

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL  
INTERVENTION SYSTEMS ON STUDENT  
AND TEACHER OUTCOMES IN SCHOOLS

by

NATHAN LINN AYERS

JINGPING SUN COMMITTEE CHAIR

STEPHEN TOMLINSON

PHILLIP WESTBROOK

BRYAN MANN

TIM GUINN

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## **ABSTRACT**

This general qualitative research study collected interview data from fifteen participants whose schools have implemented a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support System in the past three years. The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions of these participants with respect to the influence which the PBIS had exerted upon the overall school climate of their institutions. The research questions focused upon student outcomes as well as teacher outcomes. The student outcomes were expressed in terms of student engagement while the teacher outcomes were expressed in terms of teacher engagement.

The findings of this study were as follows. Three themes emerged with respect to student engagement. Fourteen participants perceived that the employment of the PBIS improved the affective engagement of students by increasing comradery and providing a competitive atmosphere. Fourteen participants perceived that the PBIS improved behavioral student engagement by offering incentives and increasing accountability. Fourteen participants perceived that PBIS improved cognitive student engagement by increasing achievement and increasing involvement.

Three themes emerged with respect to teacher engagement during this study. Fourteen participants perceived that the PBIS positively influenced teacher engagement with the school by increasing teacher attendance and giving the teachers a sense of ownership. Fourteen participants perceived that the PBIS exerted a positive influence on teacher involvement with the school by decreasing apathy and improving relationships with students. Fourteen participants

perceived that the employment of a PBIS exerted a positive influence upon a teacher's level of energy by improving the school atmosphere and improving teacher attitudes.

One participant in the study provided a negative case. This participant registered the perception that numerous improvements had taken place in the school since the employment of PBIS had taken place. However, this participant was not of the opinion that the influence of PBIS was responsible for these improvements.

This study made the following contribution to the field of Educational Leadership. Previous studies had focused upon the influence of PBIS upon student outcomes. Other studies had focused upon the influence of PBIS on teacher outcomes. This study was one of the first to integrate the two at the same time. As a result this study revealed an integrated, holistic, and synergistic influence which Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems exert upon the school institution. Implications for practitioners, policy makers, and research were discussed in the last chapter.

## **DEDICATION**

The following document is being dedicated to the three most important people in my life. First and foremost, this document is dedicated to the love of my life, my wife, Laney. The sacrifices that you have made over the past six years as I have pursued this degree are more numerous than I could ever list. You have held down our home and gotten our children from point A to point B while I spent countless hours away from home chasing this dream. I can never thank you enough for your sacrifices and I am beyond blessed that you have chosen to do life with me. Secondly, I would like to acknowledge the second female that stole my heart and made me a daddy, Parker. I have sacrificed more time than any father ever should away from you during this process. I hope when you get older you can understand why and have a sense of pride for what we as a team have accomplished. I love you baby girl and always will!!! Lastly, to the one who completed our family, and my only son, Walker. The completion of this document will signify the first time since you have been born that I have not had to spend time away from you in pursuit of this degree. I love you more than anything and I hope one day that you understand these sacrifices were made to help you as much as they were to help me. God has blessed me with you three as my family and has brought us to this point together. I love you all and cannot wait to see what God has planned for us in the future!!!

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Rationale and Importance of the Study.....	4
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Literature Review.....	7
History of Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems.....	8
Overview of the Limited Research Evidence on Influence of PBIS.....	13
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	14
Student Engagement.....	15
Teacher Engagement.....	36
Conclusion.....	50
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY.....	52
Methodology.....	52

Introduction .....	52
Research Questions.....	52
Research Design .....	52
Sampling.....	55
Participating Schools and Teachers.....	58
Data Collection .....	63
Data Analysis.....	64
Ethical Considerations.....	65
Positionality Statement.....	65
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS .....	68
Findings.....	68
Research Question One: How did the employment of PBIS influence student outcomes? .....	68
Student Engagement.....	69
Affective Engagement .....	70
Behavioral Engagement.....	75
Cognitive Engagement .....	80
Research Question Two: How did the employment of PBIS influence teacher outcomes? .....	86
Teacher Engagement with the School .....	86
Teacher Involvement with the School.....	91
Teacher Level of Energy .....	97
Negative Case and Comments.....	102
Conclusion.....	103
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS .....	104
Introduction .....	104
Discussion .....	104
PBIS Influence on Student Outcome .....	105
Affective Engagement .....	105
Behavioral Engagement.....	106
Cognitive Engagement .....	107
PBIS Influences Teacher Outcomes.....	108

Engagement with the School .....	108
Involvement with the School.....	109
Level of Energy .....	111
Conclusions .....	112
Limitations .....	116
Implications.....	117
Implications for Future Research .....	117
Implications for Policy Makers .....	118
Implications for Practitioners .....	120
Conclusion.....	123
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATORS .....	141
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS .....	143
APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER .....	145

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Participating Schools .....	60
Table 2 Interview Participants .....	62

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework .....	15
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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### Background

In the public school setting it has long been understood that students who enjoy being at school will not only want to be at school more but will do better while they are there. As our students evolve over time we, as educators have to do the same in order to reach them. One of the main goals in student engagement is for the students to become intrinsically motivated to the point that they need no motivation to want to succeed (Pink, 2012). With that thought in mind, it is important to note that extrinsic rewards may be necessary in order to give the students a boost toward being more intrinsically driven.

Historically, intrinsic motivation has been engendered by Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems. Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems facilitate intrinsic motivation in students by means of extrinsic rewards. Rewards are granted to students who exhibit school designated behavioral norms. School designated norms are designed to overcome behavioral deficiencies that exist within that specific school (Matthews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2013). Such deficiencies in student engagement may include student attendance, student discipline, and academic achievement. Some examples of rewards for positive behavior may include meals, gift cards, homework passes, and educational field trips.

Positive Behavioral Intervention System is a generic term which encompasses a number of different schemes. Each school devises its own scheme of positive behavior intervention based upon its uniquely designated deficiencies. The process of a positive behavioral intervention system unfolds in the following manner. First, a leadership team is created. The

leadership team is comprised of the following stakeholders: administrators, guidance counselors, faculty members, and students. The leadership team develops a set of non-negotiable norms based upon the specific needs of the institution (Coffey & Horner, 2012). Such norms include addressing adults with “yes sir,” always telling the truth, respecting other people’s opinions, and not showing disrespect by means of gestures. Students are notified concerning these norms by means of school signage, emails, letters sent to parents, social media, and small group meetings. Rewards for conformity to these norms are distributed based upon a point system at the end of a set time period.

Positive behavioral intervention systems have existed for approximately thirty-five years. In the past decade the concept has gained notoriety in the southeastern part of the United States. A number of anecdotal reports surfaced to indicate that the positive behavioral intervention system was effective in assisting schools in overcoming many behavioral deficiencies which existed in their institutions. These antidotal reports spurred researchers to investigate the nature of the positive behavioral intervention systems and the influence they were exerting upon school disciplinary cultures.

### **Problem Statement**

Problems related to school disciplinary climate often involve students’ behaviors and teachers as well. In many schools exist the problem of high rates of behavior issues, high absenteeism, and low statewide student achievement. The state of Alabama currently sits with the fifth most out of school suspension days in the nation according to the Alabama School Connection (2015). High absenteeism is a second problem encountered by students. The average daily attendance for schools in the state sits at 90.9% which means that the average student will miss 10% of the school year ([www.NCES.ed.gov](http://www.NCES.ed.gov)). Low student achievement is

another problem encountered by students. Currently the average ACT score for Alabama students is 19.1 with the national average sitting at 21.0. Only 20% of Alabama sophomores are proficient in Math and only 24% are proficient in Science ([www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)).

In addition to student issues, teacher absenteeism and apathy have proved to be a problem over the past decade. According to data kept at the central office level, one school located in a small school system in eastern Alabama experienced a total of over 400 teacher absences in one year. Teacher efficacy has also waned in the recent years. According to a survey conducted by Hoy, Hoy & Kurz (2008), teacher drive has substantially decreased over the past decade. Another teacher issue is the increase in teacher apathy. With the increase in requirements placed on teachers and increased litigation in the educational setting teacher apathy is at an all-time high (Richey & Petretti, 2002).

### **Purpose Statement**

There are two purposes of this research project. Previous research has indicated that PBIS has a positive influence upon the following issues for students: improvement in disciplinary referrals, improvement in student absenteeism, and an improvement in student achievement (Baker & Ryan, 2014). There is scarce research examining the influence which PBIS has exerted upon teacher outcomes. One of the purposes of this research is to fill this gap in the literature. The small amount of research which exists focuses upon teacher attendance and teacher apathy (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Dunlap, 2009; Matthews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2013). This study will investigate student outcomes and expand upon the influence in which PBIS exerts upon teacher outcomes. As a result, the purpose of this study is to better understand the impact which Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems are having upon student and teacher outcomes.

- 1) How did the employment of PBIS influence student outcomes?
- 2) How did the employment of PBIS influence teacher outcomes?

### **Rationale and Importance of the Study**

With the evidence that has been presented thus far it is clear that there is a need in the state of Alabama to study Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems and their impact on the educational environment. The first reason this study is important is because many schools in the state of Alabama are beginning to use this platform as a way to meet the requirement for a mentoring program (Richardson, Lewis, Butler, & Dejarnett, 2018). When that directive was set forth by the ALSDE there were a few guidelines but there was a lot of discretion given as well (Sugai, 2014). That reason is why a lot of schools chose this model as a way to meet that requirement. In addition there are schools getting national attention for the work they are accomplishing using a PBIS. One such school is located in Atlanta, Georgia and is known as the Ron Clark Academy. Within the RCA, students are grouped into “houses” when they arrive and continue to stay in those groups until they graduate from that middle school. Using this format, students are rewarded for different accomplishments in the form of points and at the end of the year the team with the most points wins the “House Cup”. By using this format, RCA has been able to overcome a huge SES gap in the inner city Atlanta area to produce students that leave the school to become successful college graduates and productive members of society. This school experienced great benefits as a result of the employment of PBIS. If the employments that are taking place throughout the state of Alabama experience the same type of success it is important to understand which aspects are in place at schools that are successful.

The second reason this study is important is monitoring whether or not the employments are working. As educators it is important that we have open minds to new ideas that come up in

our field which could help our students succeed in school and in life after school. With that being said there are countless programs that have been forced on to educators that do not work and eventually fade away with time. Sometimes the failure of those employments is due to lack of monitoring on a statewide level to determine the program's effectiveness. This is the area that will be addressed in this study. The areas that were examined in this study were student outcomes and teacher outcomes, which encompasses student attendance, student learning, student discipline, teacher attendance, and teacher apathy, and other student and/or teacher outcomes this explorative study may find. These areas alone could possibly hold the key to improved student achievement but together they play a large role in student learning. That is why these specific aspects of the school are the ones that the researcher will focus on as this study progresses.

A third reason for this study is that the researcher has seen the positive influence which implementing a PBIS has had in a school setting. In the first two full years after employment at the researcher's school there has been an increase in the Average Daily Attendance of the school by three percent and an 84% decrease in disciplinary infractions as compared to data prior to employment. While these numbers are a drastic change it is important for the researcher to seek possible common links to success with other schools who have had success in order for the increased success in his daily praxis.

A fourth reason for this study concerns a lack of specific investigations related to the effect which PBIS. At this point in time there are a number of studies which support the effective influence PBIS exerts upon student and teacher outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Baker & Ryan 2014; Dunlap, 2009; Matthews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2013; Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015; Molloy, Moore, Trail, Epps, & Hopfer, 2013, Metzel, Biglan, Rusby, &

Sprague, 2001; Freeman, Simonson, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2015). However, there are no studies discovered by this researcher which describe the specific ways in which PBIS influences student and teacher outcomes focused by this study. This study intends to bridge the gap in the literature by:

- Identifying ways in which PBIS influences student outcomes.
- Identifying the ways in which PBIS influences teacher outcomes.

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

### Literature Review

There are common themes within the literature which explain various issues related to school disciplinary climate. This research project will focus upon two specific aspects of school disciplinary climates: the influence of PBIS on student and teacher outcomes. Previous research has sought explanations for problems related to student attendance, student discipline, and student achievement and if PBIS influenced them (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialango, & Leaf, 2008). Additionally, there have been few research studies conducted the influence of PBIS on teacher's outcomes (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009). Those few research studies have focused upon teacher attendance, teach efficacy, and teacher apathy (Sugai & Horner, 2009). This study will investigate the specific reasons for the success after the employment of a PBIS. This study will fill two gaps in the current literature. This research endeavor will seek to identify ways in which PBIS influences student outcomes as expressed through student engagement. This research will also seek to identify the ways in which PBIS influence teacher outcomes with respect to teacher engagement.

In this chapter the researcher will first introduce the concept of Positive Behavioral Support Systems and how they have evolved over time to where they are currently today. Following that introduction the researcher will provide an overview of the research reflecting the impact which Positive Behavioral Support Systems have had on student outcomes and the limited research that exists reflecting the impact on teacher outcomes. Next the researcher will

lay out a guide in the form of a theoretical framework which will be used as a guide to direct the ensuing literature review.

### **History of Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems**

The concept of the positive behavioral support system (PBSS) was first studied in the 1980's by a group at the University of Oregon as a way of bridging the gap, which exists in student engagement (Dunlap, 2009). Initially the group focused on areas that dealt strictly with the students' behavior. The following areas were a focus in this research: identifying students who are struggling with behavior, monitoring students for academics and behavior, making intervention decisions based on student data, using research/science-based interventions and supports, maintaining the integrity of interventions and supports, using multi-tiered, progressive interventions and supports, utilizing a problem-solving, team-based approach to supports using this focus the concept of the positive behavioral support system was born.

From its initial roots strictly focusing on discipline the concept grew rapidly into a program that could also address other issues within the school such as attendance and academics (Gresham, 1991). One of the areas which became a focus was explicit instruction in social skills (Walker et al., 1996). These social skills are now commonly referred to as soft skills and many schools still use this as their foundation when developing the norms that are expected when engaging in constructing one of these systems (Biglan, 1995).

As the concept began to expand the University of Oregon was awarded a grant in 1997 which lead to them partnering with researchers from the Universities of Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and South Florida (Sugai et al., 2000). In the 2000's the University of Oregon was awarded its third grant which revolved on a five year cycle that afforded them and the other partner institutions the opportunity to facilitate direct professional development to more than

16,000 institutions who were implementing the program (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010) . The center that was developed was also now in charge of the following; web-based collection and dissemination of evidence-based behavior practices and systems, two national leadership and dissemination conferences (October Leadership Forum, and March partnership with the Association for Positive Behavior Supports), three best-practices and systems “blueprints” (Employment, Evaluation, and Professional Development), numerous publications and professional presentations, and school, district, and state employment demonstrations (www.pbis.org).

When looking at one of these systems in today’s school setting there is a high probability that a combination of these points is being used. One school located in north Alabama implements this system using teams which are divided across grade levels with all ages and abilities represented in each team. Each grading period the team with the most points is rewarded with an educational field trip for their efforts. In order to reach a decision on the winner of the trip the teachers and staff first determined what their yearly focuses would be. In the two years prior to employment of the program attendance had been one of the lowest in the area, discipline had been one of the highest in the area, and test scores were very stagnant. With those issues in mind, the school decided to focus on rewarding attendance, good behavior, and growth on their progress-monitoring test.

Using the fundamental aspects of PBSS as their foundation, Congress renewed funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and secured funding to establish the national Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. This step in 1997 led to PBIS as it is known today. Currently there are more than 18,000 schools in the United States and abroad that are using PBIS in a multitude of school settings. These systems place students into

focus groups and rewards are given in many different forms based on following a set of norms specifically designed for the needs of each school.

A review of the scholarly literature reveals that there has not been a cohesive policy which guides the employment and continued utilization of PBIS (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015). However, there are specific guidelines at the federal and state levels which address issues related to various aspects or outcomes of PBIS, such as student attendance, student discipline, and student achievement. These policies will be briefly mentioned when reviewing research evidence related to these concepts in the following texts. Below, I will review the developments of this new concept, and then highlight a typical approach to the employment of PBIS many schools adopt, the one with three tiers.

Initially the concept of PBSS evolved from the work of Roy Mayer and Anthony Biglan and their studies involving individualized behavioral support (Horner, 2011). Since its inception in the 1980's there have been very few changes in positive behavioral support systems and the foundation of the concept has not changed, helping students learn while at the same time limiting disciplinary issues. When implementing this type of system a school should focus on four centralized elements: what data will the school use for decision making purposes, the school must determine what measurable outcomes will they seek to be evaluated by that data, the school must then find evidence that these measurable outcomes are achievable, and finally the school must develop a system of support (for students and teachers) to facilitate effective employment of the plan (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015). In order for the school to achieve these four points there are six guiding principles that should be used; to develop scientifically based behavior and academic interventions, data must be used to make decisions and solve problems, arrange the students environment in such a way to hinder any potential disruptions,

enhance prosocial or soft skills, implement said interventions to fidelity, use a universal screener for data collection and constant progress monitoring (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Using this format gives schools a road map to beginning and implementing the main features of a successful positive behavioral support system.

Schools that are able to successfully implement the previous aspects have historically proven to show positive outcomes and exhibit the following trends. One study looking at PBIS discovered that when schools implement a PBIS correctly there is a marked improvement in supports for students who have a need for more specialized assistance (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2009). These improved supports lead to an increase in the desired outcomes that the school set forth. A second study discovered that schools which implemented a PBIS exhibited students who were less of a classroom management problem and were less adversarial when confronted with conflict (Mueller & Nkoski, 2007). A final study reflected that schools which had a PBIS in place had a more engaging classroom atmosphere which translated in to an improvement in learning for the student population.

Schools have taken different approaches to implementing their PBIS after it has been designed. One of the more popular approaches is to place students in to house groups for the purposes of tracking students (Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Colvin, 1999). These houses are in a sense the school family for each student as they progress through that school. Another common trend is for schools to place students in to mentor groups to track them. These mentor groups are led by a school staff member who is responsible for their group of students (McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, Frank, Turri, & Matthews, 2013). While the names of each of these are different the general theme is the same. Students are placed with a group and a leader that hold them

accountable for the norms that are set forth by the PBIS (Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Colvin, 1999). This accountability piece helps teachers and schools to meet the specific needs of every learner.

The PBIS framework seeks to make a difference in the life of every student in the school. However, the program also recognizes that differentiation is necessary for success. With that thought in mind, a true PBIS relies on a three tiered approach to engaging each student. In tier one of the PBIS triangle it is believed that 80% of students will respond appropriately to general guidance and instruction. These first tier students will generally be successful, however, they may need extra guidance from time to time. The second tier of the pyramid focuses on the next 15% of students who will need a more focused direction and instruction. This section is similar to the tier two of Response To Intervention (RTI) where small group instruction is given in order for understanding to take place. The third tier of the pyramid is the 5% group of students who will need specialized one-on-one treatment in order for the employment of the PBIS to be successful for them. This group of 5% is often where the majority of disciplinary issues arise within the school (Baker & Ryan, 2014).

With the three-tiered pyramid as its guide, the employment of a PBIS seeks to accomplish three outcomes:

- Facilitate data driven decision making in the school
- Develop practices to support student behavior
- Develop systems to support staff behavior

These three outcomes are designed as measures to determine the success or failure of the PBIS employment. Since the concept of the PBIS is more recent and structured than the concept of the PBSS, PBIS is more suited for this research endeavor than PBSS.

## **Overview of the Limited Research Evidence on Influence of PBIS**

The employment of a PBIS is often linked to improving student outcomes and should always be based around developing norms that meet the specific needs of each school (Matthews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2013). The main outcome which will be researched in this study is student engagement which will be expressed through three factors. The initial factor is an improvement in the affective engagement of the students. Students who attend a school where a PBIS has been implemented exhibit a greater sense of belonging to the school and have a better attitude toward the school experience (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015). The next factor is improving behavioral engagement through student attendance and student discipline. When students attend a school where PBIS has been implemented to fidelity there is a statistically significant correlation between employment and improvement in the Average Daily Attendance of that school (Freeman, Simonson, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2015). PBIS also has a documented influence on student discipline. Students who attend a school that has implemented a PBIS to fidelity show a marked decrease in the number of office referrals in comparison to the year prior to employment (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Epps, & Hopfer, 2013).

The final aspect of student engagement that shows improvement when PBIS is implemented is cognitive engagement. Students who attend a school where PBIS norms are instituted and followed show an overall improvement in student achievement data across SES groups and achievement levels (Reno, Friend, Caruthers, & Smith, 2017). A review of the literature reveals that the employment of a PBIS does show an improvement in the three previously mentioned areas. The need for further explanation comes in the area of why and how PBIS accomplishes this outcome. Understanding these qualitative ideas for improving student outcomes associated with PBIS is a primary need for this study.

There is much information about the impact which PBIS exerts on student outcomes. However, there is scant research on how the employment of a PBIS impacts teacher outcomes. In this study the teacher outcomes which will be monitored all fall under teacher engagement. One aspect which appeared is teacher attendance and there was only one reference discovered which linked teacher attendance and PBIS. That study revealed that schools where a PBIS existed demonstrated not only an improvement in teacher attendance, but also an improvement in overall job satisfaction for teachers as well. Another factor under teacher engagement which this study will investigate is teacher apathy. Of the two factors teacher apathy is the one which has the most literature linking it to PBIS. Teachers who work in a school where PBIS has been implemented exhibited less apathy than those which did not implement PBIS in the same time frame (Metzel, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001).

