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## Implementing Pbis: High School Principals' Perceptions Of The Change Process

Jaimie Clougher Brandt

College of William and Mary - School of Education, [jaimie.brandt@gmail.com](mailto:jaimie.brandt@gmail.com)

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IMPLEMENTING PBIS: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHANGE  
PROCESS

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Jaimie Clougher Brandt

March 2023

IMPLEMENTING PBIS: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHANGE  
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Jaimie Clougher Brandt

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Approved March 6, 2023 by

**Amy Colley, Ed.D.**

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Committee Member

**Steven Staples, Ed.D.**

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Committee Member

**Margaret Constantino, Ph.D.**

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Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

## Dedication

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7*

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and amazing family for encouraging me to pursue my dreams, finish what I started, and for selflessly supporting me along the way. Ben, thank you. Thank you for praying for me and believing in me, thank you for being my biggest fan and supporter in every way. Thank you for the pep-talks and tough love when I needed it and for the hugs, encouragement, and celebrations when they were needed too! Thank you for being present for our kids in the evenings, nights, and Saturday outings among so many other things that allowed me the time it took to complete this journey. You are an unbelievable husband and father, and I am eternally grateful for you and your love and support. Inara, Niko, and Wyatt, being your mom is easily one of my greatest accomplishments in my life. I love you each with all my heart! You all have been one of my greatest motivations and I pray that by experiencing this journey with me, you will see that with trust in the Lord’s plan and timing, prayer, perseverance and the prayers and support of those around you, there is absolutely nothing that you can’t accomplish. Mom, Dad, and Randi, thank you for everything you’ve done to help me fulfill this dream and for believing in me. I thank you for your constant prayers, support, love, and encouragement. (Mom, thank you for listening to almost every single one of my papers throughout the entirety of my program!) Grammie and PapPap, thank you for your constant prayers, for praying me through each step of this process, for your love, encouragement, and help in supporting me along with Ben and the kids. Thank you all for believing in me! I am incredibly blessed beyond measure!

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to gain deeper understanding of the PBIS process in high schools and high school principal perceptions of leadership qualities that enable, and challenge, school-wide change to facilitate PBIS successfully. The study provided an opportunity for high school principals to give a voice to PBIS leadership through sharing their personal experiences leading high schools through the PBIS process. A gap exists in the research regarding experience leading PBIS in high schools; it is important to provide high school principals the opportunity to share their experiences with PBIS while leading in a culture of change. Data were collected from high school principals, who completed a survey and participated in a focus group interview or individual interviews. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while a focus group and one-on-one interviews were coded and analyzed to answer three research questions: How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS regarding data analysis, staff buy-in and staff engagement, and school culture, and how principals perceive the components of effective leadership to be essential to, and exist in, their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. I found high school principals value: targeted division support for the PBIS process; collective buy-in and engagement cultivated through empowering teachers, building relationships, fostering a sense of community, and embedding PBIS in daily life; an environment where risk-taking is encouraged; transparency in data sharing and analysis with PBIS, especially in creating plans for support and recognition; and carefully planning the initiative.

IMPLEMENTING PBIS: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHANGE  
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Students nationwide missed over 11 million total days of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions during the 2017-18 school year as reported by the U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights (OCR, 2021). Furthermore, disproportionality in student discipline and the associated loss of instructional time continues to be a prominent issue resulting from exclusionary discipline practices nationwide (OCR, 2021). The nationwide exclusionary discipline data for K-12 public schools supports the need for the crisis in having just practices in student discipline through behavior support systems like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in schools (OCR, 2021; Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2015). Each school year brings new and unique challenges for principals and leadership teams which include, but are not limited to, rolling out new district and/or school building initiatives, refreshing staff of the focus on continued practices, and building excitement and enthusiasm within the team to accomplish goals for maximum student success. “Schools are complex organizations, and school leaders have a myriad of daily responsibilities including a mandate to develop and maintain a safe and supportive climate that promotes learning” (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 410). As school leaders implement new initiatives, it is important they are purposeful and intentional to achieve success and sustain maximum results, and to avoid complacency and staff overload, which negatively affect morale and school culture. Therefore, it is important for leaders to carefully prepare their stakeholders and the school environment for change through an

innovative leadership approach, which is fundamental for lasting success (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). This is especially true when implementing systems for change, seeking to establish new procedures, and potentially challenging the existing status quo (Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

Michael Fullan (2020) explained that as our society becomes more complex it is imperative that our leadership become more sophisticated. Along with increased complexity, change will inevitably occur, and it will happen quickly, without warning, and in an unpredictable, nonlinear way (Fullan, 2020). Complex societal change affects our schools as well, therefore, school leaders must strive find every opportunity to transform potential problems into opportunities and possibilities for growth and success (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). The day-to-day work of a school leader must exemplify transformative practices which make innovation commonplace and working collectively with common principles a goal not only for the school, but for community stakeholders as well (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). When leading in a culture of change, leaders face the dilemma of either “failing to act when the environment around [them] is radically changing, which leads to extinction...or making quick decisions under conditions of mind-racing mania, which can be equally fatal” (Fullan, 2020, p. x).

The concept that as culture evolves people must reciprocate and adapt is not novel; however, this simple statement becomes much more complex in its application to leadership, especially when leading change in schools (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018). Complexity can bring fresh, new opportunities, but only when strong leaders seize the moment to facilitate them (Fullan, 2020). This notion is extremely relevant to schools and school leadership. The principal sets the course and tone for the building and, therefore, has a strong influence over the school’s culture, climate, and overall morale. “The school leader embodies a school’s culture. Its leader’s words

and actions represent a school's priorities and concerns... We see a source of culture in the profound influence a school leader has on the community" (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016, p. 46). School principals are often tasked with introducing and overseeing the implementation of many different initiatives, some division led and others more building specific (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Simultaneously, they must ensure that other integral systems continue to operate at peak performance in their schools (Judkins et al., 2019). Each initiative presents a unique set of steps, complexities, longevity, and overall impact on the school building and school community (Judkins et al., 2019).

In essence, each initiative can arguably be viewed as a potential change agent, which means it must be handled and implemented with a certain degree of care and finesse to ensure successful sustainable implementation as a system (Fullan, 2020). This highlights the importance for principals and other school leaders to be self-aware and mindful of components of effective change leadership, such as Fullan's Framework because the integrity of the school's culture and the stakeholders depend on their ability to lead effectively (Fullan, 2020). This study paired two key issues, the need for having just practices in student discipline through systems such as PBIS and the challenges of leading such a change using Fullan's (2020) Effective Leadership model.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As previously stated, during the 2017-18 school year students nationwide missed over 11 million, 11,205,797, total days of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions as reported by the U.S. Department of Education OCR (2021). Disproportionality in student discipline and the associated loss of instructional time continues to be a prominent issue resulting from exclusionary discipline practices nationwide (OCR, 2021). The Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimations of exclusionary discipline practices, which was released

in June 2021, reports that there was a decline in overall expulsions and out-of-school suspensions by two percent from 2015-16 to 2017-18. However, three areas increased by at least 5%: school-related arrests went up 5%, expulsions with educational services went up 7%, and referrals to law enforcement went up 12% (OCR, 2021). In addition to these increases, there is still significant disproportionality and disparity in exclusionary discipline practices being reported specifically for boys, among students of varied races/ethnicities, and for students receiving educational services and those with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; OCR, 2021).

