School's implementation of PBIS and *Second Step* is showing promise for continued decreased student misbehavior. Results of this study inform a continued investigating of long-term implementation of PBIS, *Second Step,* and utilizing Trauma-Informed Practices on student achievement and academic success at Midwest-Elementary School and Midwest School District.

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