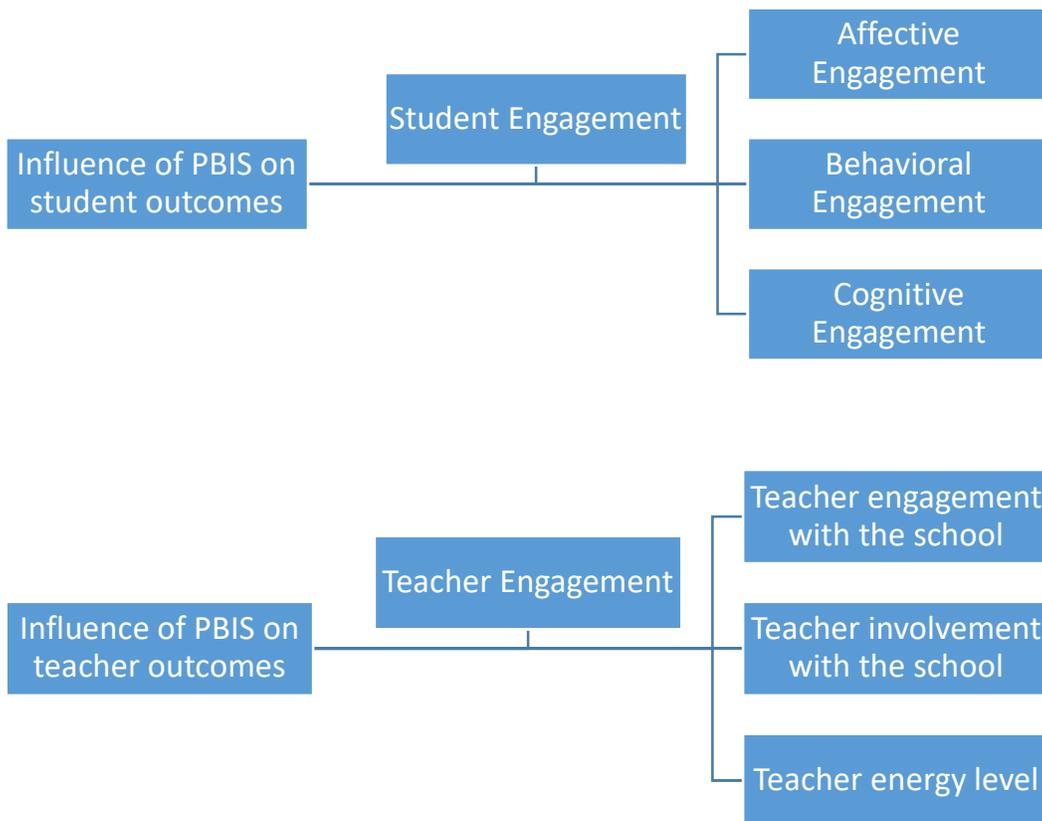
### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Previous research studies have highlighted areas in which the employment of PBIS have shown a positive influence in the school setting. Some of these areas include but are not limited to student's feelings about school, students' behavior while at school, and an improvement in the students' performance while at school. All of these areas fall into the category of student engagement. Very limited research also suggests the promising influence of PBIS on teachers' engagement with school, which can be reflected from teacher attendance in school, level of their involvement in school, energy put into school work such as teaching and building relationship with students, with teacher apathy as the low level of involvement in the school setting.

This study will use the following framework, addressing the two research questions, to guide the literature review of this research endeavor and the study. The first research question focuses on how the employment of a PBIS influences student outcomes. Since the research

suggests that those outcomes can be classified into student engagement that will be used as the main heading that affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement all fall under. The second research question addresses the influence which PBIS exerts upon teacher outcomes. The research in this area is very sparse but can fall under the areas of teacher engagement with the school, teacher involvement with the school, and the amount of energy a teacher exerts while teaching. These three specific areas will be nestled under the heading of teacher engagement.

*Figure 1 Theoretical Framework*



### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement is a construct that has been heavily studied in the realm of education literature and its impact on the school day is palpable. From a broad perspective student

engagement refers to students being involved, committed, or attached to the academic and social activities in their school (Y. Li & Lerner, 2013). For the purposes of this study the researcher will take a more refined look at the specific, research proven, aspects of the construct of student engagement. Depending on which research one reviews the construct will consist of two or three specific variables (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, PC, & Paris, 2004). According to Reschly & Christenson (2012) these aspects can be condensed into two variables and those are cognitive and a combined behavioral/emotional. For the purposes of this research endeavor the researcher will follow the guidelines set forth by Veiga (2016) and other scholars and conceptualize the construct of student engagement in to three specific dimensions. These dimensions are as follows:

- Affective Engagement- this dimension can be characterized by the extent to which students identify with school and feel they belong where they are. This dimension is quite similar to that of the social cohesion variable that students experience (Oxley, 1997)
- Behavioral Engagement- this dimension refers to the students active involvement in the academic and other school-related activities, as seen in attending to tasks and following school rules (Fredricks et al., 2004)
- Cognitive engagement- this dimension can be defined as a psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote (Herjayanto, 2018)

For the sake of this study the emotional dimension as was outlined by Christianson (2012) will be combined mainly into the affective engagement section of this work. According to Fredricks (2004) emotional engagement actually refers to a student's affective reactions and feelings

toward learning, school, teachers, and classmates. This also includes a sense of belonging, liking school, and general happiness with school. Whether researchers characterize student engaging in two or three dimensions research has proven that all play an equal role in the success of the student (Toll, 2016). It has also been said that trying to motivate students to complete essential tasks while they are not engaged is not only problematic but overwhelming to the instructor in the classroom (Lam, Shin, Cefai, Veiga, Hatzichsistou, & Zollneritsch, 2016). With that thought in mind categorizing student outcomes in terms of student engagement fits the research parameters of this study.

### *Affective Engagement*

As discussed in the previous section the first dimension of student engagement that will be discussed in this review of literature involves the affect of the student. The affective component of student engagement initially addresses how well the student identify with the school and school environment where they attend (Oxley, 1997). Students who have a positive outlook on their school experience and have pride in their identity within the school are said to have positive affective engagement. Students who identify with school have an internalized conception of belongingness that they are discernably part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their experience (Finn, 1989). Research also shows that these individuals with a positive affect value success in school-relevant goals (Finn, 1989).

It is also fair to say that affective engagement can be referred to as how a student personally feels (amused, happy, proud, etc) in their respective classroom setting. Another way some researchers have expressed this dimension is by acknowledging it as “playful” engagement (Godin, Freeman, & Rigby, 2017). This school of thought hinges on the fact that students will be motivated to participate and engage in school functions if their interactions with their

classmates are pleasant in nature. In other words students who have positive interactions will seek out more of those positive interactions in the future which will lead to increased student engagement (Godin, Freeman, & Rigby, 2017).

When assessing the specific features which facilitate the effectiveness of a PBIS in the school setting it is first important to have a specific focus. The first focus is how PBIS affects student engagement in the school. Since the term engagement is a subjective term that has many different meanings it is imperative to have a solid research-based foundation for what affective student engagement is according to the literature.

Researchers have pointed to engagement in the classroom setting as a pivotal factor in the teaching and learning that takes place in the school. When students are engaged they are focused on the lesson at hand and involved in the learning process. Engagement has also been proven to be a key factor in reaching all students regardless of any barriers that are in place (Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015). Such barriers include but are not limited to mental and physical impairments that could prevent a student from learning. In the educational setting student engagement is a term that means many things to many people. For the purpose of this research affective student engagement will be considered as referring to the amount of attention, curiosity, interest and optimism that a student exhibits toward the material that is being presented to them (Davis & Mcpartland, 2012). This zeal then builds a motivation that continues with students as they progress in to further educational opportunities in their future. The general consensus is that students who are more engaged are less bored, more passionate, and more inspired with the material that is being given to them. Since these truths have been discovered it is evident why student engagement is so prevalent in educational research.

Affective engagement is not a stand-alone concept but, rather one that exhibits several moving pieces and aspects. The first aspect of affective engagement is the concept of stimulation within the classroom. Intellectual stimulation refers to the amount of intellectual stimulation is received during the course of the instructional process (Jacobson, Lock, & Friesen, 2013). There are many ways to boost this area of engagement that vary from subject to subject. The second aspect that is a part of affective engagement is emotional engagement. In emotional engagement students become more involved in the process when they feel a strong teacher to student bond (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). These type relationships are developed over time in a classroom where students feel they have a safe learning environment. The third aspect of affective engagement is social engagement. This refers to the comfort level that the students have with their peer to peer relationships in the classroom (Jones & Thomas, 2012). The stronger these relationships are the higher student engagement is in that class. The fourth aspect of affective engagement is that of cultural engagement. In a classroom that is culturally engaged teachers seek to group students with diverse populations and ability levels in an effort to prevent any student group from feeling exiled while at school (Pennings, 2011).

#### *PBIS' Influence on Various Aspects of Affective Student Engagement*

Research has shown that affective engagement is a complex concept that focuses on a student's interaction in the classroom setting. For the purpose of this research the researcher will focus primarily on how students feel and how that impacts overall student engagement. More specifically this research will look at how the PBIS impacts various aspects or dimensions of student engagement. In doing this the researcher will seek to answer part of the first research question focusing on student outcomes.

One of the most reoccurring themes in educational research is the social emotional health of the student and how the school setting impacts that. Social engagement and emotional engagement are both pillars to affective engagement and this concept encompasses both aspects. Social emotional learning can be broadly defined as educating the whole child (Bradshaw, Bottiani, Osher, & Sugai, 2014). The concept of the PBIS is one way that schools are now addressing this ever growing need. Students who are in a school where a PBIS is in place have a greater sense of enjoyment in the school experience then students who are in a school where a like program is not in place (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008). This increased sense of enjoyment also leads to an increase in the sense of belonging that students also actively seek.

Another very important aspect of affective engagement is that of cultural engagement which refers to all groups regardless of background or ability level being reached at the same time. Schools with a PBIS have also shown to reach the affective needs of students who have significant barriers in their learning. These schools are able to achieve this difficult task by ensuring that every student is included in the process. With the multiple facets of a PBIS that is a task that can be relatively easy to achieve with a little effort in recognizing the needs of each student. Since every student has a part in the system classroom stimulation and participation is increased because students feel safe and free from the burden of worrying about mistakes or wrong answers. This increased stimulation is also a pivotal part of affective engagement and schools that have an active PBIS have shown to have an improvement in this area (Kalberg, Lane, & Lambert, 2012). This safer learning environment is evident in the interactions that take place during instruction between students and their teacher and between students while instruction is taking place.

### ***Behavioral Engagement***

The second dimension of student engagement refers to the student's active involvement in the academic and other school-related activities, as seen in attending to tasks and following school rules (Fredricks et al., 2004). Fredricks went on to link behavioral engagement with such things as school discipline, attendance, and citizenship and reflected these on the students overall engagement in the school setting. In a separate study Leithwood and Zanati (2000), categorizes this type of engagement as the way a student participates in school both inside and outside of the classroom. In doing this Leithwood and Zanati (2000) reflect and express the importance that educating the whole child has in the school setting. Linking behavioral engagement to learning was the focus of a report put forth by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004). In that report the OECD noted that when students were behaviorally engaged they were more in tune with their learning and become more self-driven learners. This was evident by the fact that students who behaviorally engaged could set their own appropriate learning goals and choose learning strategies that were appropriate for the task at hand.

Since behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement have so much in common they are often linked together in some research endeavors (Christensen, 2013). That should not come as a surprise because behavioral engagement draws from the idea of participation. That participation includes involvement in academic endeavors and is considered a crucial variable when achieving academically and preventing dropouts from occurring (Fredrick & McCloskey, 2012). Mirroring the findings of Fredrick and McCloskey a similar study by White and Salovey (2012) confirmed the important role that participation played student success. In that study classroom participation increased as the level of behavioral engagement increased. In turn, that

classroom participation correlated to increased student achievement. Yet another study found that student time on task and diligence in the completion of work mirrored that student's behavioral engagement (Abd Wahid & Shahrill, 2014). In other words if the student was behaviorally engaged they were more likely to successfully complete the task at hand and if they were not engaged they were less likely to complete their work.

One aspect of behavioral engagement is one area that this research will focus on and that is physical engagement. Physical engagement refers to the time a student is actually in a lesson and what they are doing while they are there (Stevens-Smith, 2016). For a student to be engaged in the learning process they must first be present in the learning arena. Studies such as, Smallhorn (2017), point to the lack of attendance being a substantial barrier when it comes to classroom engagement. Students who are not consistently present in the classroom lose some of their ability to cultivate mindfulness which causes disengagement with the topic at hand (Banerjee, Cavanagh, & Strauss, 2018). This problem has even prompted some teachers to adjust the way they conduct their class in an effort to improve the classroom atmosphere where students will want to attend class more.

#### *Physical Engagement: Student Attendance*

In the public school setting student attendance is tracked the average daily attendance (ADA) of the given school ([www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)). This number is a count of the overall number of students that are enrolled at the school at any given time. Chronic absenteeism is defined as the point at which a student misses 10% of the school year (ESSA, 2015). Research has demonstrated that there is a negative correlation between students who are chronically absent and students who are not chronically absent in terms of achievement (Ginsburg, Alan, Jordan, and Chang, 2014). In other words, students who are chronically absent score lower on

standardized tests then students who are not chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism is one of the few indicators which meets or exceeds the seven requirements set forth by the ESSA (Chronic Absence, 2016)

### *Causes of Student Absenteeism*

In order for teaching and learning to take place student attendance must be consistent throughout the process. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) students who become chronically absent in the early elementary school grades begin to show a degradation in academic achievement within the next school year. The literature reveals three specific factors that cause student absenteeism: family causes, school environment, and student social engagement.

One possible reason for student chronic absenteeism results from a negative home environment. When a student lives in a home where there is a focus on education the student will mirror that focus by attending and participating in school. One caveat to this conclusion concerns families who do not have the means necessary to get their students to and from school. One reason for this situation results from families falling into the lower socioeconomic groups (Welsh, 2018). In the school setting, socioeconomic status is tracked by the students' availability to receive free or reduced lunches. This is a common theme which can lead to chronic absenteeism. Additional research has shown that this problem can be linked to the family's ability to provide a substantial preschool education for the student which gives them a solid foundation prior to entering school. According to Gottfried (2015), students who are placed in a center based childcare facility have significantly lower rates of absenteeism in the lower grades of elementary school. This finding is even more significant when one understands

that students who are chronically absent in the lower grades are often the same students who are chronically absent as they progress through the k-12 setting.

Yet another theme that emerged from the research literature was the importance in which the school environment plays in increased absenteeism. The mind of a student at any age is a fragile being that can be manipulated in many different ways. If a student feels a sense of belonging or ownership in their learning process they will be more likely to attend school daily and less likely to become chronically absent (Tschannen-Moran, 2013). This sense of belonging can be linked to that student having an association with some activity at school which does not involve going to class. Some of these activities include academic clubs, service organizations, and athletic teams. These activities keep the students involved and can also be used as leverage to keep them in school.

The next cause is the student social engagement in the form of belonging to a group of friends. These peer groups give the student a social identity that continues with them as they progress through the middle and high school grades. Belonging to a peer group has shown to have a strong link to decreased absenteeism in high school students (Hartnett, 2007). Another reoccurring theme that relates to the personal makeup of the student is the health and fitness level of that student. The obvious link lies in a student being absent for a sickness. Students who are sick are allowed to miss the amount of days that are ordered by a doctor and those days are excused. The result of this policy is that there is no discrimination between excused and unexcused absences when being considered chronically absent. A student may be considered chronically absent and not have a single unexcused absence.

### *The Influence of PBIS on Physical Engagement*

Research has demonstrated that a PBIS is effective in counteracting the causes of student absenteeism and improving student attendance. When students are associated with an activity outside the academic setting statistically significant increase in student attendance (Freeman, Simonsen, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2015). There are numerous studies which have discovered similar findings in schools where PBIS has been implemented (Sugai & Horner, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Sprick, 2008; Scott & Eber, 2003; O'Neill & Stephenson; 2009; Mueller & Nkosi, 2007; Fox & Davis, 2005) . Increasing the motivation to be at school where a PBIS exists not only increases seat time but also increases achievement in areas such as Math and Reading where seat time is so important (Smolkowski, Seeley, Gau, Dishion, Stormshak, Moore, & Garbacz, 2017). Further studies have even identified the sense of community that a PBIS develops leads to an increase in multiple desired outcomes with one being an increase in student attendance (Goodman-Scott, Hays, & Cholewa, 2018). PBIS employments have also proven to increase family and community partnerships through shared decision making thus increasing student attendance (Garbacz, Hirano, McIntosh, Eagle, Minch, & Vatland, 2018). In review employment of a PBIS overcomes a disconnect with families by building relations, employment addresses personal issues by giving students a sense of belonging, and influences school-based problems by facilitating norms that help to improve the overall organization of the school. Improving all three causes of absenteeism through the employment of a PBIS has led to an increase in student attendance as is evident in the literature.

### *Student Behavior Issues*

This discipline area of the school setting is also a potential indicator for school success as could be listed in an ESSA plan (ESSA, 2015). Schools who have an increase in disciplinary

infractions exhibit a direct correlation to a decrease in standardized test scores (Arum, Jordan & Velez, 2012). This correlation indicates that discipline does play a substantial role in student achievement.

In Alabama local school systems are held accountable for the manner in which they administer and record discipline by the Alabama State Department of Education. The ALSDE is the state's education governing body and requires each individual school to document disciplinary data in to the Information now online portal so that data can be accessed and analyzed for potential patterns or problems within the disciplinary process. Since schools and school systems vary in the way their policies address the disciplinary process the ALSDE initiated the SIR, School Incident Report, to meet both federal and state discipline reporting requirements.

Schools have a wide range of disciplinary problems which occur throughout the school year. The ALSDE does not require all of these incidents to be listed on the SIR report, only incidents that meet certain criteria. The following are some of the disciplinary infractions that which code as a SIR offense: alcohol possession, defiance, disorderly conduct, fighting, harassment/bullying, inciting a student disturbance, sexual offenses, threats, and trespassing. The previous list of offenses are not all of the offenses and there is an infraction in which administrative discretion is allowed. When this type of offense occurs an administrator can code it as another SIR offense. These infractions are some of the most serious in the school and garner the most severe discipline that is allowed. If a student commits a SIR level infraction the discipline administered cannot be minor and must suit the offense according to ALSDE policy. These disciplinary measures may include: law enforcement being notified, suspension, expulsion, placement in an alternative setting, corporal punishment, or in school suspension.

Students who have an exceptionality and are protected by the ADA and IDEA also have the potential of being placed into an interim educational setting or removal due to safety concerns to self and other students. These measures are contingent on a manifestation and determination hearing by an IEP team ([www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)).

### *Causes of Student Disciplinary Issues*

In the research literature several themes occur which explain why students have disciplinary issues in school. The majority of disciplinary issues in the schools occur during times when there is a transition taking place (Cotton, 1990). These transition moments are times when there is an absence of supervision or supervision of the whole can be extremely difficult. While the research literature did discuss these transition times it was not a main focus. The initial theme which was prevalent in the literature was that of classroom expectations and how they mold student behavior. These expectations are often set at the beginning of the school year but have to be adjusted as the school year progresses in order to address the individual needs of the students in each class (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Some teachers develop their own set of classroom disciplinary procedures while others follow a set of rules set forth by the school administration. These procedures are designed to induce a sense of obligation as well as a sense of social pressure for students to abide by them. There are many ways in which these expectations are expressed but there are differences in the ways in which they are expressed based on the age of the student.

There are exterior issues which cause problems for teachers and students. Teachers are unable to control these exterior issues. However there are interior issues which teachers are able to control to some degree. Therefore, the next theme which emerged from the literature was designated school support. Within the context of school support there are three factors that are

within the control of the school's decision makers. The first factor revolves around the diversity of course offerings within the school day. Students who attend a school where there is a large variety of course offerings have a better chance of finding another niche within the school that is not the normal core offerings (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) which every school offers. These niche offerings include: Ag, Home Economics, Robotics, Drama, etc. Schools which offer these niche courses tend to have less discipline than schools which focus on traditional (Cordiero & Cunningham, 2009). The main drawback to this concept is that teacher units are funded by specific sources and every source except one, locally funded units, are allocated based on the number of students in that school. This often allows larger schools with substantial student populations are able to offer more electives which attract students who may not be involved in other areas at the school.

Often times in the elementary setting a student who has disciplinary issues can have those issues linked to something that is out of their control. The student may not have a loving family, they may live in a house with a lot of siblings and may not be able to get sufficient sleep every night prior to school. In addition that student may live in a household where a warm meal every night is not a guarantee (Labaree, 2012). These factors exert an influence upon elementary students because they have virtually no control over their surroundings. As students' progress through school more responsibility is placed on them to conform and abide by the norms of the school. Since students lack that foundational knowledge at home they push back when asked to conform. Extrinsic motivation is a common factor in motivating students to accomplish this goal. A common finding is that students will work harder and behave when they know they will be rewarded for their efforts. According to Pink (2012), this thought can prove to be counterproductive to achieving intrinsic motivation which drives the students internally to

achieve a goal without any external motivation to do so. Whether extrinsic rewards are used or not, students who are motivated in school are less likely to receive disciplinary infractions (Winkler, Walsh, de Blois, Mare, & Carvajal, 2017).