During the 2017-18 school year, boys accounted for 51.4% of total student enrollment, however, they received 72.5% of expulsions with educational services, 73.8% of expulsions without educational services, 69.5% of in-school suspensions and 70.5% of out-of-school suspensions (OCR, 2021). Further, OCR data showed that Black students received one or more in-school suspensions and one or more out-of-school suspensions at rates that were more than 2 times their share of total student enrollment. Students with disabilities served under IDEA represented 13.2% of total student enrollment but received 20.5% of one or more in-school suspensions and 24.5% of one or more out-of-school suspensions (OCR, 2021).

The exclusionary discipline data for K-12 public schools continues to highlight the necessity and need for tiered behavior systems and programs like PBIS in schools (OCR, 2021). According to OSEP's (2015) Technical Assistance Center on PBIS, there are 27,000 schools nationwide, in all 50 states, that are implementing School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) systems. Significant research has been conducted on SWPBIS systems regarding implementation, predominantly in the elementary level (Freeman et al., 2019; Horner et al., 2010).

Significant research has also been conducted regarding SWPBIS and its positive impact on the reduction in school discipline issues and reduction in discipline statistical reporting data, such as the disproportionality and disparity in specific populations (Horner et al., 2010). Additionally, research has been conducted regarding the SWPBIS system's positive influence on school environments especially concerning student outcomes (Freeman et al., 2019; Horner et al., 2010). Further, a large focus of SWPBIS research is on the connection between behavioral outcomes, such as a reduction in office discipline referrals, and students' academic performance, mainly measured through standardized assessments (Freeman et al., 2019). The implementation of SWPBIS is specifically associated with reductions in student dropouts, office disciplinary referrals, the number of students needing more intensive supports, and increased student attendance (Bohanon et al., 2006; Flannery et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2016; Swain-Bradway et al., 2018).

There are limited research studies on PBIS implementation in the secondary school setting. The secondary context is a missing piece in the literature and the difference in contexts matters (Center on PBIS, 2021a). This is especially true for high schools, as secondary schools serve an important role as a bridge to post-secondary success (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018). There are minimal, if any, research studies that focus on high school principals' perceptions of their role in the process (Freeman et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. This mixed methods study explored PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of high school principals' perceptions of the change process through the lens of a leadership model for change.

## **Conceptual Frameworks**

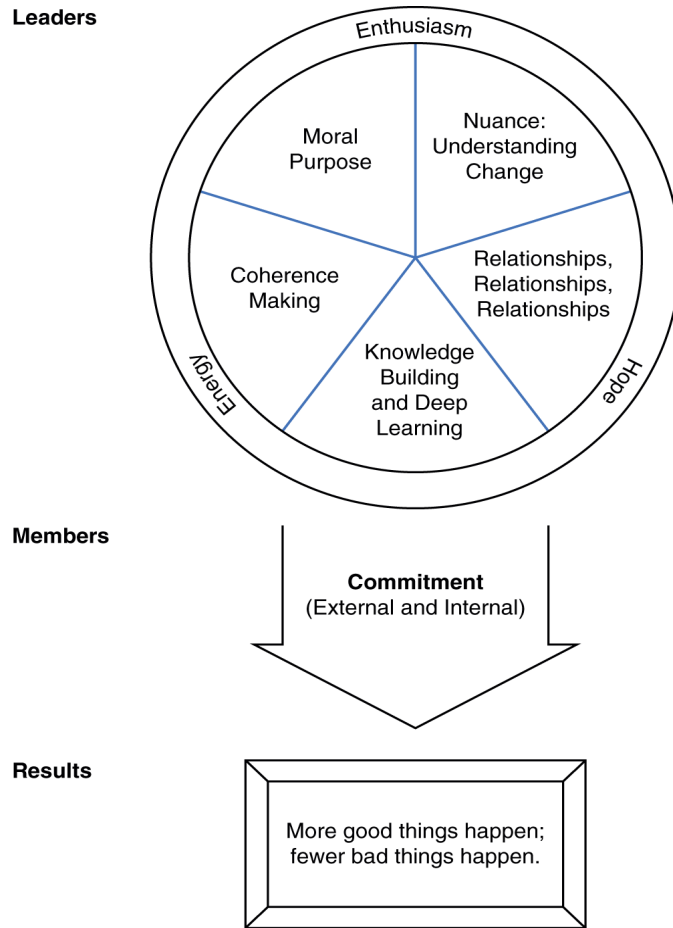
Two models informed the conceptual framework that guided this study: Michael Fullan's (2020) Framework for Effective Leadership and the PBIS Implementation Framework (OSEP, 2015). I focused on effective leadership in the change process using Fullan's (2020) Framework; and leadership of SWPBIS using the PBIS Implementation Framework found in the PBIS Implementation Blueprint: Part 1 (OSEP, 2015). I explored the ways in which Fullan's framework may influence components of the PBIS Implementation framework and the ways in which the components overlap. The relationship between these frameworks is represented and discussed further in this section.

### ***Fullan's Framework for Effective Leadership***

Fullan (2020) provided a Framework for Effective Leadership to guide leaders through the change process. In this framework, which is presented as a logic model, there are five core components leaders must possess and consciously work toward building and strengthening: moral purpose, nuance, relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making. These components work together within the overarching leader characteristics of enthusiasm, hope (courage), and energy (relentlessness). Leaders who consciously groom these components can build commitment to members and produce results: more good things happening and less bad things happening throughout the change process. Fullan's (2020) Framework for Effective Leadership is represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Fullan's Framework for Effective Leadership*



*Note.* Adapted from *Leading in a Culture of Change* by Michael Fullan, 2020, p. 9.

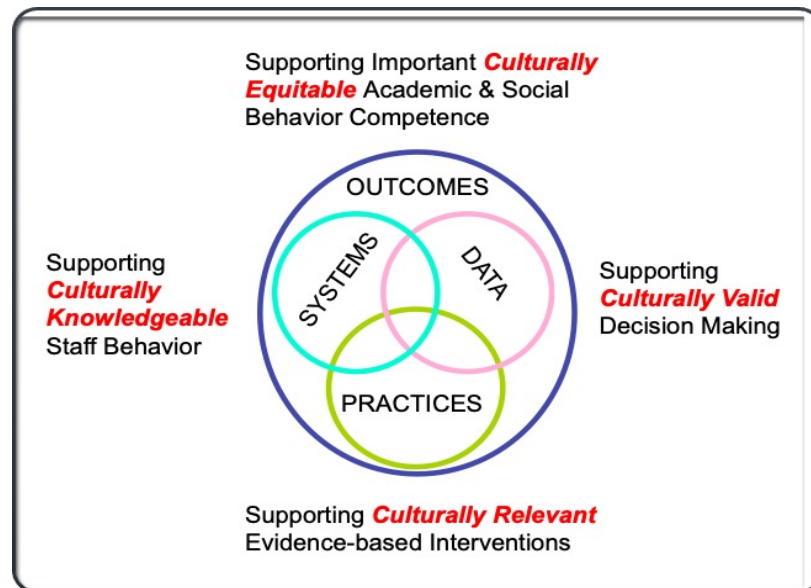
This study focused on investigating principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS and the role of these elements of leadership through the change process. This study explored the implementation of PBIS as a system for change, using the components of the effective leadership framework to glean principal's perceptions of their role in the change process as it occurred in their contexts.