### *The Influence of PBIS on Student Behaviors*

The literature indicates that discipline in the school setting has many routes. However, finding the key to successfully addressing such a dynamic issue has not been accomplished. The literature is also very clear that implementing a PBIS can make a drastic impact on certain student and teacher outcomes in the school (Hawken, Adolphson, Macleod, & Schumann, 2009). There are two ways in which this finding has become evident. The first evidence is a substantial decrease in office disciplinary referrals. A second evidence is a decrease in out of school suspensions (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niu, Chon, & Miller, 2017). These two aspects of discipline are important to understand because both aspects require the student to be removed from the educational setting. Once a student is removed they miss instruction time which they may or may not be recovered. Longitudinal studies have also concluded that over several years' time schools which have implemented a PBIS exhibit a twenty to sixty percent reduction in the total number of office referrals (Kartub, Taylor-Greene, March, & Horner, 2000)

Even though research shows that America's schools are safer now than they were a decade ago (Mayer, 2010) a constant focus should be placed on this.. Recent studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between students who participate in bullying and poor academic performance (Swearer, 2010). This thought is not one that is foreign to school level administrators as they spend a tremendous amount of resources and time trying to resolve disciplinary issues (Osher, 2010). A deeper investigation into the issue of school safety and discipline reveals that students who do not feel safe at school will ultimately achieve at a lower

rate than students who do (Mayer, 2010). This issue arises almost daily in a micro setting when students who have discipline issues are discussed among the administration. Administrators have a fine line that must be followed in order to make sure that all of their students are educated while, at the same time, looking out for the well-being of the collective whole.

### ***Cognitive Engagement***

The third and final aspect of student engagement that this review of literature will seek to define is that of cognitive engagement. Herjayanto (2018) explains this dimension as a psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote. Of the three dimensions that are being discussed in this study cognitive engagement is the least studied of all three. This is perplexing to some in the research community due to the fact that cognitive engagement is linked to certain processes such as deep processing, self-regulation, investment in learning, and the ability to think critically (Khan, Ahmad, & Malik, 2017). That study also correlated those specific outcomes to a positive impact on certain learning outcomes. Corno & Mandinach (1983) expanded on the thought of self-regulation in their study linking the important role that cognitive engagement plays in the areas of self-regulation and self-directed learning.

One possible explanation as to cognitive engagement being the least researched of the dimensions is that it is a purely internal construct. This thought is especially true when discussed with teachers. Darr (2011) stated in their study that teachers struggled with grasping the concept of cognitive engagement and could really not definitively measure it because it was an internal process. This difficulty in understanding lead to frustration from the teachers and students falling even further behind as a result. Other studies classify this mental process as a cognitive investment that the students place in the given task (Rotgans & Schmit, 2011). This cognitive

investment is evident when student learning is gaged in terms of task mastery. As student who has an increase in cognitive engagement should also show increases in their learning (Solis, 2008). Not only do students who exhibit high cognitive engagement score better when tested they also comprehend material covered (Jimerson & Greif, 2003). This comprehension allows students to build on their previous knowledge giving them a solid foundation for future educational experiences.

### *Student Learning*

Since students attend school to learn, the main purpose of the ESSA is to improve overall student achievement and improve achievement in areas where students are disadvantaged or in high need (ESSA, 2015). Within the ESSA plan there is a substantial shift toward each state taking responsibility in improving student achievement within a set of standardized parameters. These parameters are established as a set of guidelines to assist each state in developing plans to have the same focus. In addition these parameters assist schools in developing plans which approximate each other. This approximation allows federal government to monitor and compare among states and their plans.

The first parameter which is evident in ESSA is the impetus by the federal government for high academic standards to be established for all students. These standards must not only include a focus upon academic areas but on vocational areas as well. The objective behind this first parameter is to ensure that all students are college or career ready upon receiving their high school diploma. The second parameter that each state's ESSA plan must exhibit is a plan for accountability when students fall behind in achievement. Furthermore it will be a requirement for each state to have interventions in place for the bottom five percent of schools as measured by the state's chosen assessment measure. No punitive measure is attached to the ESSA

requirements however interventions must be designed in such a way that will help lower high school dropout rates and reduce achievement gaps. The accountability piece of the ESSA plan allows for states to have ownership of their remediation plans and not be forced to use a standardized approach like previous legislation had required. Next, the ESSA requires that all states choose a standardized testing platform that tests grades three through eight yearly. ESSA also contends that state's should use multiple measures and not only focus on their standardized exam as a means to decide when intervention must take place. ESSA confirms that teaching and learning cannot be overshadowed by the pressures of high stakes testing thus multiple measures for achievement are imperative. Another section of the ESSA provides funding for states to apply to more high quality preschool opportunities. ESSA understands that students who have access to a PreK program regularly achieve at a higher level then students in the same area who do not (ESSA, 2015).

In an effort to track student achievement the Alabama State Department of Education has implemented two standardized measures. The first measure is the recent shift in standardized testing formats. In recent years the standardized test that the ALSDE has used to track student growth was the ACT suite of exams. In the lower grades (3-8) this measure consisted of the ACT Aspire exam. In the upper grades (10-12) the measure used was the ACT and Work Keys testing. This approach was problematic when comparing Alabama students to national data because there was only one other state (South Carolina) which used the same platform and it took a substantial amount of time to receive student data. The new platform for the lower grades (up to the 8th grade) is the Scantron Performance testing series. The Scantron testing suite allows students to test in a more relaxed format and can be easily given multiple times during a school year without interruption in the learning environment. This mean of testing is important

because it allows administrators and teachers to track student growth throughout the year and not just one time at the end of the year. Another aspect of this testing suite is that student data is almost immediately available for review and a corresponding list of potential improvement areas is also attached. By following these measures school personnel have a differentiated plan for each student and if remediation is required it can begin without hesitation. Schools also have the option to enroll in other testing implements to diversify their data collection.

The latest plan that the ALSDE has implemented in an effort to track students in their schools is the A through F report card. This report card gives each school a composite grade based on a standard set of criteria. The first scoring criterion of the report card is the overall academic achievement of that school. This data is derived from multiple sources within the school and makes up 20% of the school's final score. The second criterion considers school growth. This growth compares school scores at the beginning of the year with school scores at the end of the year and comprises 30% of the schools final grade. The third criterion of the report card is graduation rate which comprises 30% of the report card grade. The fourth criterion of the school report card concerns students who benchmark as college and career ready which comprises 10% of the final score. The fifth criterion is the overall chronic absentee rate of students within the school which accounts for 10% of the final grade. This accountability piece gives high schools a total of five areas in which they are assessed. K-8th grade schools only have three measures on which they are graded. The difference between the two is that K-8 schools do not have a way to measure graduation rate or track college and career readiness as those measures cannot be taken at that level ([www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)).

### *Causes of Academic Issues*

The initial theme with regard to student academic concerns is teachers and their impact on classroom grades. Teachers are responsible for delivering high quality instruction for students to reach their fullest potential. Therefore, it is essential to observe any teacher issues which may exert a negative impact on student achievement. The first theme that presents itself in the literature concerns teacher autonomy. The educator who delivers high quality instruction also has a sense of ownership over their teaching domain. Unfortunately this is not the case in all schools and that lack of ownership is having an impact on students and their learning (Collie & Martin, 2017). One cause for this problem is the leadership style by which the administration of the school exerts itself. Many teachers have difficulty forming a sense of autonomy and ownership in their classroom when their educational leader exerts an authoritarian leadership style (Bush, 2011). Loss of autonomy could also be accompanied by a sense of not being supported in the classroom. The lack of teacher autonomy and a sense of support leads to a decrease in student achievement (Collie & Martin, 2017).

The second theme concerns a lack of teacher commitment in the classroom. One main reason for lack of teacher commitment results from extra responsibilities placed upon teachers. In job interviews it is a common practice to ask prospective teachers about their willingness to sponsor an extracurricular activity. As noted previously these extracurricular activities give students a sense of belonging in the school. Also these activities have been found to improve student achievement. Ironically the same clubs, sports, and activities that benefit students have an adverse impact on the teachers who are asked to sponsor them. Studies such as Alam & Ahmad (2017), have found that teachers who have commitment issues in the classroom are often victims of being asked or required to be involved with extra activities outside of the classroom.

This lack of commitment manifests itself in the lack of instruction delivered in the classroom which impacts student achievement. Additionally, a lack of commitment leads to a decrease in academic optimism. Teachers who do not have a positive sense of academic optimism usually carry that attitude in to the classroom with them. According to Heidarzadeh, & Abbasian (2014), this barrier manifests itself in lower classroom scores of students who are in this atmosphere.

Since the researcher is going to use student classroom grades as a method of judging growth it must be taken into consideration that there are factors within the student which inhibit the process of student growth. A deeper look into the literature confirms this thought. The first subtheme that arises in the literature around the student is the student's socioeconomic status (SES). Much research has been conducted on the impact which SES exerts upon on student achievement (Gearin, Fien, & Nelson, 2018). This problem of SES exerts a significant detrimental impact on academic achievement. In fact Bellibas (2016), found that all students in the top 25 % of the SES exhibited scores which were consistently higher than all students who were in the bottom 25% of the SES in the locale of investigation.

The next subtheme that arises in the literature is one that is prevalent throughout the world of educational literature and that is the concept of student GRIT in the classroom. For years this concept had many other names but the same focus, coaches would call it "guts", business owners knew it as "drive", and yet many others simply knew it as the "will" needed to make a goal happen. All of these ideas are still around today but in education it is known as GRIT (Stoffel & Cain, 2018). This idea is prevalent every day in the classroom setting as teachers strive to develop and nurture this skill in their students. Grit exhibits itself specifically in Science and Math classrooms. These subject areas focus on developing cognitive skills which are more fluid than concrete. GRIT is an important concept because it assists the students in

striving toward an academic goal. Students who lack GRIT in the Math classroom will consistently score at a lower rate than those who have GRIT. Students who have a negative attitude and lack GRIT exhibit a decrease in their Science and Math scores when compared to students who had both of those positive aspects (Al-Mutawah & Fateel, 2018).

### *The Influence of PBIS on Student Achievement*

When compiling literature on the classroom grades/achievement of students there were reoccurring themes which pointed to obvious problems which hindered student achievement. These problems can also be differentiated into three issues: (1) issues that revolve around the school, (2) issues that revolve around the teacher, (3) issues that are more student-centered. There is a significant amount of data to support the conclusion that each of these issues bring about a decrease in student achievement (Bush, 2011; Collie & Martin 2017; Bellibas, 2016),. In contrast there is sufficient data which supports the positive impact that PBIS has on student achievement (Bradshaw, Bottiani, Osher, Sugai, 2014; Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011). Students who attended a school which was three or more years post-employment exhibited consistently higher achievement on standardized tests when compared with the pre-employment years of that school (Kim, Mcintoch, Mercer, & Nese, 2018). Additionally, schools which implemented PBIS to a high degree of fidelity demonstrated a significantly higher rate of student achievement than schools which implemented a PBIS but not to fidelity (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niu, Chon, & Miller, 2017).

### **Teacher Engagement**

When reviewing literature on teacher outcomes there is one concept which encompasses every aspect of a teachers job in the school setting. This aspect of teacher engagement encompasses teacher outcomes so thoroughly that honing the concept into a manageable size

required the researcher to combine several dimensions together in this study. Some studies would have one believe that teacher engagement is as simple as teachers having high expectations for their students (Boaler, 2004), or teachers taking responsibility for their students learning (Cotton et al, 2002). Yet others would say that engaged teachers are observably concerned with student learning in their classroom (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986) and are constantly on the lookout for new instructional ideas and best practices to help their students (Marzano, 2003). While the previously mentioned aspects are important and may very well be partial facets of teacher engagement, for the purposes of this study the researcher will seek to outline teacher engagement using the following three dimensions:

- Engagement with the school- this dimension will encompass many physical aspects of the teaching profession. According to Kirkpatrick (2007) engagement in this sense involves the teacher's physical commitment to all things occurring at the school.
- Involvement with the school- this dimension of teacher engagement is the area in which the teacher maintains a deeper commitment to the things of the school. Often referred to as the teachers dedication to the cause and their extra efforts at the school (Schaufeli et al, 2002)
- Level of energy- this dimension of teacher engagement can be defined not only by the energy that the teacher personally exerts but the impact that energy exerts upon the school in which they teach (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

By breaking the concept into these specific areas will allow the researcher to relate the concept without losing many of the important aspects within each dimension. Of course engaged teachers are concerned about the quality of instruction in which they deliver (McLaughlin, Pfeifer, & Stanford Policy Institute, 1986) but that thought alone does not fully explain what an

engaged teacher is. An engaged teacher is one who plans with a purpose, facilitates classroom involvement, is committed to their job, has passion, is enthusiastic, maintains a focused effort to educate the child as a whole, and will invest the energy needed to accomplish that goal (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

### ***Engagement with the school***

The initial dimension of teacher engagement that will be delineated in this literature review will be that of actual engagement with the school. Teaching is a job in which there is a tremendous amount of commitment on the part of the teacher in order for the school to function properly. Teachers are asked to have an enhanced content knowledge in the area in which they teach, have ownership in their classroom, and have flexibility while at the same time working within a rigid schedule that is often set by someone other than them (Salanova, 2005). While some teachers struggle in this high stress environment engaged teachers flourish in their work environment and are not only engaged with their students but with their colleagues as well (Choochom, 2016). Engaged teachers are also more autonomously motivated which then correlates into students in their classrooms who have the same mindset (Roth et al 2007). These type teachers want to be in the classroom with their students and at school with their coworkers collaborating in order to improve their praxis (Maymon & Kaplan, 2007).

Berman and McLaughlin (1980) described this aspect of teacher engagement as the teacher themselves being on a mission to be engaged within every aspect of the school. This mission mindset has also said to lead to a deeper caring for their job than what is minimally required by the system in which they work (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986). Since the teachers were so committed to the school in the Rutter and Jacobson study teachers were also liberated enough to admit when they struggled with a concept and ask for help. This then allowed teachers to

build a deeper social bond with their colleagues. This type of social bond was also expressed by Pianta, Hamre, & Allen (2012) as a foundational characteristic of a teacher who was said to be engaged with their school.

### *Causes of Teacher Absenteeism*

The first theme with respect to teacher attendance is the impact that the students have on this issue. Within this theme the first subtheme is the attendance of the students. The ALSDE released a report in September of 2017 outlining that in the state of Alabama chronic absenteeism of students was a major problem. There are many schools in the state who have 20% or more of their students who have missed 15 or more days. If students are not there to learn does this hinder how teachers feel about their personal absenteeism? According to the literature it does. Teachers who teach in a school where there is a high rate of student absenteeism are more likely to become chronically absent (Banerjee, King, Orazem, & Paterno, 2012).

The next theme in the literature on teacher absenteeism revolves around professional or school based issues that inhibit teacher attendance. The following issues, if not addressed, can become counterproductive to teacher attendance. The first theme that reoccurred in the literature was the building leadership and its impact on the teachers. Often there is a need for authoritative leadership when there are issues taking place that cannot be remedied with a more diplomatic approach. While these times do exist this type of leadership cannot be the norm or it will prove to be a hindering factor in teacher attendance (Shapira-Lishchinsky, & Raftar-Ozery, 2018). Leaders who use the authoritative approach sparingly are able to build a relationship of trust with their teachers and thus teacher attendance is better in schools where transactional leadership is evident.

The final subtheme under professional aspects is one that aligns the previous two and that is the various aspects of the teacher mindset while they are in the classroom. Hoy and his associates have studied the impact which these teacher aspects have on the performance of the teacher. A byproduct of these concepts is the effect that they individually have on teacher attendance. When low teacher efficacy, low academic trust, and low academic emphasis are in place in the same setting there will be a substantial impact on teacher drive which correlates with a decrease in teacher attendance. This finding further supports the important role that academic optimism (combining all three concepts) plays in the school setting ([www.waynehoy.com](http://www.waynehoy.com)).

Nurturing the well-being of the educators in their school is one of the responsibilities of a school-based leadership team. Teachers are often consumed with their work to the point that they do not take time away to just put things down and relax. This overburdening of responsibility often leads to the next prevalent concept in the literature which is teacher burn out. In recent years this idea has come to the forefront of the educational world and there has been a substantial focus in this area. In 2015 the Washington Post released a report indicating that there had been a 20% improvement in teacher retention in the first five years on the job. This report demonstrated that nurturing teachers had a significant impact on job satisfaction. However, the remaining percentage experienced a high rate of stress and burn out which correlated with an increase in chronic absenteeism (Khan, Nawaz, Qureshi, & Khan, 2016).

#### *PBIS Influence on Teachers' Engagement with School*

Teacher attendance in a school is calculated by the number of days that a teacher is present in comparison to the number of days they are required to be in the classroom. There are multiple reasons why a teacher may not be off and days taken can be classified as sick, personal,

or professional leave. The type of days taken and the way they are taken varies by the system that the teacher works in and their board policies.

In the classroom the teacher is the necessary link to the curriculum. Teachers are given their foundational knowledge in a teacher education program. This foundational knowledge credentials them to be experts in the field in which they teach. While they are enrolled in a teacher educational program they are also taught the pedagogical skills needed to meet the needs of every style of learner. On the other hand, substitute teachers are given a one day course each year on how to be professional and control students in the event a teacher is absent. There are differences between these two types of trainings and the certified teacher should be better equipped to deliver instruction. However Matos (2016) found that one in four teachers missed more than ten school days in a school year. Thus, the researcher acknowledges the importance of teacher attendance and the impact that it has on multiple facets of the school day.

In the literature there are clear themes which point to various factors that increase teacher absenteeism. Where these factors exist in combination the potential for teacher absenteeism increases substantially. However, there is scarce literature which reviews the impact implementing a PBIS has on teacher absenteeism. One reference was found in Baker & Ryan (2014). However, this reference was a quote and not a statistically supported finding. Baker and Ryan (2014) noted that schools which implement PBIS exhibit an increase in staff attendance as well as a rejuvenation toward job performance. The lack of literature in this area demonstrates a need for an exploratory study to investigate the impact which a PBIS exerts upon teacher attendance.

### ***Teacher Involvement in school***

The second dimension of teacher engagement which will be discussed in this review of literature is that of teacher involvement with the school. Teacher involvement with the school is another broad concept that can be an umbrella that covers many things that a teacher does in their everyday work. According to Schaufeli (2002) this concept is often referred to as the teacher's dedication to the cause and their extra efforts at the school. These extra efforts also involve a demand for energy to be devoted to establishing deeper relationships that is often not present in other fields of work (Pianta et al, 2012). Since the teacher is in contact with students often more than they are in contact with their own families these energies take the form of relationships that are deeper and more meaningful with the students in which they are tasked with leading (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Developing these deeper relationships was also found to be a predictor of improvement in student achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). These deeper relationships also help teachers overcome issues with which they have no control and are often subject to. Such demands could be professional (work stress, state standards, micromanaging, etc.) or personal (family stress, bills, health, etc.) but research has shown that when teachers have a bond with their faculty team and their students these demands do not become as problematic in their classroom as they would be had there not been relationships in place (Sokolov, 2017).

Another common aspect of this dimension relates to the teachers motivation. There are as many different motivators for teachers to come to work as there are teachers who teach school and all are equally important to the people they motivate. Some of these motivators include: family, money, students, a sense of calling, or a sense of being able to make a difference in the lives of their students. Whatever the motivations are for each teacher, they all play a role in how

involved the teacher is with the school (Lieberman & Miller, 1981). These motivations that lead to involvement also require teachers to invest emotionally into their everyday jobs (Choochom, 2016). This emotional investment often manifests itself into the belief that their efforts are impactful and make a difference in the lives of their students (Rosenholtz, 2016). Seeing this difference then leads to teachers who are motivated to come to work and leads to an impact on teacher/job satisfaction. Teachers who are motivated, feel like they are making a difference, and have an increased bond with their students have less burnout than teachers who do not experience the same three variables and are more involved with the school in which they teach (DiBianca, 2000).

### *Causes of Teacher Apathy*

The first theme pertaining to teacher apathy consists of the factors that exist in the work climate. Apathy can have a direct impact on the learning environment in the school. The initial subtheme under climate focuses on the mental health of the teachers within the school. Teachers are no different than students when it concerns the need to be recognized and applauded for their achievements. Positive environments encourage teachers. Teachers who work in non-positive environments have a sense of isolation and often feel like their efforts are going unnoticed (Richey & Petretti, 2002). This environment is extremely counterproductive and has been demonstrated to produce teacher apathy.

The final theme of work climate is teacher stress. There are numerous reasons for teachers to feel a sense of stress in the work environment. Stress is a very real issue for everyone and the difference from person to person is how they process that stress. Some people lash out, others exercise as a means to relieve tension, and others shut down while on the job. This shutting down is referred to as apathy and stress is one of its major causes (Ryan, Embse,

Pendergast, Saeki, Segool, & Schwing, 2017). In addition to workplace stress it is important to note that external factors can also cause the same type of stress that leads to teachers becoming increasingly apathetic.