## ***SWPBIS Implementation Framework***

SWPBIS is a research-based school-wide approach to behavioral change in students through a multi-tiered implementation framework, derived from a logic model, that includes teaching appropriate social school behaviors, implementing research-based intervention practices, and using data-based decision making (Sugai & Horner, 2002). It is designed to make schools more effective organizations. SWPBIS is a culturally responsive system that helps establish a social culture and the behavior supports needed to improve social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for all students in schools (Center on PBIS, 2018). The SWPBIS Implementation Framework (OSEP, 2015) is represented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*School-Wide PBIS Implementation Framework*



*Note.* Adapted from *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Implementation Blueprint: Part 1 – Foundations and Supporting Information* by the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS, 2015, p. 18.



### ***Conceptual Framework for Study***

If leaders do not embody components of effective leadership, it can be extremely challenging to successfully implement and sustain a system such as school wide PBIS (Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019). “Successful implementation of any school-wide initiative relies heavily on the school leaders [ability] to create conditions for success,” such as effective leaders, who recognize the complexity of change and impact the implementation of a SWPBIS system will inevitably have on their school (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 411). Fullan (2020) provides a dynamic framework for effective leadership, especially as applied to leading complex change in educational settings. When aligned with actions, this framework for effective leadership could positively affect the change process such as that presented when SWPBIS systems are implemented. Systems, practices, and data are the three critical features that work together to help promote positive, predictable, safe environments for stakeholders in the school (Center on PBIS, 2021b). Change has a twofold impact. On one hand its pace can make the challenge seem daunting and the process exhausting. Conversely, amid unsettling change, new strengths, and innovations emerge in ways that don’t always occur in more stagnant settings (Fullan, 2020). When leaders embody the components of effective change, they are more aware of the needs in their building to foster positive change, and therefore facilitate the successful and sustainable implementation of SWPBIS.

**Alignment of the Frameworks.** The alignment of Fullan’s leadership framework and the PBIS implementation framework as they relate to the conceptual framework that guided this study are discussed further and represented in this section.

***Moral Purpose, Relationship Building, Coherence Making and PBIS Practices.*** Moral purpose, relationship building and coherence making are aligned with PBIS Practices. These

three components of the effective leadership framework are interdependent on each other (Fullan, 2020). Moral purpose, acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of stakeholders, cannot successfully occur without relationships. Relationships cannot improve, the single factor common to every successful change initiative, without positive collaboration and teamwork based on trust built through purposeful interaction and problem-solving and intentionality (Fullan, 2020). All of this comes together with coherence making, purposeful day-to-day work that brings unity and facilitates collaboration.

Each of these leadership components were explored related to the implementation of PBIS Practices. Schools implementing PBIS must select, monitor, evaluate, and adapt the evidence-based practices they use in their schools (Center on PBIS, 2021b; Sugai & Horner, 2009). Schools implement the core features of evidence-based practices in a way that fits with their schools' cultural values (Center on PBIS, 2021b). According to the PBIS Blueprint (OSEP, 2015) and other implementation guides on available at PBIS.org, this part of the PBIS implementation process involves the following critical steps: (a) creating a shared vision and approach to supporting and responding to student behavior in a mission or vision statement; (b) creating positively-stated school-wide expectations, as defined and displayed in a school behavior matrix; (c) teaching school-wide expectations through the matrix and other key social, emotional, and behavioral skills to set all students up for success; (d) establishing recognition strategies to provide specific feedback and encourage contextually appropriate behavior; and (e) establishing a continuum of response strategies to provide specific feedback, re-teach contextually appropriate behavior, and discourage contextually inappropriate behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012).

Each of these steps in establishing PBIS practices benefits from collective buy-in from the faculty and staff, as well as students and other stakeholders. Without effective leadership skills in moral purpose, building relationships, and coherence-making, these steps may be extremely challenging and would provide a weak foundation for SWPBIS implementation (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Fullan, 2020). This study investigated high school principals' perceptions of these elements as being evident and integral to the implementation process.

***Nuance: Understanding Change, Coherence Making and PBIS Systems.*** The components of effective leadership: nuance: understanding change and coherence-making in Fullan's (2020) framework align with the Systems element in the PBIS Implementation framework. Schools must invest in the administrative, professional, and organizational systems critical to sustain PBIS implementation. This is imperative because these systems create the platform for school leaders to facilitate Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 practices (Center on PBIS, 2021b). Further, they provide the foundation for school leaders to form the teaming structures, build scheduling practices, staff selection, establish training and coaching procedures, and implement on-going data-based problem-solving routines, which are all essential to PBIS implementation success (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). When implementing SWPBIS, principals must understand the culture and climate of their building (understand where their followers are at in terms of comfort, support, and buy-in) regarding the change process. Principals must become "change savvy," while intentionally and purposefully interacting with followers regarding implementation of the SWPBIS system (Fullan, 2020).

***Knowledge Building, Deep Learning, and PBIS Data.*** Effective leaders foster the generation of knowledge both inside and outside of their organization since it plays a crucial role

in all the elements of the effective leadership framework (Fullan, 2020). Creating and sharing knowledge requires “a new conception of learning, greater and bigger moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, and teamwork,” (Fullan, 2020, p. 12). The effective leadership framework components of knowledge building and deep learning aligns with the data element in the PBIS implementation framework. Transparency in data sharing is integral to PBIS practices (Martinez et al., 2019). Without transparency, staff may become skeptical and resentful of the change process. “SWPBIS schools collect and use data to guide their implementation and evaluate outcomes. It is critical to consider the local culture and context throughout the decision-making process to ensure equitable outcomes for all students and staff” (Center on PBIS, 2021b). Principals’ descriptions of the use of data during PBIS implementation and their perceptions of the importance of this element to successful implementation of PBIS were important to answering the research questions in this study.

***More Good Things Happen; Fewer Bad Things Happen and PBIS Outcomes.*** The Results of the Effective Leadership framework are described as “More good things happen; fewer bad things happen,” which aligns with the Outcomes element in the PBIS Implementation framework. “[Principals] who are steeped in the five core [components of effective leadership] by definition evince and generate long-term commitment in those with whom they work” (Fullan, 2020, p. 14). When implementing the SWPBIS system, it is imperative for principals to create and set observable and measurable goals (Center on PBIS, 2021b). These goals provide accountability for schools creating the kind of place where every student can succeed; leaders select the outcomes to target based on data that is meaningful to their specific school, culturally equitable, and centered on students’ achievements or school-level implementation (Bradshaw et

al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012).

***Energy, Enthusiasm, & Hope and PBIS Support.*** Finally, energy, enthusiasm, and hope are individual traits that effective leaders possess (Fullan, 2020). “Energetic-courageous-relentless-leaders can ‘cause’ greater moral purpose in themselves, tackle change head on, naturally build relationships and knowledge, and seek coherence to consolidate moral purpose” (pp. 12-13). These characteristics may be critical to sustaining PBIS elements of Support for Staff Behavior, Student Behavior, Decision Making, and for Social Competence and Academic Achievement throughout the PBIS Implementation process (Center on PBIS, 2021b) and were explored in this study through high school principals’ perceptions and discussion of their experiences with leading high schools through the PBIS process.

***Leadership, Teacher Buy-In, and PBIS Implementation.*** Building these leadership components and developing strong personal leadership characteristics help establish credibility of the leader and increase teacher buy-in. Staff and teacher support for a change initiative is important to the successful implementation of PBIS in high schools (Martinez et al., 2019). “When school leaders embrace the opportunity to lead with heart, healthy relationships unfold within the community, inspiring practices that are in [students’] best interests” (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016, p. 14). Initiatives in any capacity move forward more smoothly when more stakeholders are in favor of the change. “People look to leaders to define what is normative for the group” (Donaldson, 2001, p. 59).