In any school work environment there needs to be a structure of accountability. The building administration is responsible for implementing this structure of accountability. This arrangement can also engender teacher apathy. Thus, the administration of the school is the next theme which arose from the literature. A trusting relationship between teachers and administrators is important for the school to achieve its goals. In this type of trusting environment teachers will comply with the overall mission of the school. The one caveat to this finding was when administrators added too much work on the teachers. When this takes place teachers become disengaged in their job thus causing them to become apathetic. When overburdened with additional responsibilities educators experience psychological stress at work which creates a strain on their social and emotional relationships outside of school (Alvarado & Bretones, 2018). This issue becomes amplified due to the fact that the teacher cannot escape stress at work or at home.

The final theme is the role that teacher-student relationships play in teacher apathy. Teachers should strive to create a positive teacher-student relationship. This relationship will allow the teacher to better communicate with the student. The student will in turn realize that the teacher will do what's best for them at all times. When a teacher-student relationship does not foster trust and understanding the risk for teacher apathy increases substantially (Gasser, Grutter, Buholzer, & Wettstein, 2018).

### *PBIS Influence on Teacher Involvement in School*

Another problematic aspect of the school setting revealed from the literature is the concept of teacher apathy. Apathy is an ever present characteristic that appears not only in educational settings but in other aspects of life. According to Merriam-Webster apathy can be defined as the lack of interest or concern, more specifically for a certain aspect of one's life. Many educators often seek to find ways to address this issue in their students but do not have the same zeal to solve the problem when it appears in their life. Teachers who do not have a genuine concern for their work will ultimately be less effective in the classroom and students will be the ones directly affected. Therefore it is important to investigate the reasons which contribute to teacher apathy.

The literature is very clear that there are several root causes for teachers to become apathetic toward their job. The literature is equally as clear when it comes to the impact that PBIS has on improving teacher apathy. According to Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague (2001), teachers who worked in a school that has implemented a PBIS showed significantly less teacher apathy than teachers in schools who did not implement in the same time frame. These findings are important due to the fact that the original reason for employment revolved around student outcomes and not the impact that employment may have on teachers. Teachers in said schools also exhibited an increase in confidence in the handling of discipline and stated that they felt less of a sense of burnout (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). The aforementioned are often key influencers when it comes to teachers becoming apathetic about their jobs. There exists a clear relationship between the employment of PBIS and an improvement in teacher apathy.

### *Level of Energy*

The final dimension of teacher engagement which the researcher will be delineating is that of the teacher's level of energy and how it influences teacher engagement. This dimension of teacher engagement can be defined not only by the energy that the teacher personally exerts but the impact that energy exerts upon the school in which they teach (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). In the professional world this aspect often refers to the amount of effort put into completing the task at hand or meeting the next deadline. This type of engagement is called work engagement but does not necessarily correlate to the school setting. The reason for this is due to the fact that work engagement does not capture the aspect of social engagement which is pivotal in the school setting (Watt & Richardson, 2007). In the school setting the end result that is being sought might not necessarily be the same for each student and the amount of self-efficacy a teacher has can directly impact that student's success reaching that result (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Some students will graduate from high school and attend a major university while others may graduate and attend a junior college to learn a trade. While the previously mentioned students have very different end results they still require the same amount of energy and effort from their instructors in order to achieve their goal (Davis, 2003). Since every student comes into the classroom at a different place than their classmates there is a certain amount of energy that a teacher must exert in order for that teacher to be ready to meet each individual. This concept is often referred to as teacher readiness and plays a substantial role in the amount of energy a teacher must exert to be successful (Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012).

Often times the amount of energy that teachers place into their job has a direct impact on the school in which they work (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). This impact not only makes a difference in the classroom but in the overall climate of the school (Wang, 2009). Teachers who

devote energy to forming meaningful relationships with all stakeholders not only have a more inviting classroom but their students also consistently score better when measured on standardized assessments (Jeenings & Greenberg, 2007). This energy that is evident in the classroom more times than not is a direct reflection of the enthusiasm which the teacher brings to their job (Rutter & Jacobson 1986).

### *Factors Influencing Teacher Energy*

The initial theme observed in the literature concerns the important role of collaboration. Collaboration allows a teacher to have interaction with another adult during a school day that is mostly taken up by interaction with children which facilitates an increase in teachers' energy level. This type of collaboration may take many forms but often appears in the following: shared planning for teachers of like subject areas or grade levels, duty free times when teachers are allowed to mingle without having a responsibility, and faculty meetings which occur before or after school where ideas can be shared. Collaboration allows teachers to grow both personally and professionally while being at the school. When collaboration takes place teachers grow in confidence thus acquiring more foundational knowledge to help students reach their end goal. When teachers collaborate they have a more positive work environment and perceive they have the ability to teach all students (Goddard, & Kim, 2018). When these opportunities are not available teachers will be forced to find time to collaborate outside of school. Not all teachers will chose to collaborate on their own time. Thus some teachers will not grow in their professional praxis.

Just like educators would like to give their students a solid foundational knowledge before they leave their school, educators themselves also have a foundational knowledge of their craft. This foundational knowledge will often be what they reference to when encountering

difficult situations. This type of knowledge will be embedded in them as long as they are in the educational field. While some foundations are solid, others are not and can actually hinder the efficacy of the educator. The first aspect that exhibited a direct impact on an educator's sense of energy was the amount of time that educator spent in a pre-teaching residency setting. This placement is often referred to as "student teaching." Teacher education programs in the state of Alabama offer a one semester student teaching residency for educators to gain certification. Educators with this type residency for their foundation show a lower rate of self-efficacy than those educators who have a one year residency (Colson, Sparks, Berridge, Frimming, & Willis, 2017). This extra time allows the pre-service teacher to gain more experiences and see different scenarios which are not afforded to the teacher who is in the clinical setting for one semester thus enhancing their zeal for the teaching profession.

The final theme which has an impact on teacher energy relates to personal aspects which the teacher has both inside and outside of school. The theme that arises is the satisfaction the teacher has with their life as a whole. It is important to note that the school environment is only one part of a person's life. Studies have discovered that teachers who have a positive outlook on life also have a higher drive than teachers who do not (Cevik, 2017). One such study looked at two very specific influences upon self-efficacy. Those influences were satisfaction with life and self-esteem. In that study 358 teachers were surveyed of which 31% of all teachers stated a less than favorable outlook on life satisfaction and 35% had a less than favorable outlook on their self-esteem. When those two constructs were combined 95% of those subgroups showed a decrease in self-efficacy (Cevik, 2017). This finding indicates there is a statistically significant correlation between low life satisfaction, low self-esteem, and teacher drive.

### *The Influence of PBIS on Teacher Energy*

The concept of teacher energy focuses on the teacher's belief in their ability or perceived ability to deliver instruction and their drive to do so. Teacher drive is an important concept in the practice of delivering instruction to students. However, the influence of PBIS upon teacher energy is a subject which current literature does not address in significant detail. There are a few studies that address the improvement in teacher confidence in relation to the employment PBIS. One study has demonstrated that teachers feel a stronger sense of understanding and confidence in school where the employment of PBIS has taken place (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niu, Chon, & Miller, 2017). Improved confidence in the structure of the school leads to improved confidence in the classroom setting. Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialango, & Leaf (2008), discovered that over a three year period schools which implemented PBIS showed a substantial increase in teacher confidence. On the other hand schools who had not implemented PBIS in the same three year period did not exhibit an increase in teacher confidence. This evidence points to the positive impact which PBIS has on teacher confidence within the school. When a teacher gains confidence they are more empowered to work hard and are more focused in the classroom (Dupaul & Ervin, 1996). This increased vigor in the class has even shown to help teachers reach their more challenging students in the class (Edyburn, 2013). However, there is need for further exploration concerning the ways in which PBIS influences teacher energy.

The concept of teacher engagement is one that has been broadly defined in many different contexts but for the purpose of this research endeavor the researcher chose to break it down into three specific areas. The first area discussed in the literature review was a teacher's engagement with the school. This heading described aspects of the teacher that were inherently physical in nature. The next aspect of teacher engagement discussed was that of involvement

with the school. In this area a deeper commitment to things beyond just physically being there was discussed. The final aspect of teacher engagement discussed was the energy with which the teacher exerts and how that energy impacts the school. These areas combined outline very important aspects of a teacher's praxis which impact not only the teachers' engagement but the school as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review has uncovered a plethora of reasons why teachers and students have problems at school. The PBIS has been established as a mechanism for addressing many of these problems. Present research has demonstrated that the employment of PBIS exerts a positive influence upon student outcomes. Present research has, to a lesser degree, demonstrated that PBIS exerts a positive influence upon teacher outcomes. Few studies have addressed the questions of how PBIS exerts a positive influence on these outcomes and why PBIS exerts positive influence on these outcomes. This exploratory qualitative study will address these two questions.

There is much research to support the effectiveness of the employment of a PBIS. There have been studies which have shown that employment decreases the amount of disciplinary infractions within the school (Crone, Hawkin, & Horner, 2015). But how does it do this? Other studies have discovered that an effective PBIS supports the staff of the school and improves its well-being (Baker & Ryan 2014). But how does it do this? This study will investigate the specific reasons for the successful employment of a PBIS. This study will fill two gaps in the current literature. This research endeavor will seek to identify the ways in which PBIS influences student outcomes as expressed through student engagement. This research will seek

to identify the ways in which PBIS influence teacher outcomes with respect to teacher engagement.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to better understand the influence that the employment of a PBIS has on student and teacher outcomes as discussed in the previous chapters. The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

#### **Research Questions**

- 1) How did the employment of PBIS influence student outcomes?
- 2) How did the employment of PBIS influence teacher outcomes?

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is a methodology which is distinguished by four distinct characteristics. First, qualitative research takes place in a natural environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The natural environment in which this research will take place is comprised of ten schools located in the state of Alabama. Second, qualitative research focuses upon the participants meanings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This study will focus upon the understandings which are formulated by ten administrators and ten teachers regarding the influence which the employment of PBIS had on their schools. Third, qualitative research employs an emergent research design ( Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Once data collection and data analysis commence there may be a need to add, delete, or alter certain research questions as well as certain interview questions. Fourth, qualitative research requires reflexivity from the researcher (Charmaz 2014). Reflexivity was addressed by three questions prior to entering the

field: Why am I interested in this topic? How am I positioned in this research? What preconceived notions do I bring to the topic of inquiry? (Webb, 2016) The answers to these questions will be introduced in a subsequent section of this chapter entitled “positionality statement.”

There are three specific occasions which call for a qualitative study. The first occasion is when a problem or an issue needs to be explained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The influence of PBIS upon school disciplinary environments is an issue which has not been explored in any great detail in peer reviewed literature. The second occasion which calls for a qualitative study is when a process needs to be explained (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). There are no studies which the researcher has been able to discover which have attempted to explain the influences which PBIS exerts upon student and teacher outcomes in a school. A third occasion which calls for a qualitative study exists when a number of quantitative studies need to be followed by a study which addresses the reasons which explain the quantitative findings (Patton, 2014). The literature review has demonstrated that PBIS has significant quantitative impacts upon student and teacher outcomes in the school. However there are few studies which have addressed the “why,” “how,” and “what type” questions which always accompany qualitative studies. This study will fill that gap by seeking a better understanding of why PBIS influences student and teacher outcomes, and what types of influences PBIS exerts upon student and teacher outcomes.

This study employed a method which has been widely used but is relatively unacknowledged (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The method has been called basic qualitative research (Merriam, 2016). This method has also been designated as an interpretive qualitative method (Merriam, 2016). A third designation of this method is generic qualitative research (Thorne & McDonald, 1997). A fourth view characterizes this method as pragmatic qualitative

research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). For the purposes of clarity and consistency we will add one more label to this list. In this document the method will be described as practical qualitative research.

Practical qualitative research is comprised of three clearly designed components: understanding, research, and application. Practical qualitative research focuses on understanding how participants experience a phenomenon (Merriam, 2016). This study will focus its attention upon how administrators and faculty members in the K-12 setting experience the phenomenon of a positive behavioral intervention system. The specific focus of this study will engage the participants in their experience of the influence which particular positive behavioral intervention systems exert upon student and teacher outcomes.

Practical qualitative research is interested in how participants interpret their experiences (Neergaard, Olesen, & Anderson, 2009). This research will incorporate a descriptive account of the participant's interpretive analysis of the influence which a positive behavioral intervention system exerted upon student and faculty behavior in their particular situations.

Practical qualitative research conducts its energy towards practical applications of research findings (Sandelowski, 2000). Practical qualitative research focuses its attention upon developing models of explanations and provisional solutions to problems (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Practical qualitative research investigates issues which are localized to well-defined areas (Wolcott, 1992). This study will record the descriptions which the administrators and faculty members submit concerning the influences which a specific positive behavioral intervention system exerts upon the institutions involved in this study. This study will gather and characterize the positive influences which positive behavioral intervention systems exerted upon the institutions involved in the study. This information will serve as a best practices document for

other institutions when complete. This study will also engage the particular problems encountered by schools participating in the study. The study will demonstrate how positive behavioral intervention systems addressed and remedied those problems.

This research study was directed by the philosophical assumptions of post-positivism. Ontologically post positivism assumes that one set reality exists (Creswell, 2018). The reality cannot be grasped in its entirety but can be approximated (Yin, 2018). Epistemologically, post positivism assumes that reality can be approximated by a series of logically related steps implemented with a specific methodological degree of rigor which his replicated with a measure of consistency (Phillips & Borbules, 2000). Axiologically, post positivism assumes that research is not value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Post positivism research strives to keep the researcher separated from the research findings. Post positivist research seeks to control researcher bias by means of a variety of techniques known as validity checks. In qualitative research, researcher influence is controlled by member checking, data audit, negative case analysis, peer review, expert analysis, and positionality statement.

### **Sampling**

Qualitative research employs a sampling technique known as purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling solicits participants who have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the topic being researched (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling also seeks to incorporate individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being investigated (Glesne, 2015). Maximum variation sampling is a specific category of purposeful sampling which seeks to obtain a broad array of experiences related to the topic of inquiry (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014).

This research employed a purposeful sampling strategy to soliciting participants for this study. As noted above, five schools were selected in an effort to get a focused look at a specific setting. The system which the study was conducted in houses seven high schools ranging from the smallest with a population of 223 students to the largest with a population of 440 students. Two schools were selected that feed into class 4A school (298-377 students), two schools were selected that feed into a class 3A school (225-297 students), and one school was selected that feeds into a 5A school (378-604 students). The goal of the researcher was to have a representation within the selected schools that mirrors that of the area in which the study is being conducted. Each of the participating schools were selected based on post-employment improvements in the areas of attendance and ALDSE report card scores. Based on the literature review attendance is a vital part of success in the school setting. The ALSDE report card reflects not only attendance but student learning and student growth throughout the school year. This study sought to seek to outline the impact which the employment of a PBIS had on each of those outcomes.

Maximum variation sampling was applied to the participants within the study. The participants selected for the study represent administrators and teachers at the schools being studied. The category of the participants will be developed as follows: gender included four male administrators and one female administrator, four male teachers and six female teachers. Teachers in the study included seven White teachers, two African American teachers, and one other ethnicity teacher. Experience level included: two administrators with one to five years' experience, one administrator with six to ten years' experience, and two administrators with ten or more years' experience in the field. Teacher participants included two teachers with one to five years' experience, six teachers with six to ten years' experience, and two teachers with ten

or more years of experience. The only criterion for participation in the study was that the participant was employed by a school at the time of the PBIS employment. The participants were accessed through a gate keeper, in this case that person was the system superintendent, to connect with the leadership at each middle school in the system. Upon making contact with the school administration the researcher then constructed an email to the staff of each school seeking volunteers to participate in the study.

In order to get a better picture of how effective the employment of a PBIS is and how it is able to be effective the researcher must strive to collect data that mirrors the geographic area he is studying (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the state of Alabama the most common schools are placed into one of three categories; Elementary Schools (grades PK-5), Middle Schools (grades 6-8), and High Schools (grades 9-12). The first category is the elementary school. Typically an elementary school is comprised of kindergarten through fifth grade students. There are variations of this system that include pre-K and some go to the sixth grade but the most common is K-5. The second category is middle school which typically consists of students in grades six through eight. The third category is the high school which usually consists of students who are in the ninth through the twelfth grade. For the purpose of this study the researcher will select five schools in the middle school setting in which to conduct research. By focusing on one school group the researcher was able to achieve more intimate understanding of the phenomenon at that level.

It is also important that the researcher sought to match this study with the demographics of the schools in the study. In order to do this the researcher must identify the main areas in which schools exist in the state. According to the United States Census there are three types of areas in which people live. The first area is known as urban. In an urban area the territory is

very densely developed and has both residents and industry. These urban areas consist of metropolitans where the population exceeds 50,000 people. The second area are known as urban clusters. These cities range from a population of 2,500 to a population less than 50,000. The third area is identified as rural which is sparsely populated and is not densely developed. These areas often contain industry but farming is normally the primary industries in these locations. The focus area of this study will be a school system in rural North Alabama in which all of the systems middle schools have implemented a form of PBIS.

### **Participating Schools and Teachers**

Students and teachers in the system being studied were a mirror of the area which they are located. In this county there are currently an estimated 82,755 residents whose children attend either the county school system, the city school system, or one of four private school options in the area. This population consists of 92.1 % Caucasian, 4.3 % Hispanic, 1.3 % African American, and four other ethnicities comprising of less than 1% each. The median household income is \$40,997 and the poverty rate in the area is 13.8%. The school system being studied is the county school system and is comprised of more than 9,600 students and 686 teachers. Those students and teachers attend one of the 27 campuses in this area of suburban Alabama. Since the school system covers such a vast area there are a large number of socio economic populations represented and the average school has a free and reduced lunch rate of 58.3%.

All five schools selected for this study shown improvement in the areas of chronic absenteeism, student growth, and student achievement student achievement, student growth since the employment of their PBIS. More specifically this growth placed each school above the state average for chronic absenteeism which was recorded as 18.28% statewide ([www.alsde.org](http://www.alsde.org)).

These schools also reflected an achievement growth score and an academic achievement score that was above the state averages of 91.58 % and 66.38 % respectively ([www.alsde.org](http://www.alsde.org)). These improvements lead to an increase in the ALSDE report card grade for each school. The first school in this study is Buck Middle School. BMS exhibited a 5% growth in student achievement and a 4% improvement in chronic absenteeism over pre-employment data. These improvements lead to a report card grade of 86 for a school whose previous grade was an 81. The next school in this study is Hunt Middle School. HMS exhibited a 2% increase in achievement and a chronic absenteeism rate of only 7.14% which was a decrease of 3% over the previous year. Hunt had a report card grade of 85 which was an increase on the previous years' score of 84. The third school in this study is Hawk Middle School. Hawk Middle showed an increase of 5% in the area of student achievement and a decrease of 8% in chronic absenteeism. Hawk also had an 8 point increase in overall report card score from the previous year scoring an 87. The fourth school represented in this study is Lake Middle School. LMS had a 5% increase in student achievement and a 3% improvement in chronic absenteeism over pre-employment numbers leading to a report card score of 88. The score of 88 was also a 7 point increase over the previous year. The fifth and final school in the study is Day Middle School. DMS improved its student achievement score by 2% and decreased it's chronic absenteeism by 5% after implementing their PBIS. These improvements lead to an ALSDE report card score of 86 which was a 4 point improvement over the previous year. These schools all shown an increase in student achievement and attendance after the employment of their PBIS while also scoring higher than the state report card average of 80.

*Table 1 Participating Schools*

Pseudo Name	School Location	Student Achievement	Chronic Absenteeism	State Report Card Growth	Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage
Hunt Middle	Suburban	Increased 2%	Decreased 3%	1 point	57%
Hawk Middle	Rural	Increased 5%	Decreased 8%	8 points	76%
Buck Middle	Rural	Increased 5%	Decreased 4%	5 points	72%
Lake Middle	Suburban	Increased 5%	Decreased 3%	7 points	44%
Day Middle	Suburban	Increased 2%	Decreased 5%	4 points	62%

The following are the teachers who will participate in the study and their pseudo-names who were chosen based upon the previously mentioned selection criteria above. Teacher number one was a white female and has been teaching in the public school setting for fourteen years and has been at Hunt Middle School all of those years. She was known in this study as Lilly Brown. Teacher number two in this study was a white female who also employed at Hunt Middle School and has spent her entire nine year career employed at that school. For the purposes of this study teacher number two was known as Melba Hastings. The administrator at Hunt Middle School was the first administrator interviewed and he has been in education for fourteen years with the last four of those as an administrator. His pseudo name will be Jo Smith.

The second set of school employees work at Lake Middle and the first teacher interviewed was a white male teacher who is in his tenth year teaching at his third school. During this study he was known as Aaron Smith. Teacher number two from Lake Middle was an African American lady who has been teaching for sixteen years and is currently at her fourth

school. She will be known in this study as Debbie Jackson. The administrative representative for Lake Middle has been in education for thirty one years and the last ten of those have been as an administrator. During this study he went by the name Si Jones.

The third set of interviewees which was represented in this study work at Buck Middle. Teacher number one at this school was a white female, has been teaching for eighteen years and was currently the library/media specialist at the school. This teacher went by the name Anna Claire. The second representative from Buck Middle was a white female and was currently in her ninth year teaching at this location. This instructor went by the pseudo name Laura Thompson. Rounding out the contingent from BMS was their principal who has been at their school for six years. Mr. Alan Clean was completing his twentieth year in education with the last eleven being in administration.

The next set of participants in this study teach and lead at Day Middle School. Teacher interview number one was an African American gentleman who was in his third year teaching and all three years have been at Day Middle. For the duration of this study he was known as Blake Rookie. The second teacher representing Day Middle was a Hispanic female and was currently in her third year teaching and all three of those years have been at her alma mater. This young lady will go by the name Rachel Ragsdale. Rounding out the interviewees at Day Middle was their administrator. He was in his third year as an administrator at the school and his twelfth overall in education. For the purposes of this study he will be using the name Jake Slay.

The final set of interviews were conducted with staff members at Hawk Middle School. The first representative from Hawk Middle was a white male special education teacher that was in his ninth year teaching. This gentleman was currently in his fourth school and will go by the name Josh Hendrix. Next to be interviewed was a white gentleman who was in his eighth year

teaching and all have been at Hawk. During the duration of this study he was known as Jonny Angus. The last representative to be interviewed was the principal at Hawk Middle Mr. Caleb Ragland. Mr. Ragland was currently in his twenty third year in education with the last ten being in administration.

*Table 2 Interview Participants*

Pseudo Name	School Name	Race	Years' Experience	Years Administrative Experience
Lilly Brown	Hunt Middle	White	14	
Melba Hastings	Hunt Middle	White	9	
Jo Smith	Hunt Middle	White	14	4
Aaron Smith	Lake Middle	White	10	
Debbie Jackson	Lake Middle	Black	16	
Si Jones	Lake Middle	White	31	10
Anna Claire	Buck Middle	White	18	
Laura Thompson	Buck Middle	White	9	
Alan Clean	Buck Middle	White	20	10
Blake Rookie	Day Middle	Black	3	
Rachel Ragsdale	Day Middle	Hispanic	3	
Jake Slay	Day Middle	White	12	3
Josh Hendrix	Hawk Middle	White	9	
Jonny Angus	Hawk Middle	White	8	
Caleb Ragland	Hawk Middle	White	23	10

## **Data Collection**

Data collected in this study involved interviews. Qualitative interviews are classified at three levels (Seidman, 2013). The first level is closed interviews. Closed interviews are very much like surveys in that questions are yes/no or a participant is asked to list or rank items (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Open-ended questions ask participants to speak about a subject without placing boundaries around the subject (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990). Semi-structured interviews give the interviewee a topic and a direction which place loose parameters around the nature of the interview process (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

This study utilized semi-structured interviews in order to extract thick, rich descriptions from the participants in the study (See Appendices A & B). Interview questions were derived from the research questions in such a fashion that would collect the type of data needed to answer the research questions (Webb, 2016). There is a threefold design of the interview protocol. An initial question will ask the participant to recount their experiences with respect to the research question. The second interview question will be more focused by asking the participant to comment about a specific aspect of the research question. The third interview question will ask the participant to comment in greater detail about any specific items which they had mentioned in the previous lines of questioning.

This study adhered to the following time parameters. Data collection began in March of 2019 and end in May of 2019. Data analysis began in May of 2019 and end in June of 2019. Final document write up will begin in June of 2019 and end in December of 2019. The defense of this dissertation was set for the end of the academic year of 2019-2020.

## **Data Analysis**

This study employed a six stage approach to data analysis. Stage one involved transcribing each of the interviews in to a word file. Stage two involved reading the transcript, or document, in its entirety to get a feel for the data (Merriam, 1998). Stage three involved coding the data by means of holistic coding (Dey, 2016). Holistic coding is a micro level coding approach (Saldana, 2016). The design of holistic coding is to capture the essence of the participants meaning within the interviews. The purpose of holistic coding is to obtain a general idea of how the participants in the study will address the research questions. Stage four incorporated in vivo coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In vivo coding seeks to capture the very words of the participants. It is designed to explain the holistic coding by giving a graphic depiction of the holistic meaning. The process of in vivo coding is to capture the expressions of the participants in the study and display those expressions by means of thick, rich descriptions. In vivo codes enable the reader of the research to obtain a vicarious experience of what the participants encountered in the employment of a PBIS. The fifth stage of data analysis involved versus coding (Walcott, 2003). Versus coding is a more focused style of coding which is often used in multi case studies. Versus coding is used when participants or groups of participants have contrasting viewpoints or experiences with regard to the phenomenon (Hager, Maier, O'Hara, Ott, & Saldana, 2000). In this study versus coding was applied to contrast the experiences of PBIS among participants from primary schools, middle schools, and high schools. The sixth stage of data analysis involved integrative coding (Saldana, 2016). The purpose of integrative coding is to assemble the holistic, in vivo, and versus coding into a manner that will develop themes which will answer the research questions posed in this study. After compiling

the codes the researcher sought to discover commonalities within the interviews that could answer the posed research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study did not involve any participants who would be considered a “protected group.” As such the study proposed in this dissertation should be described as “posing no more than a minimal risk.” Two areas of risk applied to participants in this study. The first risk is anonymity. In order to promote anonymity the researcher masked the identity of the participants by assigning pseudonyms to each participant. A second protection of anonymity involved the use of pseudonyms for their institutions mentioned in the study. The second risk associated with this study was privacy. To protect the privacy of the participants in the study the researcher engaged three measures. The first measure was an agreement not to discuss any participant’s interview comments with any person. A second measure to ensure privacy involved storing all interview data (interview recordings and transcripts) in a locked filing cabinet located in the researcher’s private office. The only person with a key to this filing cabinet will be the researcher. The third measure to ensure the privacy of the participants in this study will be the destruction of all data collected in the study upon the five year anniversary of the publication of the dissertation.

### **Positionality Statement**

In qualitative research reflexivity by the researcher is necessary in order for the study to progress. In this study reflexivity will be accomplished by answering three questions which make up the positionality statement of the researcher. The first question addressed by the researcher is why he is interested in the topic studied. In this case, the topic studied is PBIS. The researcher has had personal experience with PBIS as a building based instructional leader.

At the researcher's school, PBIS has been in place for two full years and the impact on the climate of the school has been measurable in several areas. The overall discipline of the school has been reduced by 84% since the program's employment, the attendance rate has risen by 3% since the employment, and the teacher attendance rate has increased since employment. With the above findings as the starting point the researcher has seen the positive impact of a PBIS and would like to seek out other schools which have implemented similar types of programs to determine if the results are the same in multiple schools.

The second question addressed in reflexivity is how the researcher is positioned in the research endeavor. While conducting this study the researcher is an instructional leader at a school which has implemented PBIS. During the course of the study the researcher was not part of the study. The researcher does not hold any power over the individuals participating in the research. This is an important aspect to note because individuals being studied will not have any fear of repercussions as a result of being interviewed. Since the research took place in schools that have implemented programs similar to that of the researcher there is a shared interest in the topic. Finally, the researcher conducted interviews with colleagues in the same field who have shared experiences with PBIS. This shared experience allowed the researcher to gain relevant and holistic data on the interviewee's experiences with PBIS.

The final question that is essential to reflexivity is what are the preconceived notions that the researcher has about the topic? In this case there are several preconceived notions which the researcher holds due to past experiences with PBIS. The first preconceived notion is that PBIS, when implemented, is successful in all areas. Another preconceived notion that the researcher holds with respect to this topic is that every school should put forth the same emphasis toward the program employment. This could be the most important aspects of the study. Programs that

are implemented with zeal are often more apt to be successful than those which are half-heartedly implemented. In this research there are multiple facets being studied and any difference from school to school could become problematic. The final preconceived notion that the researcher has about PBIS is that students at the implementing school were open to the concept. This belief could affect the outcome of the concept employment. When students see an employment as one that is useful to them the concept generally flourishes. It is the thought of the researcher that the newness, alone, of PBIS will facilitate this acceptance of the program.

## CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

### Findings

This chapter will present the findings of the research. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with fifteen participants who are actively involved in a school which has implemented PBIS. The interviews were transcribed and coded. Themes were developed from the analyzed data. These themes corresponded to the two research questions which were established for this research study. The first research question concerned the influence which PBIS exerted upon student outcomes. The theme which emerged from the data analysis was student engagement. Student engagement functions as an umbrella term which is composed of affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement. The second research question concerned the influence which PBIS exerted upon the teacher outcomes. The theme which emerged from the data analysis was teacher engagement. Teacher engagement will serve as an umbrella term for teacher engagement with the school, teacher involvement with the school, and teacher energy level.

### **Research Question One: How did the employment of PBIS influence student outcomes?**

Three themes emerged from the data in regards to the influence in which PBIS exerts upon student outcomes that all fall under student engagement. The first of these three themes was affective engagement which address the topic of student engagement and is comprised of comradery and competition. Students felt a sense of comradery in belonging to the larger group they were placed in. This comradery lead to improved student learning. Participants in the study also expressed the importance that competition played in the success of the PBIS in improving

student engagement. The second theme is behavioral engagement and is comprised of incentives and accountability. Teachers and administrators alike felt like giving the students an extrinsic incentive to strive for helped to facilitate an improvement in student engagement. Participants in the study also felt like when students knew what the expectations were and they were responsible for following them, that sense of accountability improved student engagement. The third theme is cognitive engagement and is comprised of achievement and involvement. Students who were involved in the PBIS were shown to have an improvement in achievement from the previous years where the PBIS was not in play. Participants expressed that the students being a part of a larger group ensured that they were involved in something other than the general classroom instruction while at school. This involvement was essential in improving student learning.

### **Student Engagement**

The participants were asked to give their definition of student engagement. Very few gave a formal definition of student engagement but most of the participants offered several descriptions of what they considered student engagement to be. For the most part their descriptions could be encapsulated by the word holistic. For these participants student engagement goes beyond the classroom. Student engagement involves having fun in the learning process. Student engagement involves having fun in the process of working toward a common goal. Student engagement involves having fun in contributing to an ideal which is bigger than one's self. Finally, student engagement involves having fun while doing good in the world. The participants were of the opinion that PBIS influenced these goals positively in the following ways: producing comradery and engendering wholesome competition.

## **Affective Engagement**

The first theme of the first research question focused upon affective engagement. The themes which address this question are comradery and competition. Comradery involved the development of close bonds among student members. An example of comradery was the teamwork which was required for each house to function as a cohesive whole. In the process of working together a family atmosphere arose which bonded students together. Competition involves friendly games which were designed to increase student engagement. Kahoot is an example of competition which was utilized in the math and English classrooms.

### ***PBIS Influenced Affective Engagement: Increased Student Comradery***

An initial theme which established itself from the data was “*increased comradery.*” The participants in the study understood an improved comradery among students as one of the important ways in which the employment of PBIS improved student learning in their schools. When asked to explain what they meant by comradery the participants produced a multiplicity of responses. Rather than attempt to define the term most participants found an explanation of the term to be preferable. In addition to an explanation of comradery the participants set forth a number of contributors which increased comradery among the student body in their respective schools.

Josh Hendrix described comradery as “Something along the lines of school spirit.” Jo Smith went in to greater detail by listing a number of examples such as giving students “A sense of belonging, a sense of being at one with others.” Alan Clean described it as “a close knit relationship with others within the house.” A more elaborate explanation of comradery was set forth by Melba Hastings in the following words: “In class if kids answer questions right or kids even in groups get things correct and really pay attention and do a good job then they gain points

for their house. So they have skin in the game and they've got a reason and their motivation is deeper than self. They understand that their efforts are more than reflected on a test score but also points for their team and I think it is incredible. So I think that has increased the motivation alone and nobody wants to be the weak link of the team." So comradery can be understood as an intense commitment to an idea, and a group of individuals who are mutually committed to that idea. In addition that intense commitment produces a very strong personal, social, and emotional bond. In this case the idea is success in life and helping others.

The participants in the study enumerated three specific contributors to the increase in comradery among students in their schools. The first contributor was collaborative work. Jonny Angus summed this sentiment up in the following fashion, "When you are motivated by an idea that is larger than yourself you find ways to work with other people who share the same philosophy, even if they might not be the type of personality that you would naturally get along with. You find yourself willing to make sacrifices for the greater good of the family group.

Competition brings people together. Competition unites people in a common effort to achieve some type of success. Jo Smith described the close link between competition and comradery in the following manner, "So long as you are able to have competition we have seen that it has really pushed the kids out of their comfort zones. They are actually stepping up and saying I am in this house and I want my house to win points and I want my house to win the house cup. So the kids are actually participating and fighting for these points."

Symbols play an important role in increased comradery. The participants listed the following items which belonged to each group. Each group was responsible for producing a crest, a t-shirt, and a chant. The fact that the students within the groups created these artifacts played a pivotal role in increased comradery. These symbols were a reflection of their time,

energy, and creativity. As such these symbols gave ownership to the students, served as a source of pride, and increased a personal, social, and emotional bond which held the members together.

The participants were in agreement that the employment of PBIS was the influence which brought about this increased comradery among the students at their school. Caleb Ragland noted “PBIS builds a buy-in with respect to collaborative learning.” Rachel Ragsdale stated “One of the primary components of PBIS is that healthy completion is good for successful students.” Jo Smith said “PBIS focuses students’ attention upon looking beyond themselves and developing their creativity to serve the desires of an altruistic notion which will serve others and create an environment of success and service.”

### ***PBIS Influenced Affective Engagement: Promoted Student Competition***

Another theme which emerged from the data analysis was “*competition influences students engagement.*” Based upon the responses from the participants in this study PBIS has a built-in component which promotes competition among the school, the groups, and the individual student. Anna Clair made the following comment, “Kids at this age naturally love to compete.” Aaron Smith commented, “The component of competition which is built-in to PBS may be its most engaging facet.” Competition exists in four areas attendance, discipline, athletics, and academics.

At school several participants in the group which had the highest attendance rate received an award. The rewards range from an extra ten minutes at break to a movie and pizza party. One participant noted that “If students are not present they cannot participate in any of the learning activities of the school.” Attendance competition proved to be very effective in engaging students to attend school. Melba Hastings noted that the environment created by the PBIS system enticed students to want to come to school. Si Jones made the following comment

“No one was twisting their arms and making them come to school. They wanted to come to school because they knew that if they were absent they would miss out on a lot of fun and excitement.”

The issue of discipline arose throughout the interviews with the participants in the study. Jonny Angus noted that prior to the employment of PBIS at his school discipline had been primarily punitive. The slogan that kept being repeated was “If you do badly you get punished.” The description of PBIS was like a carrot and a stick. If you are responsible and act how you are supposed to act then you get rewarded. If you do not behave in the manner which you should then the rewards are withheld from you. Jo Smith commented, “Not being able to participate in the rewards was a strong deterrent to disciplinary situations.” Caleb Ragland noted, “Not being allowed to take part in the fun things seemed to curtail behavior issues at our school.”

Josh Hendrix tied the decrease in disciplinary infractions to the theme of competition. This participant noted, specifically moral competition. In particular they stated, “If you look in the decision ed portal you will see that the number of infractions are down dramatically over the past five years. He tied this statistic to the reward system and the PBIS component of moral competition. He told the story of a boy who “Probably spent more time in alternative school than he spent in the regular classroom.” When PBIS was implemented in the school “This boy’s life took a turn in the right direction.” The boy was recognized for doing good on two or three occasions. “Finally, he came to me and said, ‘it is just a whole lot easier to be good than not to be good. So knock on wood, I haven’t been to alternative school once this year.’”

The PBIS system also embedded a number of athletic competitions. The house competition has already been mentioned. The participants in the study mentioned dodge ball, races, basketball, and jump rope as activities that the students enjoyed. Each individual

represents their perspective group in these competitions. At the end of the competitions the group with the most points receives a specific reward mentioned prior to the start of competition. Most of the participants in this study commented favorably with respect to these types of athletic competitions. Young children are filled with energy and participants felt that athletic competition was a healthy way for them to release this energy while learning valuable lessons with respect to sportsmanship and team work.

Academic completion was one of the activities which participants found to be most beneficial for student engagement. Students were required to take two or three standardized exams during the course of a school year. The Scranton exam is the assessment required by the ALSDE for each student in the state to take each year. If students scored at or above their “benchmark” level then they would be allowed to be exempt from the final exam in that subject area. The participants in the study were pleased with this component of their PBIS. One participant observed “Instead of cramming for one high stakes exam and forgetting most of what they learned, this progressive approach increased retention of knowledge and taught the valuable lesson of discipline to students.”

The participants in the study reported that the students play all sorts of classroom academic games. These games included class dojo, Kahoot, vocabulary contests, math challenges, and jeopardy as a way of reviewing previous material covered. The students gained points in each one of these competitions. The total scores for each group were tallied and the results were placed on a monitor in the hallway for all of the school to see.

Another facet of PBIS was described by the participants as “moral competition.” When students were discovered to be engaged in altruistic activities they were awarded points. These activities included being kind to other students, complimenting other students on their

accomplishments, picking up trash, and helping others. The participants in this study were positively inclined to this type of moral competition. They were of the opinion that this type of moral competition would be useful in training children's emotional focus away from themselves and toward a broader audience. Jake Slay summed this sentiment up in the following manner "If we can get students to broaden their concern to society at large it will pay future dividends not only for them but for society as a whole."

When asked the question, "How does competition increase student engagement?" the following responses were typical. Laura Thompson summed the sentiment up nicely with the words, "Competition makes learning fun." Blake Rookie stated, "When engaged in competition you sense the joy in the students' eyes and you can feel the excitement in their voices." Most of the participants acknowledged that competition existed before the arrival of PBIS. However, the competition was at best, sporadic and unfocused and on many occasions focused on outcomes that were detrimental to the students' well-being. "The benefit of PBIS was that competition became focused and directional. PBIS pointed competition in a positive fashion and gave it a moral direction."

### **Behavioral Engagement**

The second theme of the first research question focused upon behavioral engagement. After the data was delineated the sub themes which addressed behavioral engagement were offering incentives and enhancing accountability influenced behavioral engagement. Incentives involve the positive and negative reinforcements which are embedded in PBIS. Field trips are an example of positive incentives and denial of participation on field trips would be an example of negative incentives. Accountability involves teamwork and collaboration. Studious attention to

school attendance is one example of accountability because a student's house does not gain points which lead to rewards when students are absent from school.

### ***PBIS Influenced Behavioral Engagement: Offering Incentives***

The initial theme which emerged from the data analysis was “*incentives influence student engagement.*” Based upon the responses from the participants in this study PBIS creates an environment which encourages students to be actively engaged in their education. Lilly Brown mentioned that the incentives in PBIS had brought “Order, direction, and focus to her school.” She explained, “Prior to the employment of PBIS everything was confusing.” Students were not clear on how they were to be measured, what their responsibilities were, and would they be rewarded for a positive result. Laura Thompson was of the opinion that students did not have “ownership” of their education prior to the employment of the PBIS. Giving their students incentives to strive for lead to students striving to take “ownership” of their learning.

One of the primary means by which by which the employment of PBIS influenced student engagement was by offering incentives. Si Jones noted that “The effectiveness of PBIS was that it did not simply hand out free stuff, students were expected to work for the rewards they received.” In other words, PBIS required and facilitated responsibility from the students. Students felt a responsibility to the other members of their house. In addition, students felt an obligation not to let down the honor of their group.

The incentive mentioned by most of the participants was an event designated as a “house celebration.” That was a day which all of the groups come together to participate in a number of athletic and academic activities. Points are awarded to each student based upon their performance in each of these activities. At the end of the day the points were distributed to each group and the winner would be awarded different prizes from trips to snacks for their efforts. All

of the participants were unanimous in their opinion that these types of rewards were instrumental in giving students “ownership of their education.”

There was one profound result which came from the employment of PBIS. The structuring of incentives and rewards brought about an increased rate of attendance. Each participant remarked anecdotally that they had observed a dramatic reduction in absences after PBIS had been implemented in their schools. Jo Smith produced the following attendance statistics for the first three years after employment. “At our school we have seen an increase in the attendance rate from 94.6% after the first year to 96.3% after year three.” The reasons for these increased rates of attendance were explained in the following ways. “Students feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves.” Students have a clear path of what is expected of them. “Students are invested in the purpose which has been set out before them.” “Students see the reward for their efforts as a goal worth striving to achieve.” All of these incentives combine to make the student “want to be at school.” Incentives lead to increased attendance which leads to student engagement.

### ***PBIS Influenced Behavioral Engagement: Enhancing Student Accountability***

A second theme which emerged from the data analysis was “*accountability influences student engagement.*” Based upon the responses from the participants in this study PBIS creates an environment which engenders accountability. According to a number of participants in this research PBIS made a dramatic change in the area of accountability. Rachel Ragsdale noted that prior to the employment of PBIS students had a “blasé” attitude toward school. “It was just something they did because it was required for them to do.” Josh Hendrix observed that many students just, “came along for the ride.” In other words they did the bare minimum required of them. Debbie Jackson mentioned that there was a sizeable number of “free-loaders.” By this she

intended that when students worked in groups some students allowed others to do the lion's share of the work.

Things changed dramatically after the employment of PBIS. According to several participants the impact of PBIS was of a "seismic magnitude." Many of the participants commented that they noticed a dramatic change in the attitude of a large number of students. As noted previously, the participants attributed this change to the fact that PBIS had the notion of accountability built in to its fabric. PBIS focused students in a coherent direction and inculcated a frame of mind that many participants characterized as "positive, success-oriented, and helpful." The prime movers for this accountability were the mentors.

Mentorship is entrusted to the teachers within the PBIS universe. Alan Clean mentioned that the leadership team at her school attended a Ron Clark workshop where they received training on how to be an effective mentor. The participants in this study described a process of mentoring for accountability which can be pictured with a descending process of influence toward accountability. The top layer is represented by PBIS and its built-in measures of accountability. The second layer is represented by the mentors who communicate the principles of accountability. The third layer is represented by the student body who hold respective members accountable. The fourth level is represented by the individual student who holds themselves accountable.