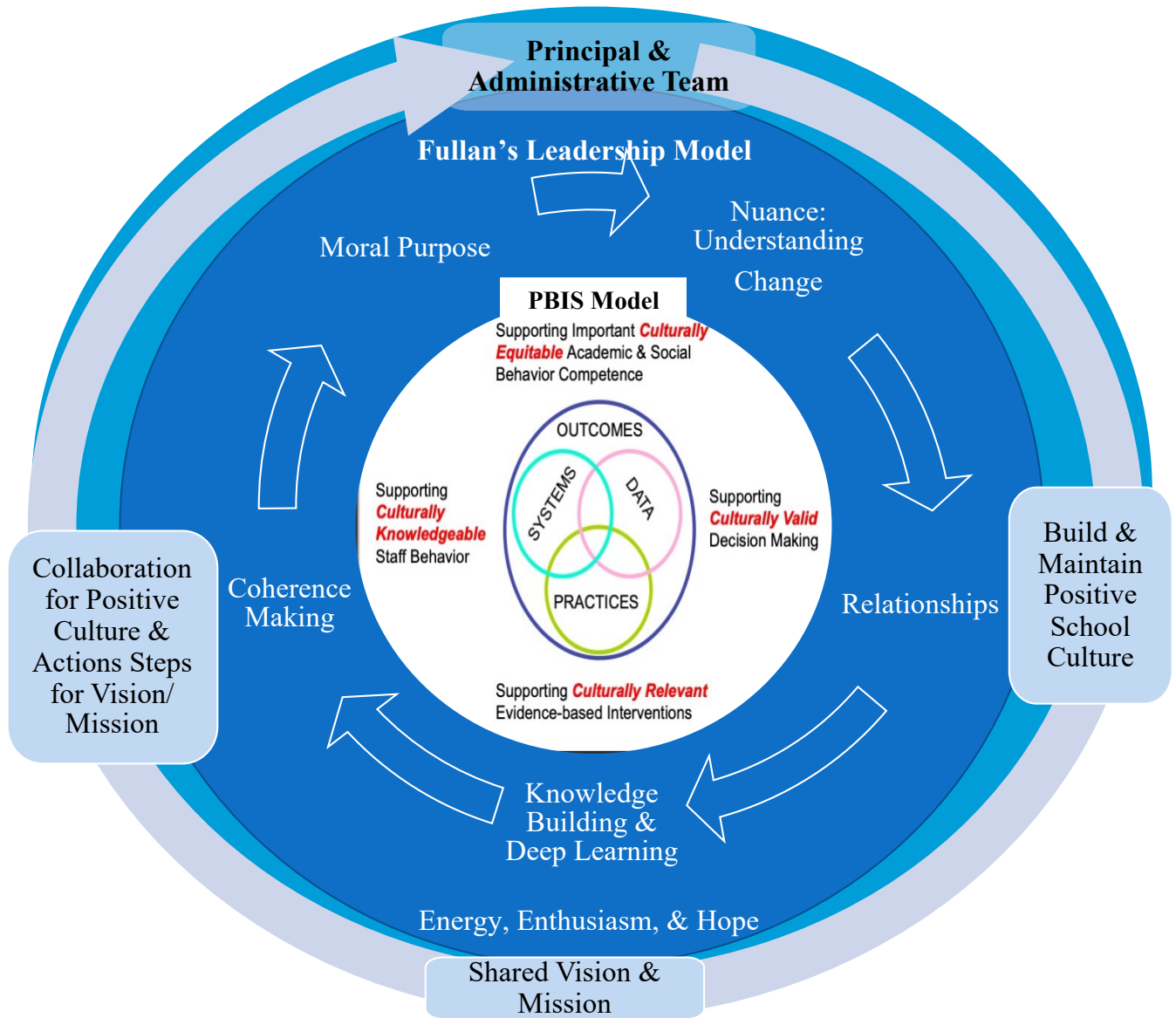
Teachers are more likely to value and follow leaders who demonstrate that they are trustworthy, open, and affirming, and who intentionally develop authentic connections and meaningful relationships with their stakeholders (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo &

Sinanis, 2016). “Faculty confidence and hope grow as they see in the leader’s actions clear evidence of optimism about the school’s work and his or her own confidence in them” (Donaldson, 2001, p. 59). While it may be more difficult to achieve in high schools, support from stakeholders, especially teachers, is one of the critical elements for successful implementation of PBIS (Martinez et al., 2019). Principals in this study were queried as to their perceptions of this element to the change process as well as those action steps taken during the implementation phase.

It is clear, that through a crosswalk of the two frameworks that Fullan’s Effective Leadership framework could represent a foundation for leading through the complexities of the change process when implementing the SWPBIS system. The Conceptual Framework for this study, represented in Figure 3, reflects the relationship of the elements of Fullan’s Effective Leadership Framework (2020) and the PBIS Implementation Framework (OSEP, 2015).

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual Framework for the Study*



*Note.* Adapted from *Leading in a Culture of Change* by M. Fullan, 2020, p. 9 & *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Implementation Blueprint: Part 1 – Foundations and Supporting Information* by the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS, 2015, p. 18.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions embedded in the Framework for Effective Leadership (Fullan, 2020) that facilitate the implementation of a school wide PBIS program. In this mixed methods research study, I explored PBIS as a system for change and attempted to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process as examines through the elements of the framework of effective leadership (Fullan, 2020). Further, I focused on investigating principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS and their role in the change process. To begin, the guiding conceptual framework was developed to determine the extent to which Fullan's Components of Effective Leadership Framework align with the PBIS Implementation Framework. Subsequently, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?
  - a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?
  - b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?
  - c. How has PBIS become embedded in the school's systems, policies, and practices?
2. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be *essential* to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?
3. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to *exist in* the successful implementation of PBIS?



## **Significance of the Study**

By effectively leading in a culture of change, leaders also develop greater courage (in themselves and others) to do even more...The most effective leaders become more courageous as a result of their experiences. Yet they retain their humility and empathy for others. The notion that courage becomes stronger and more evident as leaders develop is a powerful insight and phenomenon. (Fullan, 2020, p. 13)

It is important to give voice to the leaders who are tasked with implementing programs, such as SWPBIS systems, and therefore explore the experience of leading in a culture of change; and to provide a platform to share their experiences with the implementation process of PBIS. The findings may shed light on important commonalities, significant differences, and overall provide vital information for future professional development and training for implementation and sustainability of the system amid complex change, as well as assist in guiding high school leaders into more effective PBIS implementation overall.

Freeman et al. (2019) explained further research is needed that explores the outcomes related to the impact of unique contextual characteristics of high schools, integrated systems of support, implementation of advanced tiers, the overall implementation process, and factors related to sustainability in high school. It is apparent that there is a critical need for more research that can assist in guiding the work of school leaders implementing the PBIS framework, specifically at the high school level (Freeman et al., 2017). Therefore, my study focused on high school principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS and their role in the change process.

## Definitions of Terms

Moral Purpose: “Moral purpose is acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole” (p. 9).

Nuance: Understanding Change: “Understanding change means understanding [the people you are leading]. The more complex the change, the more that people with the problem must be part of the change” (p. 45).

Relationships: “The single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve...Focused collaboration in relation to the work is key” (pp. 10-11).

Knowledge Building and Deep Learning: “Engages students and employees in the pursuit of knowledge [data sharing and analysis] and problem-solving” (p. 11). Effective leaders foster the increase of knowledge [transparency and understanding through data sharing and analysis] both inside and outside of their organization since it plays a crucial role in all the elements of the effective leadership framework.