The participants mentioned the following ways in which mentors imparted the characteristic of accountability to the students in their schools. First, students were taught character education. Learning self-control, respect for others, and consideration of the larger body were three lessons which the mentors sought to develop in the students who were members of their group. For example mentors taught students to develop respect for fellow students by

learning their names, addressing them by their names, and acknowledging their accomplishments. Mentors taught students to develop a sense of respect for their group. Character missteps by one student would be a bad reflection upon the group because it caused the group to lose points which would result in everyone in the house losing opportunities for rewards.

Mentors also connected the dots for students by showing them how their present responsibilities had long term implications for their lives as adults. Mentors demonstrated that education was a life-long endeavor. Jesse James stated that “Mentors taught the students the value of learning for the joy of learning.” The participant added that this type of learning will “reap benefits for many years to come.”

Mentors communicated the long-term benefits of accountability to the students. Rachel Ragsdale was pleased to communicate that the mentors at her school “painted a picture of the future” for her students. This mentor communicated the future benefits of being responsible and being held accountable. This mentor explained to students that “one day they would get married, have children, and need to find a job.” She pointed out to the children that leading an irresponsible life would not prepare them for this future and that the results would be a tragic and disappointing experience.

Finally, the mentors served as implementers of accountability. One metaphor which arose frequently in the data was “skin in the game.” Numerous participants agreed that one of the primary means by which mentors held students accountable was by making them understand that they had a say in what was happening and thus reflecting the fact that they had “skin in the game.” In other words mentors showed students that their future depended upon the decisions they make in the present. Mentors did not allow students to take the easy road while they were

in their group. Mentors required students to work hard and hold up their end of the educational bargain. Several participants referred to this agreement as “an educational contract.” The mentors were there to ensure that child would get an education which would secure a successful future for them. The students’ end of the bargain was to learn to behave responsibly. If the child behaved irresponsibly the mentor imposed accountability upon them by demonstrating that there were consequences for irresponsible behavior.

### **Cognitive Engagement**

The third of the first research question focused upon the concept of cognitive engagement. The themes which addressed this part of the first research question are achievement and involvement. Achievement concerns the improvement of students in academic, moral, and social behavior. One area of achievement was noticeable when students were given rewards for good behavior. As a result students went out of their way to do good things for other people. Involvement encompassed the infusion of pride into the student’s academic life. Students were consistently pointed to the future and the responsibilities which would be required of them as adults. This technique developed a conscientious attitude in the students.

### ***PBIS Influenced Cognitive Engagement: Increased Student Achievement***

The initial theme which the data set forth was “*student achievement.*” Participants understood student achievement along the lines of measureable standards which could be quantified. The majority of the participants in the study acknowledged that there had been a noticeable increase in grades as well as scores in standardized tests. Lilly Brown measured student achievement according to the number of students in her class that had been placed in RTI at her school. RTI is an educational program where a team of faculty members work together to develop plans to help certain students who exhibit struggles in the classroom. She made the

assertion that over the past three years there had been a “dramatic decrease” in the number of students that had been placed in RTI. Melba Hastings mentioned that there had been a noticeable increase in “moral achievement.” She stated that she had observed students taking initiative to reach out to their fellow students to befriend those who seemed to have no friends. These students were doing this in an effort to comfort those who seemed to be depressed, and to rejoice with those students who were reaching a noticeable accomplishment. This participant made the comment, “There was something new around here because I have never seen anything like this before.”

The participants were asked to compare the cultural environment of their school prior to the employment of the PBIS with the cultural environment after the employment. Most of the participants qualified their responses with comments like, “I don’t want to say anything bad about my school but” and “I don’t want to make any comments that could be interpreted as critical of those teachers and administrators who were here five years ago however.” So it is apparent that the participants did not want to say anything critical but it was abundantly clear that there was a radical transformation in student achievement which took place after the employment of PBIS. Also, from the perspective of the participants it was apparent that a radical change took place as a result of the employment of PBIS. One participant commented, “PBIS was the point at which things began to change.”

Based upon the participants’ responses there were three characteristics which changed after the employment: attitudes, motivations, and accountability. Some participants noted that student attitudes were bad in the days before the employment of PBIS. One participant described student attitudes prior to employment as “blasé” or “nonchalant.” According to the participants student attitudes improved after the employment because PBIS was proactive on focusing

attitudes in a positive direction. Prior to PBIS the participants used two common descriptives when discussing motivation; “bad” and “lacking.” PBIS has a built-in component which focuses student motivation in a positive direction with a proactive attitude to take initiative to go out and do good in the world as well as to go succeed in whatever you put your mind to do. When describing the transition which occurred after the employment of PBIS the word “accountability” came up often. The participants noted that the notion of accountability was “fuzzy” or “nondescript” during the days prior to PBIS but “clear” and “focused” in the days after employment. The reason for the differences was due to the components in PBIS which communicated to the students that “you are responsible for your actions, your words, and your education.”

The participants were asked the question “Has the employment of PBIS increased student learning, improved student attendance, increased motivation, and cause students to take responsibility for their lives?” While reading the interview transcripts there were two words that stuck out like neon signs. These words were “mentor” and “rewards.” These mentors functioned as human models within the PBIS. These individuals were human examples who modeled the principles of accountability and responsibility which were established within the PBIS. The students could observe their mentors and see a living example of what it is like to have a positive attitude and a motivation to succeed in life and serve other people. Mentors were not only models but agents of accountability. They were tasked with monitoring the students academically and intervened whenever and wherever they found it necessary. Finally, the participants in the study found the concept of rewards as a necessary component of promoting a good attitude, a positive attitude, and an improved accountability. Jake Slay noted “We are preparing these students for the real world. In the real world these students will have jobs and

there will be consequences for negative behavior. If they do a sloppy job, show up late, and have a lousy attitude they get fired. When they lose that job all sorts of other bad things start to happen. When they show up for work on time with a positive attitude they get promotions and a pay raise. When these things happen all sorts of positive things, in turn, happen in their lives.”

### ***PBIS Influenced Cognitive Engagement: Increased Student Involvement***

A second theme that grew out of the data was “*student involvement.*’ Participants in the study understood the theme of student involvement as an intricate part of the larger composite of student engagement. Student involvement evoked comments from the participants such as: “you could see the enthusiasm in their eyes” and “you could feel the excitement in their voices.” Most of the participants focused the increase in student involvement around PBIS. Anna Clair noted, “Before PBIS everyone just showed up for school and students did not have goals which eventually lead to them becoming distracted and eventually getting into trouble because they found wrong things to do.” Rachel Ragsdale pointed out that “PBIS had a purpose and a plan which organized students and moved them into a positive direction.” Aaron Smith explained, “Before PBIS students simply organized themselves in a random fashion. PBIS organized students in a purposeful fashion bringing students together based upon set criteria. Some of these included diversity, skills, or even interests.”

The participants described student involvement along three different lines: active learning, pride, and teaching. Lilly Brown noted that her students were engaged in what she labeled as “active learning.” After the employment of PBIS she noted that “In class students were actively learning and not just listening and taking notes but asking questions and working out answers with fellow students.” Collaborative learning and critical thinking went hand in hand with increased student involvement.

A second example of student involvement came about as a result of “house pride” or “group pride.” PBIS incorporated a number of symbols which engendered a sense of pride in the membership of a group. Each house or group had a crest which was created by the members that belong to that group. Some took those crests and designed t-shirts which were then distributed to members of their group and proudly worn on celebration days. According to several participants “The students said the t-shirt, the crest, and other emblems which represented their groups gave them a sense of pride.” The emblems of the house served to make students feel special because they belonged to something which was bigger than themselves.

A third example of student involvement revolved around the activity of teaching other students. Melba Hastings observed and stated that her students “learned at different paces.” Another participant noted that many students have “different” ways of learning and mastering a concept. Many students involved themselves in teaching or tutoring other students who were in their group. Some were naturally gifted in mathematics and they helped students in working out their math problems. Some students had an inclination toward English and they helped other students master grammatical as well as rhetorical forms of learning. The common thread was that students were reaching out to other students in an effort to share their skills with them. Caleb Ragland summed up this sentiment in this fashion, “The most profound display of student involvement occurs when kids are talking to each other and teaching each other.”

The participants in the study articulated three distinct ways in which the employment of PBIS influenced student involvement in a positive fashion; family involvement, positive expectations, and a rewards system. Rachel Ragsdale mentioned the family involvement in the house system as a positive influence on student involvement. She said, “Students respond very positively when knowing they are a part of something that is important and inclusive.” Anna

Clair noted how the family environment given off by the house system played an important role in increasing involvement for a certain segment of the student population. She said, “They get a family feeling, a feeling that they are a part of something important and this is a feeling that they may not get with their real family.”

A second way in which participants considered PBIS a positive influence upon student involvement was what they described as positive expectations. Si Jones summed up this concept by saying, “PBIS makes students aware of what is expected of them and what the potential consequences might be if those expectations are not met. If the student behaves in a responsible manner there will be a number of enjoyable rewards that will come their way. If the student does not behave in a responsible fashion they will not be allowed to participate in the reward activities.”

The final tool which PBIS employed in the positive influence on student involvement was characterized by the participants as a rewards system. Intricately connected with the rewards system was gaming activities. Lilly Brown mentioned, “In math class students competed in a game called Kahoot.” Kahoot is a game that allows students to use their own devices to interact with the teacher and the class through a set of quizzes or questions to earn points. The game also tracks student results in the form of a list. Blake Rookie added, “In our classes we play a game called Quizlet.” Similar to Kahoot, Quizlet is an interactive game that tracks student understanding through interaction with the game. Other academic games were mentioned but these two games were the most prominent. The students turned achievement in these academic games in to points for their house. Those points were then added to the house total which resulted in possible rewards and celebrations for their accomplishments.

## **Research Question Two: How did the employment of PBIS influence teacher outcomes?**

The second research question proposed for this research design was focused upon how the employment of PBIS influenced teacher outcomes. Three themes emerged from the data in regards to the influence in which PBIS exerts upon teacher outcomes that all fall under teacher engagement. The first theme which emerged from the data analysis was teacher engagement with the school and is comprised of teacher attendance and ownership. The second theme which emerged from the data analysis was teacher involvement with the school which is comprised of teacher apathy and teacher relationships with students. The third theme is teacher level of energy which is comprised of atmosphere and teacher attitudes.

### **Teacher Engagement with the School**

The first theme of the second research question focused upon teacher engagement with the school. The themes which addressed this part of the second research question are teacher attendance and ownership. Attendance was addressed in the following manner. The focus and discipline provided by PBIS made it difficult for teachers to be absent, thus reducing teachers' absenteeism. In addition teachers wanted to be present because of the enjoyment they were getting from participating in all the interesting activities which were taking place at the school, hence the enhanced organizational commitment on the part of teachers. Ownership concerned the "buy-in" of teachers participating in PBIS. Teachers were given context, focus, and direction in their responsibilities. As a result they considered their teaching as something which they developed and considered their accomplishments to be significant.

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Engagement with the School: Improved Teacher Attendance***

The theme of teacher attendance developed in an unusual fashion. Thirteen of the fifteen participants stated that teacher attendance had not been a problem prior to the employment of

PBIS at their school. Then nine of those thirteen participants qualified those comments with words like “there was an attendance problem with one or two teachers but not with the whole faculty.” Si Jones noted that “before PBIS we had a teacher attendance rate of 94% and after the employment that rate jumped to 97%. I would say that most of that three percent difference was due to two particular teachers.” Jones and Smith noted that teacher absences had been a major problem at their schools and that they had witnessed a dramatic improvement after the employment of PBIS. According to the participants in the study there were four reasons behind the improvement in teacher attendance as a result of PBIS. PBIS provided a greater focus, PBIS made teaching fun, house competitions, and PBIS held teachers accountable.

PBIS provides greater focus, organization, and continuity to the process of education. Josh Hendrix said “Everything is connected, everything is moving forward with a clear direction and a clear purpose.” With reference to continuity provided by PBIS Rachel Ragsdale added, “You can’t afford to be absent because a lot of people are depending on you. If you are not there to do your job then they cannot do their jobs because they have to build on what you are teaching them.” Laura Thompson noted, “If you are not there to do your job then everything gets gummed up.” PBIS has a built in process for continuity and a built in obligation for every person to fulfill their roles.”

As one Laura Thompson commented, “PBIS makes teaching fun.” There is an obligation to be present and to perform but PBIS enables teachers to have an enjoyable experience in the process of showing up and performing well. Si Jones told the following story with reference to three teachers who had been chronically absent prior to the employment of PBIS. “We had a definite problem with some teachers being absent. Then we implemented PBIS and I noticed a dramatic change in those teachers. PBIS provided a new found excitement, fulfillment, and

enjoyment into those teachers lives. You could see them come alive. You could see them starting to thrive in the new environment. They were asking questions, collaborating with other teachers, engaging with students, and looking for new and creative ways to improve their teaching skills.”

Another way in which PBIS improved teacher attendance was by the house celebrations or competitions. The houses improved teacher attendance by giving them a goal and a sense of purpose as well as a sense of enjoyment. Alan Clean described this in the following manner, “PBIS and the house system have made such an impact on the students. They are engaged in the learning process, they are excited about coming to school, they are motivated, and they are giving all that they got. They are looking up to you as a mentor and counting on you to be their leader. How in the world could you let them down by not showing up? The answer is that you couldn’t.”

Another important way in which PBIS improved teacher attendance was by holding teachers accountable. In a previous section we mentioned that students’ attendance rates were posted on a monitor in the hallway for everyone to see. Si Jones said, “We do the same for our teachers, their attendance rates are also posted in the hallway for everyone to see. Some teachers questioned this practice and I had to tell them what was good for the goose was good for the gander. If we are going to post student attendance rates then we are going to post teacher attendance rates. If you do not want to be embarrassed then I would suggest that you keep your attendance rate up.”

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Engagement with the School: Increased Teacher Ownership***

Many of the participants in this study were under the impression that “*teacher ownership*” was a key ingredient to becoming a successful educator. According to the

participants' responses ownership is comprised of confidence, commitment, and conviction. Most of the participants painted a picture of their lives prior to the employment of PBIS in their schools. The picture that they painted was a foggy one. Common responses were, "I was not certain where I was supposed to be or what I was supposed to be doing," "There was not a lot of cohesion in the overall structure of our school," or "Everyone was working hard but there was not a lot of collaboration." Thirteen of the fifteen participants in this study indicated that the employment of PBIS brought about a big change and one of the ways in which the change was brought about was by teachers taking ownership in their teaching responsibilities. The participants were persuaded that PBIS had enabled them to take ownership of their teaching by creating three specific avenues for them. According to the participants PBIS assisted them in taking ownership of their teaching by creating a framework, by creating methods, and by creating a holistic approach to education. PBIS created a framework for education by providing direction and developing a clear focus for those educators who were working within the system. Melba Hastings noted that PBIS seemed to clarify the picture of what she was supposed to be doing. She stated, "PBIS made me more efficient because of its clear focus. Once PBIS was implemented I could see that I had a clear purpose, a clear role, and I understood what I was supposed to be doing as a teacher." Blake Rookie added, "I could take ownership of what I did as a teacher because PBIS gave me a clear path and pointed me in the right direction." Laura Thompson commented, "PBIS gave me a broad general framework and allowed me to express my creative abilities to develop approaches that would achieve the goals set before me." Anna Clair arrived at ownership by means of the product which PBIS developed. She stated, "When a student comes into my class and I have a system that rewards them and leads them in the right

direction then I am happy because I know that I have accomplished something good and that PBIS has given me the framework that I needed.”

A second way in which PBIS brought about ownership among teachers was creating methods which would assist teachers in accomplishing their goals. PBIS used a rewards system, an accountability system, and a system of collaboration to bring about ownership among teachers. Blake Rookie told the following story, “Halfway through the year everything clicked. Classroom disruptions decreased dramatically and I was no longer fatigued at the end of the day. The kids bought in to the system, the kids took the lesson and ran with them. I became a facilitator of learning instead of a dispenser of knowledge. This was the point in which I realized that PBIS worked and I could take full ownership of what was happening in my classroom and beyond.” Alan Clean noted that PBIS “Removed the chaos and focused on the positive.” According to this administrator “teachers bought into the system because it gave them clarity and focus.”

A third avenue by which PBIS increased teacher ownership was by creating a holistic approach to education. Jo Smith commented, “PBIS is a student-first program, PBIS creates a special bond between teachers and their students.” Alan Clean noted that his teachers got caught up in the competition, the teamwork, and the rewards “every bit as much as the students did.” A second aspect of this holistic approach was the fact that PBIS extended beyond the classroom. Jonny Angus commented, “PBIS is not just about the classroom but outside the classroom. It is personal, social, and everything else.” The holistic application of PBIS seemed to captivate those teachers who worked within its domain. The fact that teachers under the PBIS realm were more interested in the student as a whole person caused them to see their work as a calling and no longer “just as a job.” Josh Hendrix summed up this sentiment when she said, “Seeing the

intellectual development of my students was pleasing but, witnessing their moral improvement let me know that I was accomplishing more than simply teaching them how to do math problems. It solidified in my soul that my work would go far beyond the classroom.”

### **Teacher Involvement with the School**

The second theme of the second research question focused upon teacher involvement in the school. The themes which addressed this part of the second research question were apathy and relationships with students. Apathy concerned an attitude which exhibited a lack of concern. PBIS provided a context which provided teachers with a purpose for what they were doing and gave them an incentive for developing themselves as well as their students in a professional manner. Relationships with students involved an improvement in the interactions between faculty members and the students. The fact that teachers were part of the house resulted in a more familial atmosphere which improved teacher relationships with students.

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Involvement with the School: Decreasing Teacher Apathy***

Through this research endeavor teachers and administrators alike developed a working definition of teacher apathy that revolved around teachers being “burned” out and lacking the drive needed to be an effective instructor. When participants in the study were asked to give their impressions concerning teacher apathy, the conversations took the following path. The participants gave a number of descriptions of teacher apathy. Then the participants described what they thought were some of the causes of teacher apathy. These descriptions were followed by a deposition of some of the more common manifestations of teacher apathy. The conversations concluded with an articulation of the ways in which the employment of PBIS had influenced the phenomenon of teacher apathy in their schools.

Two metaphors emerged from the data which gave a graphic description of what teacher apathy is. Debbie Jackson said, “Teacher apathy is the long-term numbness to a lot of the stress of being a teacher.” Lilly Brown noted, “Teacher apathy is a repetitive wheel and a vicious cycle. You feel like a hamster going nowhere fast.” Other participants described teacher apathy as burn out, a loss of desire, and a loss of caring. Blake Rookie stated, “Teachers who are apathetic are just concerned with getting through the day, the week, the semester, and the year.” Debbie Jackson made the comment, “Apathetic teachers are no longer enjoying the process of teaching. They are simply enduring the grind and jumping through the hoops which are set before them.”

What causes teacher apathy? Repetition, monotony, and resignation were the three main causes of teacher apathy as represented from the comments of the participants in this study. Many of the respondents noted how doing the same things over and over again lead to apathy. One participant said, “I was simply repeating the same lessons, activities, and assignments year after year with no reason, focus, or purpose other than that was what I was supposed to do, that was what everyone else was doing.” Repetition leads to monotony. One word which came up often in these interviews was “boring.” Debbie Jackson noted that, “Boredom is one of the most excruciating pains that a teacher can endure.” This same participant told the story of seeing young, energetic, and passionate teachers come into the school system “They emerged on the scene like a roman candle and slowly but surely got ground to a fizzle. The monotonous, boring grind of repetitive work with no seeming purpose or focus seemed to zap all of the energy and passion out of them.” After enduring the monotony produced by repetition the final stage of teacher apathy is resignation. According to Alan Clean, “Apathetic teachers just go through the motions with no passion or zeal for the task.”

According to the participants in this study teacher apathy manifests itself in two ways. One manifestation is pedagogical and a second manifestation is personal. Several participants stated that teachers who have succumbed to apathy tend to reinforce the repetitions which lead to boredom and the monotony and then resignation. Laura Thompson observed that “Apathetic teachers use the same lesson plans, give the same assignments, and administer the same tests year after year.” Rachel Ragsdale noted a personal trait of teachers who have lost the battle with apathy. She noted that “they are constantly whining and complaining about everything.” She told the story of how she would avoid the teachers’ lounge in the old days prior to PBIS because in was “depressing to hear so many teachers complaining and nitpicking about every trivial thing.”

Each participant was asked if they thought the employment of PBIS had improved the problem of teacher apathy. Seven of the fifteen participants were of the opinion that “Things had gotten better around the school since the employment of PBIS but had not considered teacher apathy to have been a problem prior to its employment. The other eight participants were of the opinion that PBIS had dramatically decreased teacher apathy in their schools. According to these participants PBIS decreased teacher apathy in the following ways: teachers were given a purpose and a focus, teachers were given a longitudinal perspective, and teachers were motivated to reinvent themselves.

Prior to the employment of PBIS the participants noted that teachers found themselves in the same predicament as students. They were simply going through the motions of teaching. PBIS gave these teachers a focus and a purpose. Laura Thompson stated PBIS “made teaching fun.” Anna Clair noted that “After PBIS was implemented at our school teachers were

reinvigorated. They had a renewed zeal and felt like they were making a difference in the lives of the kids.”

Several participants pointed to a longitudinal impact which PBIS had for the improvement of teacher apathy. Before PBIS teachers had one year with each class. After that year was over the students moved to another teacher and another group of students moved into their place. Jonny Angus noted that this process created a repetitive nature to the teachers’ lives which brought about monotony, boredom, emotional letdown, and created teacher apathy. PBIS created a system in which each teacher would have their group of students for three years in their house. This participant felt that this system provided an antidote to teacher apathy.

Numerous participants pointed out that apathetic teachers created a rut for themselves and needed to find a way out of the hole they had dug for themselves. The problem was that these apathetic teachers did not know how to get out of this rut and also were so beaten down emotionally that they did not have the motivation to crawl out of this hole. According to Si Jones PBIS created a perfect solution for this problem. According to Alan Clean “PBIS motivates students and gets them engaged in the learning process which carries over to the teachers and motivates them to reinvent themselves.” Lilly Brown stated that PBIS helps apathetic teachers get out of their rut by “Forcing the issue and providing them the opportunity to be successful.” Blake Rookie summed up the issue in the following manner, “PBIS does not have room for apathetic teachers. They have to reinvent themselves and change their ways or go to some other school. For those teachers who want to break out of their rut and change their habits PBIS shows them how to do this and creates scenarios where they can accomplish this goal.”

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Involvement with the School: Teacher-Student Relationships***

The final question posed to every participant was, “In what ways do you feel PBIS has made the biggest difference in your school?” The most common response to this question was in the area of teacher-student relationships. This finding is a direct reflection of what previous research has found in this area. According to Jo (2014), teacher job satisfaction and teacher commitment are directly related to positive teacher-student relationships. Another previous research endeavor confirms this finding by linking negative teacher-student relationships to increased burden and teacher attrition in the school setting (Rytivaara, & Frelin 2017). One participant painted the following picture, “Before the employment of PBIS the discipline in the school was pretty much run on a punitive system. After the employment the school is run on a rewards based system. Prior to PBIS the teacher was viewed by the students as a detached individual, a disciplinarian, as someone who was watching your every move, as someone who was going to punish you if you got out of line. After the employment the relationship between teachers and students changed. The teacher took on the role of mentor. The teachers became role models and someone who was there to set an example for the students. The teachers became facilitators, someone who was there to help the students figure out the best way to negotiate their way through life. In many ways the teacher took on the role of the older sibling.”

In past sections of this chapter we have examined how the employment of PBIS influenced the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of the student. In this section we will examine the relationship through the lens of the teacher. The primary characterization of this relationship which came out of the data analysis was the concept of “bonding.” PBIS with the mentor system in place has created a completely new dynamic between teachers and

students. The participants in this study characterized this bonding as possessing a personal component as well as an emotional component.

Laura Thompson made the comment, “In PBIS you are sort of playing the role of a teacher. I don’t mean to imply that you are pretending to be a teacher, I mean that you are part of a team with your students. They are in your house and you have a vested interest in their well-being and in their success. You are united in competition with other houses. You are no longer the caretaker. You are no longer just the dispenser of knowledge and the administrator of discipline. You now have skin in the game.” The participants indicated that there was a certain level of vulnerability to being a teacher which had not existed prior to the employment of PBIS. The participants seemed to view this as a good facet of PBIS. It made the teacher seem more like a real person and less like a detached semi-human.

The participants mentioned a secondary result which arose from the personal bond between the teacher and the student. Under the PBIS system there is an element of responsibility which the teacher develops for the students. Melba Hastings mentioned, “Teachers meet with their mentor groups every time there is a progress report, report card, or a disciplinary referral. The house system produces a comradery between the teachers and the students.” Debbie Jackson said, “I feel a responsibility for these kids. I want to see them succeed and if I see them messing up I want to intervene.”

The employment of PBIS develops an emotional bond between teachers and students. Teachers have an experience in PBIS that is similar to that of their students. Teachers have the rewarding sensation that they are part of something bigger than themselves. PBIS creates an atmosphere where teachers can make an impact on the lives of their students. Teachers also gain the assurance that what they are doing with their lives is important. The teacher also gains an

emotional attachment to the students who they are responsible for. Laura Thompson referred to her students as “my babies.” The teacher also receives the emotional reward of knowing that students respect them, admire them, trust them, and are dependent upon them.

### **Teacher Level of Energy**

The final theme of the second research question focused upon the teacher’s level of energy. The themes which addressed this part of the second research question were atmosphere and attitude. Atmosphere involved the environment from a holistic perspective. The improved attitudes engendered by the employment of PBIS spread throughout the campus and the community. People in the community were aware of the positive outcomes which were taking place at the school and businesses in the communities desired to contribute to the program. Attitude concerned the improvement in teacher demeanor. Teachers exuded enthusiasm and enjoyment in taking part in the learning process. A note of optimism permeated the faculties of these schools which were implementing PBIS.

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Level of Energy: Improved School Atmosphere***

The initial theme which emerged from the data with respect to teacher efficacy was an “*improved atmosphere.*” Many of the participants described the atmosphere prior to the employment of PBIS as “sort of vanilla,” “It wasn’t good, it wasn’t bad it just sort of was.” Debbie Jackson said, “There really was no atmosphere. Everyone just came and went and did their own thing.” However, Rachel Ragsdale described the atmosphere at her school prior to PBIS as “toxic.” Thirteen of the fifteen participants were in agreement that the atmosphere at their schools was greatly improved after the employment of PBIS. The participants described this transformation along three separate but complimentary lines. The first line was that PBIS created an environment which was conducive to the learning process. The second line was that

PBIS created an environment in which everyone was “on the same page.” A third line was that PBIS created an environment which was inclusive.

“Creating an environment which was conducive to,” was a common phrase which came up repeatedly in the conversations with the participants. What did this atmosphere look like? Anna Clair commented, “We have a wonderful principal who walks through the halls encouraging everyone and that was something you never saw prior to the employment of PBIS.” Rachel Ragsdale described the atmosphere at her school as enthusiastic. She said, “Enthusiasm is the first word that comes to mind. Since the employment of PBIS enthusiasm has exploded and the enthusiasm is contagious. Enthusiasm rubs off on everyone from teacher to teacher, from student to student, from teacher to student, and from student to teacher.”

PBIS brought about a coordination of activities in the schools from which the participants came. Most of the participants described this phenomenon as “everyone being on the same page.” Everyone had a clear job to do as Jonny Angus phrased it, “there was no longer any wandering around wondering what they were supposed to do.” Jo Smith said, “PBIS brought a synergy to the enterprise.” Faculty and administrators were working together to make everyone a success. We heard phrases like “everyone has a purpose,” “everyone has a place,” “everyone has a role,” and “there are no unimportant people.” PBIS develops an atmosphere which has a clear communication of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and how it needs to be done. This atmosphere engenders enthusiasm and cooperation which leads to success in the educational environment.

PBIS brought about an atmosphere of inclusivity. A number of participants described this as “having skin in the game.” Melba Hastings noted that her school took a holistic approach to inclusivity which included teachers, administrators, students, parents, staff, and community.

Rachel Ragsdale remarked, "Several parents got involved in the school's activities because their kids had hated school before and now, all of the sudden, they were enthusiastic about going to school." Another parent said to one of the Ragsdale, "I wanted to get involved because for years the only time I got a note from the school was when my child had done something bad. And now, all of the sudden, I started getting notes telling me he had done something good!"

Several participants mentioned that they had been contacted by members of the community who had come in contact with some of the students who were doing good things in their town. Other participants mentioned that local businesses had contacted them wanting to make donations and contributions to the school because they had been exposed to some of the altruistic projects in which the students were involved.

The inclusive nature extended to the staff at one of the schools. Lilly Brown observed that the enthusiasm which PBIS generated spread its way throughout the entire school. She noted that the lunchroom ladies and the custodians noticed the change in the school atmosphere which had occurred after the employment of PBIS. She made the following comment, "The biggest difference PBIS made is the whole atmosphere of our school. The whole faculty, all the way from the teachers, students, even down to the lunchroom ladies. I know this sounds awful but the kids are here and they are excited about coming to school and when your lunchroom ladies notice the difference you know that you have chosen the right course of action. They do not understand PBIS but they see that the kids are acting better and they are excited to be here. This whole concept has helped our school from top to bottom."

### ***PBIS Influenced Teacher Level of Energy: Improved Teacher Attitudes***

A second theme which emerged from the data analysis with respect to teacher efficacy was "*improved teacher attitude.*" One study even goes as far as declaring that positive attitudes

are directly linked to high teacher efficacy (Yesilyurt, Ulas, & Akan 2016). Si Jones stated, “Since the employment of PBIS I have noticed a distinct improvement in the attitudes of a number of our teachers.” Alan Clean that participated in the study noted, “Teachers really did not expect how PBIS would affect them on a day to day basis. As an administrator I had the privilege of watching several of our teachers blossom as they saw the improvement of their students.” Finally, a teacher spoke with reference to the way in which the employment had improved the attitude of the teachers at her school. She stated, “A Blue Ribbon Panel praised our school in three different ways because our teachers are happy with the work their administrators are doing, the kids love the school, and the parents love what the teachers are doing with their students at school.” The participants expressed their perspectives upon the influence which PBIS exerted upon their schools in three categories: PBIS crystalized a good attitude, PBIS positively reinforced a good attitude, and PBIS provided proofs of efficacy which engendered a good attitude.

Attitude was a fuzzy term before the arrival of PBIS. Of course a bad attitude was obvious and observable. However a good attitude was not so obvious or observable. A number of participants expressed the sentiment that their attitudes had not been bad prior to the employment of PBIS but noted that after the employment their attitudes had improved dramatically. Melba Hastings explained the phenomenon in the following manner, “I wanted to engage students, I wanted my students to learn. I wanted my students to do their best. PBIS is the system that motivates me. It’s not like I did not want those things before, it’s like PBIS crystalized those things and brought them back into focus.

A number of participants stated that PBIS was effective because it positively reinforced and rewarded a good attitude. Rachel Ragsdale mentioned that on a number of occasions when

she was out in the community complete strangers would recognize her as a teacher at the school. Some people would come up to me and say things like, “I do not know what you all are doing at the school but it is truly impressive so keep up the good work.” She said, “When I hear those comments it makes me want to ramp up my efforts.” Laura Thompson told the story of running in to a parent at the grocery store. She said, “I saw a parent in the grocery store. She told me that her son was a different person since we had adopted this new system. ‘He is nice, kind to his younger brother and sister, he talks about school all of the time. What is he learning and what are you doing to him?’ When I heard these words it was just like my attitude just got a shot of adrenaline.”

Participants continually used the words “proofs of efficacy” when they discussed the impact of PBIS on their schools. From a researchers perspective “examples” is probably a more preferable term. However, the majority of the participants in the study were convinced or persuaded that PBIS was instrumental in bringing about these positive transformations. Laura Thompson stated, “I see living evidence standing before my eyes every day when I stand in front of the class.” What is this living evidence? Several participants indicated that there were several students who had been serious disciplinary problems prior to the employment of PBIS. After the employment of PBIS these students are now model students. The participants credited the rewards system and the accountability component for the transformation which had taken place in the lives of these students. “Under normal circumstances we saw a handful of students undergo these types of transformations prior to the employment of PBIS, but the number of these transformations after the employment is too large for this to be a coincidence” said Jake Slay. Finally, Josh Hendrix made the following comment with respect to these student transformations, “Not only does it make me feel good to see a student go from a chronic disciplinary problem to a

model citizen, it also gives me great confidence to know that there is a system in place which can produce such beneficial results.”

### **Negative Case and Comments**

One participant in the study provided a negative case. This participant registered the perception that numerous improvements had taken place in the school since the employment of PBIS had taken place. However, this participant was not of the opinion that the influence of PBIS was responsible for these improvements. Debbie Jackson registered comments on her disdain for the PBIS program because of the lack of input that the teachers at her school had. She stated “we were told about this great program and told we were going to implement it and then basically just told to fend for ourselves.” Debbie also said “we were not given any training in what they wanted us to do, not only did we lose instructional time we also lost autonomy in this which is why I do not like our PBIS.”

While Debbie was the only teacher who was completely against the employment of the PBIS others gave ideas in which they felt like it could be improved in one way or another. “I really enjoy what we are doing but I am struggling with being able to afford buying enough rewards keep up with the demand,” stated Josh Hendrix. “I love my kids but I also love my family and have to pay my bills too,” he also joked. Resources were not the only concern that came to mind for some teachers. Melba Hastings spoke about her administration not appearing to be fully committed at the onset of the program. “We started off very skeptical at my school, almost like this program might not be long term, I feel like if our leadership would have been fully committed from the start then we would be much further along than we are now,” she said. The final critique that appeared from the interviews came from Anna Claire and it was in regards of the schools initial approach to their PBIS. “We started off very business-like with the

implementation and then worked our way in to the fun stuff,” “our students love it now and have a lot of fun with it but it has taken us a while to get there, we should have been fun centered from the start,” she affirmed.

## **Conclusion**

This research endeavor has set as its goal to better understand the influence which the employment of PBIS exerted upon five schools in the state of Alabama. The goal was further focused by two research questions which investigated the influence which PBIS exerted upon two outcomes. The first question was focused on student outcomes which manifested itself as student engagement and can be broken down into three areas: affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement. The second question was focused on teacher outcomes which manifested itself as teacher engagement and can be broken down into three areas; teacher engagement with the school, teacher involvement with the school, and teacher energy level. The findings presented in this chapter have presented twelve themes derived from the data collected from the participants who are presently working in a school which is presently implementing PBIS. Each theme addresses one aspect of the research questions posed in the study. In the following chapter these findings will be discussed, conclusions will be drawn from these findings, and recommendations will be made based upon these findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study which were based upon the data collected from the participants in the study. In chapter four the voice of the participants was presented as themes which emerged from the data articulated in the words of the participants. In chapter five the findings of the study will be analyzed along the lines of discussion, conclusions and recommendations. In this chapter the reader will hear the voice of the researcher as he interacts with the findings of the study. The discussion section will compare and contrast the findings of the study with the findings of previous research. The conclusions section will present the unique findings which arose from this study. The recommendations section will present specific ways in which the findings of this study can best be applied in the areas of future research, policy formation, and practitioner innovation.

### **Discussion**

In this study the findings of this study will be compared and contrasted with previous studies which have been conducted in the area of PBIS and the influences which this program has exerted upon individual schools and school systems where it has been implemented. The format of this section will follow the thematic structure of the findings which presented in chapter four. Student engagement will occupy the first sub section and teacher engagement will occupy the final sub section. The purpose of this section is to bring into clear focus the place which the study occupies in the overall field of the study.

## **PBIS Influence on Student Outcome**

### **Affective Engagement**

During this study a number of elements in PBIS developed a sense of community and produces comradery among the students. The notion of being involved in something bigger than yourself, the idea of mutual dependence among other people, and the contribution to society at large are three of the primary ways which PBIS brought about comradery and a sense of community among the students who attended a school where PBIS had been implemented.

One previous study identified the sense of community as an asset of PBIS (Goodman, Scott, Hays, & Cholewa, 2018). The findings of this study not only confirmed that but also the ideas of Crone, Hawken, & Horner (2015) that PBIS exerted a positive influence upon affective student engagement by producing comradery among students.

Much of the PBIS systems are built around competition. The findings of this study showed that competitions were for attendance, academics, athletics, and altruism. PBIS utilizes competitions as a tool to produce sportsmanship, team spirit, collaboration, and charity. From the perspective of the participants of this study the employment of PBIS increased student engagement by means of incentivizing them, holding them accountable for their actions, and providing a competitive venue as an outlet for their creative energies.

The concept of competition explored by previous research was based on the impact which competition had on the overall attitudes which students developed. According to Pink (2012) students who were actively involved in competitions are less likely to receive disciplinary infractions. The participants in this study were in affirmed this contention. This finding in the also adds to the previous research of Godin, Freeman, & Rigby (2017) that stated that “playful” engagement was influential on improving the affective of the students in the school setting.

## **Behavioral Engagement**

Positive reinforcement by the means of “incentives” were the primary tool used to motivate students to pursue excellence in the classroom during the duration of this study. The rewards for positive behavior and the withholding of rewards proved to be a unique advantage of the PBIS system. The movement away from a purely or predominantly punitive perspective appears to have had success in motivating students to pursue responsible and altruistic goals in their lives. This thought was further extended by some participants in this study through a shift in motivation from an extrinsic perspective to one that was intrinsic which confirms the studies of Pink (2012). Ava Thompson stated, “Initially our students did things strictly for the reward, now kids do the right thing because it is who we are.” Alan Clean confirmed that thought by stating, “The rewards were nice but the big impact is that students now do what’s right even when there is no reward that is being offered, our culture has completely shifted.”

Previous research indicated that increasing the motivation to be at school was essential for improving student engagement (Smolkowski, Seeley, Gay, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2017). The participants in the study were of the opinion that PBIS accomplished this goal and expand on this thought by pinpointing incentives as the driving force to accomplish motivation. Participants also confirm the thoughts of White & Salovey (2012) that incentives are important in influencing behavioral engagement.

The evidence of accountability in this study was predominantly anecdotal but powerful none the less. A quantitative analysis which will be described later in this study would provide hard evidence for this suggestion. The notion of accountability embedded into PBIS was suggested as the component which effectively decreased disciplinary referrals and out of school suspensions. The perspective of being counted on to behave properly because others would

suffer for your misdeeds seemed to exert a strong control over students involved in the PBIS program.

One previous study concluded that there was a correlation between the accountability within a PBIS and a decrease in disciplinary referrals and out of school suspensions (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niu Chon, & Miller, 2017). The perspectives of the participants in this study confirmed this conclusion. This finding was not a surprising one as it also confirmed the importance of accountability as was previously discussed by Scott and Eber (2003).

### **Cognitive Engagement**

The fourteen schools in this study which implemented PBIS with fidelity experienced a higher rate of student achievement. The one school which implemented PBIS without a high degree of fidelity experienced what participants would consider to be a lesser degree of improved academic achievement. In effect, when PBIS was not implemented with a high degree of fidelity the effort appeared to exert a negative effect on student achievement. In the schools which implemented PBIS with a high degree of fidelity the academic achievement resulted from the holistic perspective which PBIS employed. Achievement outside of the classroom contributed to achievement inside the classroom.

One research study indicated that schools which implemented PBIS to a high degree of fidelity demonstrated a significantly higher rate of student achievement than schools which implemented PBIS but not with the same degree of fidelity (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niy Chon, & Miller, 2017). The findings of this study appear to confirm this assertion. The findings of this study also confirm the thoughts of Kim, McIntosh, Mercer, and Nese (2015) in that schools which implement a PBIS achieve at a higher level.

Student involvement was a second area of cognitive engagement which this study reflected an influence. All participants acknowledged that involvement had increased since the employment of PBIS. The quantitative study described below would verify these findings with hard evidence. The house/group systems of PBIS seem to be the main component of PBIS which contribute to improved student involvement. There is a perpetual number of interesting activities which motivate students to be involved in school. There is the additional dynamic of not wanting to let ones house members suffer because of your noninvolvement that also came to light in this study.

One prominent study in this are contended when students are associated with an activity outside the academic setting there is a statistically significant increase in student involvement (Freeman, Simonson, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2015). The findings of this study corroborated that evidence. The finding of motivation leading to improved involvement extends the findings of Reno, Friend, Caruthers, and Smith (2017) which did not specify how improving involvement influenced cognitive engagement.

## **PBIS Influences Teacher Outcomes**

### **Engagement with the School**

Most of the teacher participants noted that teacher attendance had not been a problematic issue prior to the employment of PBIS. As a result there was little room for improvement after the employment of PBIS. The one participant who noted an improvement after the employment of PBIS attributed the improvement to cohesion of the PBIS system. They stated a schedule is in place which requires all people involved in the system to be present and actively engaged on a daily basis.

A previous study by Baker and Ryan (2014) noted that schools which implemented PBIS exhibited an increase in staff attendance as well as a rejuvenation toward job performance. The findings of this study were less corroborating on the issue of teacher attendance and seem to confirm the findings of Benjaree, King, Orazen, and Paterno (2012). In that study there was a less conclusive link between the employment of PBIS and an increase in staff attendance.

Many teachers, especially those who are young in the profession need a clear direction with comprehensible guidelines for administrating their classes. For a variety of reasons these teachers felt left out in the cold. Several participants credited PBIS with giving them the direction they needed and the comprehensive feedback they needed in order to understand what they were doing. In turn this positive feedback gave the confidence to create and experiment with new ideas. This confidence gave them a sense of pride and enabled them to take ownership of what they were doing in their classes.

Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialango, and Leaf (2008) observed that confident teachers are more willing to take ownership. The findings in this study affirm that statement. This thought of ownership adds to previous research by Collie and Martin (2017) that found autonomy to be the key to teacher engagement with the school. The findings of this research affirmed previous research that the employment of PBIS exerted a positive influence on teacher efficacy by creating an atmosphere conducive to teaching, improving teacher attitudes, and enabling teachers to take ownership of their teaching methods and strategies.

### **Involvement with the School**

Teacher apathy in this study was described as “boredom,” “confusion,” “burn-out,” and “lack of direction.” PBIS addressed each of these issues by giving focus and clarity to the education process. In addition PBIS provided an exciting array of activities which integrated

teachers as active participants with students in their groups. The participants viewed this idea of a teacher as an active participant with a purpose, importance, and focus as the ingredient which solved the problem of boredom, confusion, and burn-out those improving teacher apathy.