Coherence Making: “The shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work through purposeful day-to-day interaction” (p. 120).

PBIS-Systems: “Supports that are needed to enable the accurate and durable implementation of practices, efficient use of data, and achievement of outcomes” (OSEP, 2015, p. 18).

PBIS-Data: “Information that is used to select, monitor, and evaluate outcomes, practices, and systems, as well as, to monitor effective and equitable implementation and guide decision making” (p. 18).

PBIS-Practices: “Interventions and strategies that are evidence-based and empirically supported in achieving indicated outcomes” (p. 18).

PBIS-Outcomes: “Academic and behavior targets or indicators that are locally meaningful, culturally relevant, specified, endorsed, emphasized, and monitored because of their social and educational significance” (p. 18).

Common Values/Vision: “A mission, purpose, or goal that is embraced by the majority of members of the organization, reflects shared needs, and serves as the basis for decision-making and action planning” (p. 9).

Common Language: “The terminology, phrases, and concepts that describe the organization’s vision, actions, and operations so that communications are understood, informative, efficient, effective, and relevant to members of the organization” (p. 9).

Common Experiences: “A set of actions, routines, procedures, or operations that are practiced and experienced by all members of the organization and include data feedback systems or loops to assess the quality of implementation and link activities to outcomes” (p. 9).

Quality Leadership: “Personnel, policies, structures, and processes that are organized and distributed to achieve and sustain the organization’s vision, language, and experience” (p. 9).

Implementation Fidelity: “Structures and procedures are in place to assess, ensure, and coordinate appropriate adoption and accurate and sustained implementation of evidence-based practices and systems in the context of assessment data regarding student responsiveness” (p. 12).

Leadership Team Implementation and Coordination: “Implementation of evidence-based practices and systems are guided, coordinated, and administered by a team comprised of representation from leadership, stakeholders, implementers, consumers, and content experts. This team is responsible for ensuring high implementation fidelity, management of resources, and data-based decision making” (p. 12).

Continuous Progress Monitoring: “Performance is reviewed on a frequent and regular schedule to identify the adequacy of growth trends, student responsiveness, fidelity of support implementation, and adaptations and modifications in supports” (p. 12).

Cultural and Contextual Relevance: “Implementation of evidence-based practices, systems, and associated data-based decision making are adapted to the content of the local culture such that characteristics and cultural leading histories of stakeholders, implementers, and consumers are embedded in a comprehensive and authentic manner” (p. 12).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter explored change theories and models that were developed before and/or laid the foundation for Fullan's (2020) framework. Positive school-wide discipline models are explored including the PBIS framework (OSEP, 2015) which underpinned this study along with Fullan's framework for change. PBIS Implementation in context, specifically in the high school setting is discussed. Finally, the need for effective change leadership through the PBIS implementation process are discussed, providing insight for sustainability of the PBIS implementation system in high schools amid complex change (Freeman et al., 2019; Fullan, 2020; Horner et al., 2010; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

#### **Change and PBIS**

Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture of change: producing the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively integrate new ideas and practices inside and outside of the organization (Fullan, 2004). Today's school leaders face complex problems and unique dilemmas, that do not have easy cookie-cutter answers (Horner et al., 2010; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Problems arise when our society has unrealistic expectations that leaders can provide solutions in a formulaic manner to these dynamic situations. Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) explain this sentiment based on their own experiences:

Too often students, educators, and families experience multiple new initiatives [opportunities for change] at once, each implemented in the hope that it will be the magic

potion that fixes many problems that afflict the school district. We know that Band-Aid solutions offered by many initiatives or standardized curriculum do not affect sustainable improvement and change. (p. 15)

It is imperative that our school leaders are provided with the support, tools, and capacity to lead successfully in today's unique environment(s) and fast pace; understanding the fundamentals and dynamics of change leadership is important to this success (Freeman et al., 2019; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

Change opportunities are not viewed as isolated events that require a solution; instead, they are anticipated and handled accordingly by living by and embodying Fullan's components for Effective Leadership (Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). In this regard, implementation of systems such as PBIS can become welcome opportunities for positive long-term change, not just another overwhelming, temporary initiative (Judkins et al., 2019). Fullan (2020) explained this notion when he says:

By effectively leading in a culture of change, leaders also develop greater courage (in themselves and others) to do even more...The most effective leaders become more courageous as a result of their experiences. Yet they retain their humility and empathy for others. The notion that courage becomes stronger and more evident as leaders develop is a powerful insight and phenomenon. (p. 13)

It is important to give voice to the high school leaders who are tasked with implementing and sustaining SWPBIS systems, and therefore are leading in a culture of change. Leading a school through the PBIS process requires effective leadership skills to ensure long-term, systematic change, which can be garnered through incorporating Fullan's (2020) change leadership

components (Judkins et al., 2019). Finally, it is important to provide a platform for high school principals to share their experiences with the implementation process of PBIS.

### **Change Theories and Models**

Fullan continuously scoured the research published on the change process and leading through change, including analyses of other scholars' work in his own research and expanding upon it. His first edition of *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001) was published 20 years ago, and he continues to adapt and improve his framework for leadership. He recently published the second edition of his work, which is updated to include research from the past 20 years and strives to provide realistic guidance to leaders in school buildings and educational settings who are awarded with the daunting role of leading schools and districts in our unique and increasingly challenging times and circumstances. Because he continues to pursue and research this topic so passionately, his framework is often referenced when implementing and leading through change, especially in the educational settings (Donaldson, 2001; Smith, 2008). Fullan (2004) explained that strong leadership means there is a focus in building leadership capacity of others:

For an organization to be strong, leadership must be developed at all levels of the organization. Effective leaders cultivate leadership in others. The main mark of an effective leader is how many effective leaders they leave behind...Ultimately, your leadership in a culture of change will be judged as effective or ineffective not by who you are as a leader but by what leadership you produce in others. (pp. 202-203)

Organizational change is ever present. School leaders are expected to revise and improve the systems in their schools that exist and, as necessary, to establish and implement new systems to improve the operation and success of the school (Freeman et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis,

2016). This feat is impossible if leaders view each arising challenge as one in its own isolated process, rather than a component of a much larger, more complicated system.

Leading in a school, especially in a dynamic and ever-changing culture is often messy and presents many challenges (Donaldson, 2001; Freeman et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008). Fullan provides a leadership framework that embraces and understands that change, especially in the educational school setting, is constant and will never be solved. Fullan's leadership framework, which is informed by and expands upon the work of many scholars, provides components that maximize opportunities for embracing organizational change in a positive, proactive, and productive way (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Smith, 2008). Further, the framework operates with the understanding that change exists and will occur, rather than addressing each issue reactively as a single, isolated problem or obstacle (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Smith, 2008). His leadership framework is not only applicable when in crisis mode; rather he provides tools that foster effective 'everyday leadership' as well as effective leadership through change processes (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Smith, 2008). There are three major change models (discussed in this chapter) that serve as a foundation for leadership through the change process which Fullan expanded upon in laying out his framework.

### ***Lewin's Three Stage Change Model***

Much of the early literature on organizational change reflects the assumption that change can be directed and orderly; and the outliers, individuals, and systems, that did not change in the prescribed manner were labeled as resistant to the change process (Burnes & Bargal, 2017; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Fullan, 2004; Kotter, 2012). Many of the earlier change models describe top-down or bottom-up, multiple step processes for managing or leading an organization through



transformational change. Rather than attempting to control or manage change as some models suggest; it is more important, as well as more successful, for leaders to attempt to understand the organizational change so they can lead it better (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008).