Mtzler, Bigland, Rusby, and Sprague (2001) suggested that teachers who worked in a school where PBIS was implemented showed significantly less teacher apathy than teachers in schools where PBIS was not implemented. The results of this study indicated that there was less teacher apathy after the employment of PBIS thus confirming their findings. This study also added to the research of Richey and Petretti (2002) that breaking up monotony decreased apathy in teachers.

The teachers who participated in this study acknowledged that PBIS had created a dramatic improvement in teacher-student relationships. PBIS is designed to humanize the teacher making them more approachable which improves teacher-student relationships. The mentoring process is the primary means by which PBIS accomplishes this goal. PBIS creates a scenario by which a teacher is no longer viewed as a detached individual who delivers information, punishment, and assessment. PBIS presents the teachers as a mentor and an advocate for the student.

In a previous study, Tschannen-Moran (2013) noted that when a student feels a sense of belonging or ownership in the learning process they will view teachers as co-creators of learning rather than disseminators of knowledge. This idea was reinforced by the findings of this study. Gasser, Grutter, Buholzer, and Wettstein (2018) also contended that improving teacher-student relationships was pivotal in teacher involvement which is echoed in this study. This study reinforced the findings in previous research that the employment of PBIS improved teacher apathy and enhanced the teacher-student relationships in the school.

## **Level of Energy**

In this study PBIS was found to increase teacher's energy level by creating a positive atmosphere in which teachers are appreciated, involved, acknowledged, and rewarded for their efforts. Many of the principles of PBIS come together in order to create this environment. Incentives, rewards, accountability, competition, involvement, comradery all combine to create an environment in which every individual has a place. The motto that there are no unimportant people produces an environment in which teachers can thrive.

A previous study of teacher level of energy noted that teachers who work in non-positive atmospheres have a sense of isolation and often feel like their efforts are going unnoticed (Richey & Petretti, 2002). The findings from this study indicate that the employment of PBIS proved to be the perfect antidote to this reality. The work of Goddard and Kim (2018) also suggested that atmosphere was one key to enhancing teacher energy which this study reaffirmed. The findings of this study also expand on the work of Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, (2009), in the specific aspects of the PBIS that lend to an individual having a place in the school setting thus increasing a teacher's level of energy.

Most of the participants in this study stated that there had been no attitude problems prior to the employment of PBIS. However, there were two participants that noticed a significant increase in their job satisfaction and zeal after the employment of PBIS at their schools. One participant credited the PBIS clarity of purpose, increase of focus, and organization of tasks. The other participant created the PBIS directional pointing which gave her the blueprint of what she needed to do and the flexibility to use her creative skills to achieve the objective.

In previous research Baker and Ryan (2014), conducted a study which argued that schools where a PBIS was implemented demonstrated an improvement in overall job

satisfaction. The findings of this study affirms that statement. This improvement in attitude extends the thoughts of Edyburn (2013) that vigor was the initial driving factor for improving teacher attitude.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this research endeavor was to discover what parts of a PBIS influenced student and teacher outcomes in schools which had implemented a PBIS system. The research questions were broken into two questions which addressed student outcomes and teacher outcomes. After the data were delineated there were multiple themes which emerged but the ones most prevalent in improving student outcomes were the following. Student engagement was improved through focusing on affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement. These three aspects of student engagement were then found to be influenced individually by two main sub themes each. Affective engagement was influenced through the PBIS by improving comradery and increasing peer to peer competition. Behavioral engagement was influenced through the PBIS framework by offering incentives for desired outcomes and increasing the accountability level for students who did not meet the desired outcomes. Lastly cognitive engagement was found to be influenced by the PBIS by increasing student achievement and improving involvement within the school setting.

Previous data were very sparse concerning the influence which PBIS exerted on teachers in the school where the PBIS was being implemented. This research not only confirmed that PBIS improved teacher outcomes but also outlined multiple reasons why these outcomes were improved. According to the fourteen participants of this study teacher outcomes were improved in schools where PBIS was present because of an improvement in the areas of teacher engagement with the school, teacher involvement with the school, and an increased teacher

energy level. More specifically teacher engagement with the school was influenced through the PBIS platform by improving teacher attendance and increasing teacher ownership in the learning environment. The next theme in teacher engagement, involvement with the school, was influenced by a decrease in teacher apathy and an improvement in the area of teacher student relationships. Lastly teacher energy level was influenced by the employment of a PBIS because of an improvement in the overall school atmosphere and teacher attitudes.

The original contribution which this research endeavor made to the field of knowledge revolved around the influence which PBIS exerted upon the combination of student outcomes and teacher outcomes. The articulated gap in the literature stated that numerous studies had been conducted on the influence which PBIS had conducted upon student outcomes but few studies had been conducted upon the influence which PBIS had exerted upon teacher outcomes and even fewer studies had been conducted upon the combination of student and teacher outcomes. This study advanced the field of knowledge in three ways: a holistic approach, integrated influences, and synergistic results.

The research design employed an aerial perspective. Previous studies isolated student outcomes as the unit of analysis, others isolated teacher outcomes as their unit of analysis. As a result findings were localized and demarcated. This study employed a holistic research design which focused upon the combination of student outcomes and teacher outcomes as the unit of analysis. As a result findings were not localized to two respective outcomes. As a result the findings were demarcated between two separate outcomes. Instead the findings of this study were integrated between the two outcomes which revealed some significant figures which had previously gone unnoticed.

The findings of this study revealed that when PBIS is implemented the influence which it exerts upon teacher outcomes runs parallel with the influence it exerts upon student outcomes. Previous impressions of PBIS were that it was a disciplinary system that was designed to improve student behavior. This study discovered that some of the influences which were exerted upon student outcomes also influenced teachers in a parallel fashion. Three notable areas of integrated influence were attendance, attitude, and relationships with students. Parallel with students, teacher attendance improved because PBIS had an imbedded organization which required everyone to be present and working in a parallel fashion.

Parallel with students, teacher attitude witnessed a dramatic improvement. Not only did PBIS encourage students to become motivated and progress in their studies, teachers also registered a notable improvement in their attitude. According to the participants in this study PBIS provided them with a clarity of purpose and an improved focus. This provision resulted in teachers who could take ownership of their teaching and feel confident in the difference they were making in the lives of their students.

There was also an integrated finding which concerned the relationships between students and teachers. Students no longer viewed teachers as detached administrators of discipline and knowledge and teachers no longer saw themselves as dispensers of information. The employment of PBIS brought about a partnership between students and teachers. The mutual incentives, accountability, and competitions brought about a sense of comradery among students but also among students and teachers.

The result of this study discovered that the employment of PBIS produced a synergetic relationship among a wide variety of stakeholders. Several participants in the study noted that the influence of PBIS went far beyond the student and teacher. The positive influence of PBIS

reached to the administrators, parents, custodians, lunchroom personnel, and to members of the community. Synergy is often described as an entity in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Based upon the responses of fourteen of the fifteen participants in this study, when viewed from a holistic perspective PBIS exerts a positive influence upon the combined outcomes of students and teachers which creates a synergistic result that extends to a multitude of interested stakeholders.

It is also important to note that the findings of this study support the employment of PBIS in a variety of socioeconomic climates. The schools within the study ranged from a free and reduced lunch rate of 44 percent at Lake Middle School to a free and reduced lunch rate of 86 percent at Hawk Middle School. This finding is important because it shows the effectiveness of this program in not only areas of economic struggle but also in areas where there is less of an economic struggle. This finding also suggests that the results of this research do not come as a result of a chaos theory. In this thought, schools were struggling so bad initially any type of reform would have had an influence (Borg, Bright, & Pryor, 2014). The fact that these students had a moral purpose to improve seems to affirm the change theory outlined by Fullan (2018). This sense of moral purpose is said to carry employments to success even when obstacles arise. The lowest initial Alabama State Department of Education report card score for the schools which were studied during this research was a 79 which was just one point off of the state average of 80 at the time of employment. That meant that each school was at or above the state average at the time the program was started and was not what the state of Alabama would consider a “failing” school.

## **Limitations**

This study encountered two limitations. The first limitation concerned the credibility of the data collected in the study. The main concern in this area is the fact that the administration at each school were the ones who chose the interview participants. It would be very easy for leadership of the school to choose participants who would shine a positive light on what is happening in their school. The accuracy and truthfulness of the data collected in the interviews with participants is an inherent limitation for all qualitative research studies. Studies that rely upon interviews for the preponderance of data have a specific limitation with respect to data reliability. The researcher has no guarantee that the participants will be truthful or accurate in their responses to the interview questions. There is a potential that some of the participants, for a variety of reasons, may give responses that are intentionally incorrect. Some participants may give responses in good faith but which are not factually accurate.

In order to counteract data which is false or factually inaccurate the researcher will engage in negative case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In most qualitative studies there will be one individual or one small group of individuals whose responses to certain questions are not aligned with the majority of the participants within the study. In negative case analysis the researcher will draw attention to these negative cases. Negative case analysis functions as a control which draws the reader's attention to the possibility that certain parts of the collected data may be corrupted with inaccuracies.

A second limitation of this study concerns the data analysis. In qualitative research the researcher serves as the instrument of data collection and data analysis. As a result, the credibility of the study's findings will be parallel with the skills of the researcher. If the researcher is highly skilled in data collection and data analysis the findings of the study will

exhibit a high level of reliability. If the researcher has a low level of skill as a data collector and data analyst the findings of the study will exhibit a low level of reliability.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study evoke applications in three specific areas. The knowledge gained from the influence in which PBIS has exerted upon student outcomes and teacher outcomes can assist educational professionals who are seeking to improve the educational effectiveness of the schools in which they work. These findings have resulted in implications for researchers and policy makers, and recommendations for practitioners.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study was exploratory in nature. A lot of studies have been conducted on the influence of PBIS on student outcomes. Few studies have been conducted upon the influence of PBIS on teacher outcomes. Even fewer studies have been conducted upon the influence of PBIS upon the combination of student outcomes incorporated with teacher outcomes. This study was a qualitative study which investigated the perceptions of fifteen participants who worked in schools where PBIS had recently been implemented. The logical compliments to this study involve three additional investigations, one replication of this study, a second which is the development of a survey instrument, and a third the application of that survey to a larger population.

The present study assembled the perception of fifteen individuals. Replicating this study in subsequent fields would serve to assess the findings of this research investigation. A series of similar studies conducted in different school settings would also be helpful. Such studies would serve three purposes. First, additional studies could reinforce the findings of this study that the employment of PBIS exerts a positive influence upon student and teacher outcomes. Second,

additional studies could uncover a number of additional findings which were not detected in this study. Third, additional studies could detect the nature of context in which PBIS is an effective tool as well as the contexts in which PBIS is not an effective tool.

The present study isolated twelve areas in which PBIS exerts an influence upon educational outcomes. Six of these themes applied to student outcomes. Six additional themes applied to teacher outcomes. Twelve potential constructs exist based upon the findings of this study. A survey instrument could be created to ascertain the explanatory power of each of these constructs. Such a survey instrument could be calibrated using various measures for validity and reliability. This survey instrument would prove to be a valuable tool for future researchers wanting to study the influence in which PBIS exerts on educational outcomes.

The third stage in the research agenda would be a quantitative investigation of the influence in which PBIS exerts upon educational outcomes. The survey instrument mentioned in the previous paragraph could be administered to a larger sample size. As a result the findings could possibly reach the level of generalizability. In addition, a quantitative study could address a number of interesting research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A sample of these questions could be the following questions. Is there a significant difference between school types with respect to the effectiveness of PBIS? Are there a combination of variables which can predict the positive influence of PBIS when implemented in a school? Is there a significant reduction of disciplinary infractions over a five year period when PBIS has been implemented in a school?

### **Implications for Policy Makers**

This study has reflected that, in the sample surveyed, PBIS exerted a substantial positive influence on the learning environment of students. Since change happens so often in the

education setting it is imperative for district level policy makers to take a systematic approach to supporting building level leadership. Based upon the findings in this study there are multiple commitments that policy makers should follow when facilitating the employment of PBIS in their school system.

Initially, this study found that PBIS influenced behavioral engagement through offering incentives for students who met certain criteria set forth by the PBIS. The implication for policy makers for this finding is to commit resources to allow for this to occur. “Initially it was very hard for our school to obtain rewards because we were struggling to classroom supplies, much less rewards,” claimed Joe Smith. This commitment of resources is a supporting finding and one that Cordiero and Cunningham (2009) not only classify as financial resources but human resources as well. This is a substantial commitment because schools throughout the state struggle to fund supplemental professional development.

PBIS was also discovered to influence behavioral engagement through an increase in the accountability of students. This accountability was found not only between teachers and students but between students within the same group. An implication for policy makers based on this finding would be to research what makes this happen within schools who have successfully employed a PBIS and model their approach. Sprague and Golly (2004) reflect this thought and feel that most successful employments of PBIS come in areas where leadership modeled the previous success of another school or school system.

This study discovered that an increase in achievement positively influenced the cognitive engagement of students while they were in the classroom setting. An implication for district leaders is that they should research PBIS and school systems which have implemented the program effectively and have seen the results which they desire. Without background

knowledge of the subject it will be difficult to answer many of the questions that school-based leadership will have. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialango, and Leaf (2008) in that background knowledge is essential for successful employment.

Also, reflected in this study was the positive influence which PBIS had on cognitive engagement through an increase in student involvement in the learning process. The implication for this finding for district leaders is develop community partnerships to insure the implementation is supported outside of the school building. These community partnerships will not only be pivotal in obtaining rewards but in gaining community support as well. According to Collie and Martin (2017) these community partnerships will help the employment beyond the walls of the school.

This research unveiled the link between the employment of the PBIS and the positive influence in the teacher's level of energy while at school. This link was narrowed down in to an improved school atmosphere and an improvement in overall teacher attendance. The implication for policy makers with this finding is that policy makers must commit to the project. Once the employment begins there will be some adjustments which need to be made and a firm commitment from district leaders will be needed for the employment to succeed. "We didn't really get any guidance from the central office we just did our own thing," laughed Si Jones. Crone, Hawken, and Horner (2015) reinforce the importance of commitment in their research stating no employment can show desired without a commitment from leadership

### **Implications for Practitioners**

Now that implications for future research and policy makers have been considered, it is necessary to give implications to the individuals who are the "boots on the ground" when it comes to implementing PBIS. These individuals are the ones who have the most "skin in the

game” with PBIS and also the ones who can be most negatively impacted in the event that the employment does not go smoothly and a noticeable difference is not made. Based upon the findings of this study, practitioners who are tasked with implementing PBIS should undertake the following procedures when developing their plan.

This study discovered that PBIS influenced the affective engagement of students by creating an atmosphere where the students felt an increased sense of comradery. The implication of this findings is that practitioners should take the necessary steps to make sure the employment is fun. Students who are in a PBIS that is designed around an atmosphere of fun show an increase in comradery and overall school enjoyment. Obviously the plan is in place to facilitate certain desired outcomes but one must not lose sight of student enjoyment in the process. Many teachers in our study spoke of how the school atmosphere had improved since the employment. One possible explanation for this improvement is that students were enjoying the plan and the events that were intertwined with it. This is what it is all about according to Baker and Ryan (2014). All educational change is designed to improve certain outcomes but the uniqueness of the PBIS is that it is designed for the students to enjoy as well.

Another finding in this study was that schools who provided a competitive atmosphere within their PBIS had an increase in the overall affective engagement of students. One implication that a practitioner could take from this is to allow students to have a voice in the plan. “Our kids loved it once they realized how much fun it could be but they would have bought-in quicker if they would have had some input,” Anna Claire stated. It is important to listen to students when it comes to planning events and rewards because they are the ones for whom the plan is being designed (Berger, Rugan, Woodfin, & Johnston, 2014).

Teacher engagement with the school was also an area in which this study discovered that employing a PBIS had an influence on schools. In schools where PBIS was successfully employed there was an increase in teacher attendance and teachers had a sense of ownership in the PBIS. The overarching implication that can be taken away from these thoughts is that teachers should be given a voice in the employment of a PBIS. One of the common occurrences in the research was the link between the teacher input and the success or lack of success that PBIS had. Teachers who had a positive view of PBIS spoke of how their administration allowed them to have input during the plan and as the plan progressed. This thought was further confirmed by this research because the only negative case was due to lack of ownership. Debbie Jackson stated, “We were just given this house system and told what to do and never asked what our opinion was.” This finding is one that is supported by the work of Bressman, Winter, and Efron (2018). In their research teacher input is essential if any educational change is to become effective.

Finally, this study discovered that the employment of a PBIS influenced the overall teacher involvement with the school through decreasing teacher apathy and improving the relationships between teachers and students. The implication for practitioners exhibited in this finding is to commit to the employment of the plan but listen and be flexible to the needs of your school and adjust to meet those specific needs. There is a saying that “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” The same can be said for the successful employment of a PBIS. Once the plan is in place it may be necessary for administrators and teachers alike to review the plan and adjust it in areas where the plan is not being successful. The implication of being flexible is also supported by the work of Collie and Martin (2017). In their work they discuss the need for an open mind and a flexible mind set when employing educational change.

## **Conclusion**

Research endeavors should be evaluated according to four questions. Did the research articulate a valid gap in the literature? Did the research fulfill the purpose of the research? Did the research address the research questions? Did the research make a unique contribution to the field of knowledge?

This research articulated a valid gap in the literature. The gap was that few studies had investigated the influence which PBIS had exerted upon the combined populations of students and teachers. This research fulfilled the purpose statement which was to better understand the impact which PBIS has upon students along with its impact upon teachers. This research study discovered that PBIS had a very positive impact upon student outcomes, as well as teacher outcomes by means of twelve themes which emerged from the data. The themes which addressed the influence of PBIS upon student engagement were the incentivizing of students, holding students accountable, providing competitions for students, increased achievement, increased involvement, and increased comradery. The themes which addressed teacher engagement were decreased apathy, increased attendance, improved relationships with students, improved atmosphere, improved attitude, and improved ownership. This study made a unique contribution to the field of Educational Leadership. This study demonstrated that the influence of PBIS to the overall institution of the school is holistic, integrative, and synergistic when the influence is viewed from the combined focus of students as well as teachers.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATORS

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Tell me about your experience with the PBIS in your school.
- What comes to mind when I say the words student engagement?
  - Has PBIS influenced student engagement in the classroom setting?
  - If yes, how so? If no, why do you think not?
  - Do you feel like there are any specifics that lead to this?
- How has the employment of a PBIS affected student learning?
  - Do you feel like there are any specifics that lead to this?
  - Probe: Did you see a problem in student learning in your school prior to the employment of your PBIS?
  - If so how?
- I have noticed that your school attendance has improved over the last year, do you feel your PBIS has played a part in this?
  - If yes, how so? If no, why do you think not?
  - What specific parts of the PBIS do you feel lead to this?
- Do you believe the employment of your PBIS has influenced student behavior in your school?

- What specific parts of the PBIS do you feel lead to this?
- Do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your teachers' commitment?
  - If so in what way?
  - Probe: Did you see the problem of teacher apathy in your school?
  - If yes, probe: do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your teachers' apathy?
  - Probe: Did you see the problem of teacher attendance in your school?
  - If yes, probe: do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your teachers' attendance?
- Do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your teachers' efficacy?
  - If so in what way?
- In what areas have the PBIS made the biggest difference?
- Is there anything that I have not asked about your PBIS that you feel like is important for me to know?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Tell me about your experience with the PBIS in your school.
- What comes to mind when I say the words student engagement?
  - Has there been an improvement in student engagement at your school since the employment of a PBIS?
  - Do you feel PBIS played a role in this? Why or why not?
  - Do you feel like there are any specifics that lead to this?
- I have noticed that your school attendance has improved over the last year, do you feel like your PBIS has played a part in this?
  - If yes, why so?
  - If no, why do you think not?
  - What specific parts of the PBIS do you feel lead to this?
- When I say the words student learning what comes to mind?
  - Has the employment of a PBIS impacted student learning?
  - Why or why not?
  - Probe: Did you see a problem in student learning in your school prior to the employment of your PBIS?

- If so how?
- Do you believe the employment of your PBIS has influenced student behavior in your school?
  - What specific parts of the PBIS do you feel lead to this?
- Do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected teachers' commitment at your school?
  - If so in what way?
  - Probe: Did you see the problem of teacher apathy in your school?
  - If yes, probe: do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your apathy?
  - Probe: Do you see the problem of teacher attendance in your school?
  - If yes, probe: do you feel the employment of your PBIS has affected your teachers' attendance?
- Do you feel the employment of a PBIS has affected teachers' efficacy?
  - If so in what way?
- In what areas have the PBIS made the biggest difference?
- Is there anything that I have not asked about your PBIS that you feel like is important for me to know?

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**® | Office of the Vice President for  
Research & Economic Development  
Office for Research Compliance

March 28, 2019

Nathan Ayers  
ELPTS  
Box 870302

Re: IRB # EX-19-CM-047: "A Qualitative Analysis of the Influence of Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems on Student and Teacher Outcomes in a School"

Dear Mr. Ayers,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under exempt review category 2 as outlined below:

*(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if:*

*(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).*

The approval for your application will lapse on February 18, 2020. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Sincerely,



Director & Research Compliance Officer

cc: Dr. Jingping Sun