Kurt Lewin's (1947) three-stage model is considered by many to be the theoretical foundation of planned change management (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). His model involves three main steps for leading through and managing planned change: unfreezing, transition, and refreezing. Lewin (1947) noted that most people are "frozen" regarding change, meaning people are naturally resistant to change. So, the first step in his model is to 'unfreeze' this natural state of resistance and challenge complacency (Burnes & Bargal, 2017). Errida and Lotfi (2021) describe Lewin's unfreezing step as destabilizing the status quo by creating the need and buy-in for change. Lewin's second step, *transition*, is when the change occurs and involves moving to the desired future state (Burnes & Bargal, 2017; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). The final step, *refreezing* takes place after the implementation of the change has occurred and the new norm is adopted and institutionalized which results in new culture, behaviors, procedures, and practices (Burnes & Bargal, 2017; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Fullan, 2004).

Lewin's model for the change process served as a basis for other theories and frameworks that are developed later such as Havelock's (1973) Theory of Change and Kotter's (2012) Process of Creating Major Change among others (e.g., Burnes & Bargal, 2017; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Fullan, 2004). Fullan (2004) explained that the labeling of individuals and systems that did not change in the prescribed manner as "resistant" came from early change models such as Lewin's and Havelock's. This resistance is the reason understanding change and leading through the process of change are vital rather than attempting to manage and control the process. Leaders

must attempt to understand what their stakeholders are experiencing regarding the change process to move forward successfully. Labeling those who may be hesitant as resistant does not assist in progressing the process in today's complex society (Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012).

### ***Havelock's Theory of Change***

Havelock (1973) expanded Lewin's model into five or six steps and acknowledged that people generally resist change, so it must be intentionally planned (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004; Parker, 1980; Smith, 2008). Havelock also accounted for the fact that change must be managed, and his model incorporated this notion through planning and monitoring. Parker (1980) and Fullan (2004) explained the stages in Havelock's change model as follows: (a) *Needs Identification*, or finding a need and deciding to do something about it; (b) *Transformation into problem statements*, or attempting to define the problem; (c) *Developing user capability at problem solving*, or searching for promising solutions; (d) *User centered solution building*, or applying one or more promising solutions to the need; (e/f) *Problem solution summaries and establishment of ongoing user resource linkage*, or determining whether the problem is solved satisfactorily and *repeating the problem-solving cycle* if it is not.

While this process addressed change more thoroughly than Lewin's original model, it still lacked the ability to implement and sustain change over time (Parker, 1980). As society and organizations become more complex, implementing change becomes more of a process rather than a multi-step solution (Parker, 1980). The change process must be lead with care and not managed or controlled from a top-down or bottom-up, one-size-fits-all viewpoint to garner the most success. This means it is important for leaders to understand change, build relationships with stakeholders, ensure there is transparency and effective communication to increase buy-in,

and lead by example (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008).

### ***Kotter's Process of Creating Major Change***

Finally, another highly regarded and notable change management model is the one proposed by John Kotter (2012). His model includes aspects of the change process that others before him lacked, such as visionary planning and getting away from labeling stakeholders as resistant and focusing instead on the culture of the organization (Fullan, 2004; Kotter, 2012). Kotter (2012) explained the significance of an organization's culture on the change process:

One of the theories about change that has circulated widely over the past fifteen years might be summarized as follows: The biggest impediment to creating change in a group is culture...Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement...And that is why cultural change comes at the end of a transformation, not the beginning. (pp. 164–165)

Kotter's (2012) Process of Creating Major Change consists of eight steps to ensure a successful change process: (a) establish a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change, (b) create a guiding coalition, (c) develop a vision and strategy, (d) communicate the change vision, (e) empower broad-based action, (f) generate short-term wins, (g) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (h) anchor new approaches in the corporate culture. Although this model is more in-depth and provides a more modern means for implementing change, it is still initiating a top-down transformation (Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012). Sometimes, when implemented in this way, the change is still being controlled and managed rather than led because the leader has not

mobilized others to embrace the change. This model is widely used in business organizations successfully, however the education setting is better served by a model created specifically to target the unique circumstances and needs that come with leading schools (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012; Smith, 2008).

Fullan (2020) used Kotter's (2012) ideas in his effective leadership framework and expands on them, suggesting that as leaders it is important to lead through the change process, not attempt to solely deliver a solution. These models' steps are more solution oriented, targeted at the change issue at hand, rather than the leader and their ability to lead change effectively.

### ***Fullan's Effective Leadership Framework***

Fullan's Effective Leadership framework targets the leader and the development of leadership abilities and characteristics to effectively lead change, in any circumstance rather than an isolated event (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Smith, 2008). The framework encourages leaders to face the challenge of confronting problems that have not been successfully tackled (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Smith, 2008). Further, he encourages leaders to face the challenge by leading through the change process to take charge of the change, not solely focusing on solving the problem (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Smith, 2008). There are numerous solution-oriented change models, however, these address the issues more than they focus on shaping the leaders. Fullan (2004) explains:

It is more productive to develop your own mind-set based on the five core components of leadership, because you are more likely to internalize what makes for effective leadership in complex times. This makes it difficult for leaders because they will be pushed to provide solutions. In times of urgent problems and confusing circumstances, people demand leaders who can show the way...In other words, leaders, and members of the

organization, because they live in a culture of frenetic change, are vulnerable to seeking the comforting clarity of off-the-shelf solutions. If one doesn't work, there will be another one next year. (p. 54)

Even in times of uncertainty, standard, pre-conceived solutions for organizations cannot provide the information needed to understand unique contexts of the school environments, which is necessary to implement and lead change successfully in schools (Fullan, 2004; Smith, 2008).

Fullan's (2020) leadership framework challenges leaders to prepare in five major areas, training and equipping them to lead in complex circumstances. The model cultivates proactive rather than reactive leadership opportunities when complex change situations arrive. Change is inevitable, especially in schools. When leaders implement Fullan's approach to leadership and strive each day to embody the five components, they will be ready for the challenges as they come and therefore will be able to lead their stakeholders with a level head rather than panic or worry. This model aligns with purposes of this study for this reason; rather than a change model that focuses on addressing situations and scenarios that arise, it addresses the tasks of making the decision and choosing to always lead a proactive way. "Complex systems have both the ability to respond adaptively, and the stability needed to enable them to survive" (Fullan, 2004, p. 57).

Fullan's (2020) leadership framework is based upon five components: moral purpose, understanding change (nuance), relationships, knowledge building and deep learning, and coherence making. These five components can be seen in leaders who are enthusiastic, energetic, and hopeful. According to Fullan (2020), the energy-enthusiasm/courage-hope/relentlessness constellation, are personal characteristics that all effective leaders should possess. Further, there is a vibrant give-and-take relationship between these and the five leadership components. Energetic-enthusiastic/courageous-hopeful/relentless leaders cause greater moral purpose in

themselves, tackle change head on, naturally build relationships and share knowledge, and seek coherence to strengthen moral purpose (Fullan, 2020). The leaders are responsible for the characteristics and themes of the framework. Members, or followers, are responsible for a level of commitment to both the leader and their vision. Their commitments exist on two levels: external and internal (Argyris, 2000; Fullan, 2020). The result of the leader-follower relationship in the dynamics of this framework is that there will be more positive change opportunities in schools and less stagnant, incomplete initiatives (Fullan, 2020).

**Moral Purpose.** Moral purpose is acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society (Fullan, 2020). To be effective in complex times, leaders must be guided by moral purpose because it is critical to the long-term success of all organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2000; Fullan, 2020). Leaders with moral purpose are authentic and lead with integrity (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), striving to improve the quality of how we live together as a society.

An effective leader with moral purpose must have specific qualities which include: a making-a-difference sense of purpose; they use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems; they must be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success; and be assessed by the extent to which it awakens people's intrinsic commitment, the mobilizing of everyone's sense of moral purpose (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004; Pascale et al., 2000). Moral purpose is one of the key elements for sustainability in an organization; it creates passion and purpose in an organization because workers *want to know* the enabling purpose of their work (Fullan, 2004; Pascale et al., 2000). To this effect it is important to figure out which groups might be weary of or concerned with the change and engage their participation, to achieve a collective moral purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Nuance: Understanding Change.** According to Fullan (2020) effective change and nuance go hand in hand the more complex societies become. “Understanding change means understanding [the people you are leading]. The more complex the change, the more that people with the problem must be part of the change” (Fullan, 2020, p. 45). Fullan (2020) provides nine strategies for becoming change savvy: (a) be right at the end of the meeting, (b) relationships first, (c) acknowledge the implementation dip, (d) accelerate as you go, (e) beware of [over ambitious] plans, (f) behaviors before beliefs, (g) communication during implementation is paramount, (h) excitement prior to implementation is fragile, and (i) become a lead learner. When leaders embrace these strategies, they will appreciate the change process more and therefore approach it more realistically (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Mintzberg, 2004).

Understanding change is essential for effective leadership; understanding and respecting the complexities of change creates more successful leaders, as well as leaders with a deeper moral purpose (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Most change occurs as a response to a problem internally or externally and, when the response to the problem is immediate, reflexive, and unmanaged other problems arise rather than the original problem solved (Badaracco, 2002; Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Fullan, 2004). Fullan encourages leaders to understand the change (problem) and come up with a means to addressing the actual issue with a long-term plan, rather than a quick-fix-solution (Badaracco, 2002; Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Fullan, 2004).

**Relationships.** Quality relationships and focused teamwork that leads to high quality collaboration results in success (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000). The single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). This is impossible without

specific, intentional, and meaningful collaboration. Fullan (2020), calling on Donohoo et al.'s (2018) research on collective work, describes four factors that are imperative to effective, high-quality collaboration, and therefore to building quality relationships and focused teamwork (Donohoo et al., 2018). The four factors are to focus on powerful levers, enable all to engage, use peers to strengthen practice, and appoint leaders who participate in strengthening what works (Donohoo et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020).

When relationships improve there is a positive yield on all other things (R. Lewin & Regine, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). This requires good collaborative work because then ideas do not have to be imposed, instead they are built into the culture (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner 2007; Newmann et al., 2000; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Meaningful collaborative work is built into the daily culture, it is more specific and addresses both pedagogical and emotional support as well as directly links to student learning (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Newmann et al., 2000). Many educational scholars agree that effective leaders facilitate meaningful interactions and purposeful problem solving and are mindful when harmony is too easily achieved (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004; Kouzes & Posner 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008).

**Knowledge Building and Deep Learning.** Knowledge building and deep learning engages students and employees in pursuing knowledge, engaging in problem-solving, and sharing the learning (Fullan, 2004, 2020; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Effective leaders foster the increase of knowledge both inside and outside of their organization since it plays a crucial role in all the components of the effective leadership framework. To foster an environment where followers want to share knowledge they have to trust in their leader's moral purpose and feel that



the exchange of information legitimate because information becomes valuable in a social context (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Fullan, 2020).

Knowledge and data sharing without the relationship component is not meaningful or relevant because turning information into knowledge is a social process (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Fullan, 2020). Creating and sharing knowledge increases relevance and when stakeholders are included in the knowledge sharing process their trust and buy-in also increase (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008). Knowledge building and deep learning plays a crucial role in all the components of Fullan's leadership framework since knowledge at every level is essential.

**Coherence Making.** The final component in Fullan's (2020) framework of leadership is coherence making, which is described as a "perennial pursuit." Coherence making is "the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work through purposeful day-to-day interaction" (Fullan & Quinn, 2015, p. 1). Essentially, to achieve consensus, leaders must acknowledge differences of opinion and collectively guide stakeholders through the differences throughout the change process (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). They must do this while embodying all the effective leadership components and leading from the middle rather than the top or bottom (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Further making coherence is often more successful when leaders are focused on the outcomes to maintain forward movement (Fullan, 2004). "Making coherence includes aligning policies and coordinating strategies for changing directions, assessment, professional development, and so on" (Fullan, 2004, p. 166). All the components of Fullan's framework work together to achieve successful coherence making, which is vital to successful change leadership.

**Results: “More good things happen; fewer bad things happen” and Energy, Enthusiasm, & Hope.** The outcome of effective leadership is that more good things happen, and fewer bad things happen (Fullan, 2020). Fullan (2020) explained in most cases,

effective leaders make people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively. They are always hopeful, conveying a sense of optimism and an attitude of never giving up in the pursuit of highly valued goals. Their enthusiasm and confidence are...infectious. (p. 7)

Moral purpose and the other components in Fullan’s leadership framework are dependent upon stakeholders’ beliefs that the leader will act in their best interest, both as a group and organization. Conceptually, moral purpose is driven by the ethical duty to do what is right, which essentially is what authentic leadership is centered on as well. The drive to do morally and ethically what is right, according to Fullan’s framework and authentic leadership, is critical to long-term success and effectiveness of the leader, stakeholders, and organization (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Further, Fullan (2004), as well as other scholars, explained that leadership is needed for the problems that do not have easy answers and is vital to successful change implementation:

The conclusion is that leaders will increase their effectiveness if they continually work on the five components of leadership with energy, enthusiasm, and hope: if they pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building and sharing, and strive for coherence. The rewards and benefits are enormous. It is an exciting proposition. The culture of change beckons. (p. 8)

When school leaders embody these leadership components and ideals, stakeholders naturally have more buy-in and trust in their leadership and less reservations because they have greater

moral purpose, face change head on, and naturally build relationships and knowledge to seek coherence (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2018).

### **School-Wide Discipline Plans**

According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2008), the use of effective school-wide discipline has produced impressive results in schools in Virginia and the implementation of a positive school-wide discipline system has successfully reduced numerous school-related problems. As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school districts in many states nationwide, including Virginia, began implementing school-wide discipline models to address national achievement concerns (VDOE, 2008). Two fundamental goals the VDOE established for schools in Virginia assures all students have access to the general education curriculum and have an equal opportunity to succeed (VDOE, 2008). In public K-12 schools, however, disproportionality in student discipline and loss of instructional time continue to be prominent issues because of exclusionary discipline practices nationwide (OCR, 2021). As stated earlier, students missed over 11 million days of school 2018 because of serving out-of-school suspensions. Students with disabilities, Black students, and male students were found to be 2–3 times more likely to be disciplined than their peers (OCR, 2021). A school-wide discipline plan could help ensure the two fundamental goals, access to the general education curriculum and equal opportunity to succeed, among others, are achieved.

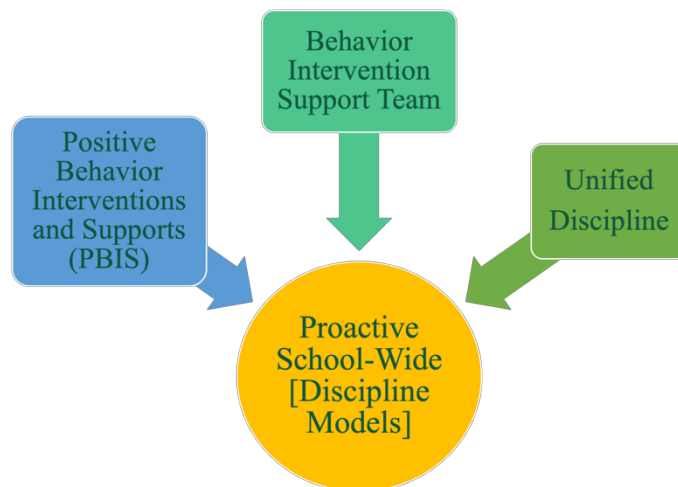
A school-wide discipline plan is one that outlines clear school expectations, encourages positive reinforcement for appropriate school behavior, appropriate consequences for misconduct, and is agreed upon by all faculty and staff implementing and supporting the plan (Freeman et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Horner et al., 2020). Positive discipline approaches represent a fundamental change in the ways schools respond to

students with learning and behavior problems (Freeman et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Horner et al., 2020; VDOE, 2008). Inevitably by establishing a positive school-wide discipline plan student achievement rates increase, the number of student behavior problems decline, attendance improves, and school climate is enhanced (Freeman et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Horner et al., 2020; VDOE, 2008).

Empirically, the most successful school-wide discipline models are different variations of proactive school-wide behavior management plans (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001). There are a variety of ways a school-wide discipline plan can be implemented. Ideally, the models are intended for school-wide implementation and creation as a collaborative effort to solicit stakeholder input and buy-in (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001). However, components used within the models can be implemented within classroom settings if the school-wide approach is not viable (Boulden, 2010). Figure 4 represents three common school-wide discipline models supported through research that support a proactive school-wide discipline approach (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001).

**Figure 4**

*Proactive School-Wide Discipline Models*



Three common school-wide discipline models supported through research are the Behavior Intervention Support Team Program Model, the Unified Discipline Model, and the PBIS Model (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001). While each has unique features, these models support a proactive school-wide discipline approach. Each of the models can be used in schools as the model for a school's discipline plan, the basis for a discipline plan, or used on smaller scales for support of at-risk students and creating and implementing behavior plans (Boulden, 2010). Each of the models takes a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to school-wide discipline, where the goal is to attempt to prevent behavior problems through positive and engaging learning experiences (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001). Proactive school-wide discipline plans use a positive, proactive approach to school-wide discipline to foster a positive learning environment, while encouraging and teaching positive behavior rather than reacting to bad behavior with potentially meaningless and/or severe punishments that do not necessarily teach them the appropriate behaviors (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001).

### ***Behavior Intervention Support Team Program Model***

The Behavior Intervention Support Team program is a multi-level, proactive school-wide behavior management plan. This model emphasizes the facilitation and support of meaningful relationships and high expectations throughout schools through partnerships with students and parents (Boulden, 2010). The Behavior Intervention Support Team model provides teachers, counselors, and administrators with proactive strategies to respond to students exhibiting disruptive behavior by assessing and providing what is needed, rather than what is thought to be deserved (Boulden, 2010; Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019).

This model was developed to provide stakeholders with the tools necessary to create a positive and engaging learning environment for all students. The primary goals of the Behavior Intervention Support Team model are to prevent inappropriate behavior, reduce ongoing patterns of disruptive behavior, teach skills for success in school and life, and enhance improved academic performance for all students (Boulden, 2010). Like other models for school-wide discipline plans, the Behavior Intervention Support Team model provides a multi-level approach, which can be implemented within single or multiple classroom settings, despite its initial design as a school-wide discipline plan model (Boulden, 2010; Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019).

Key attributes of the Behavior Intervention Support Team model, as with others, included the following: clarifying expectations for faculty members, establishing clear and consistent rules, teaching expectations to all students, enhancing student social and problem-solving skills, affording students the opportunity to practice expectations, and reinforcing appropriate behavior (Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019). Appropriate behavior reinforcement through the Behavior Intervention Support Team model is typically addressed through “intense levels of assessment for students who need more teaching and practice to develop social and behavioral skills and increasing levels of intervention matched to the types of skill deficits exhibited and needs identified” (Boulden, 2010, p. 18).

Early identification of inappropriate behavior and intervention are essential to the effective implementation of Behavior Intervention Support Team because it provides the necessary structure and consistency which is integral to offer support to students (Boulden, 2010; Marr et al., 2002). The most important feature of the Behavior Intervention Support Team model is the collaborative teamwork among all stakeholders, which includes teachers, students, parents,

and administrators (Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019; Marr et al., 2002). The framework offered by the Behavior Intervention Support Team model encourages open communication among stakeholders and provides meaningful opportunities for support (Boulden, 2010; Cressey, et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019). “A key element of Behavior Intervention Support Team model is the establishment of an ongoing partnership between school personnel and Behavior Intervention Support Team consultants who meet monthly with school personnel to provide professional development training and support” (Boulden, 2010, p. 20). Stakeholder support is required for the success of a Behavior Intervention Support Team discipline model; however, when districts invest in this program, they receive a partnership that offers meaningful professional development and support to stakeholders within the school and community (Boulden, 2010; Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019).

### ***Unified Discipline Model***

The Unified Discipline Model has four integral components that establish a collaborative and proactive school-wide discipline model. The model focused on encouraging appropriate behavior and correcting misbehavior by focusing on the behavior and corrective measurements rather than solely the punishment (White et al., 2001, p. 4). The Unified Discipline Model exposed students to a united, caring, firm, and determined action plan (White et al., 2001). The model contains interrelated objectives integral to establish effective implementation: unified attitudes, expectations, correction procedures, and team roles (White et al., 2001).

To establish unified attitudes, all participants (teachers, administrators, and other personnel) must adopt consistent points of view about encouraging appropriate behavior and correcting misbehavior (Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019; White et al., 2001). It is important that faculty members collectively agree on what consists of appropriate behavior and

collaborate to devise a plan for consistently addressing misbehavior accordingly. Failure to establish these unified attitudes can result in confusion among students and inconsistencies in the enforcement of the discipline plan (White et al., 2001).

White et al. (2001) explain the importance of establishing unified expectations in terms of the necessity for alignment between school-wide rules, classroom rules, and classroom procedures. Individual teachers should establish classroom rules and procedures; however, these rules and procedures should not contradict those established in the school-wide discipline plan (Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019). Similarly, it is important to establish unified correction procedures, where collective agreement among all stakeholders (faculty and administrative leadership team) is reached on the steps and procedure for addressing misbehavior.

Establishing unified team roles is the fourth component of unified discipline models. Clear roles and responsibilities must be established for this model to be effective and garner support and buy-in from stakeholders (White et al., 2001). According to White et al. (2001), “an effective discipline program requires intervention that is firm and caring without overly emotional responses” (p. 60). Like the Behavior Intervention Support Team and PBIS models, a collaborative process is required for setting up a Unified Discipline Model. Perhaps one of the most defining attributes for the Unified Discipline Models is the notion that consequences for misbehavior and rule breaking are no longer prescriptive with set-out punishments that fit the misbehavior—that is, all student who violate  $x$  rule, will receive  $y$  punishment (White et al., 2001). Instead, the administrative teams, in collaboration with other stakeholders, determine disciplinary consequences on a case-by-case basis (White et al., 2001).

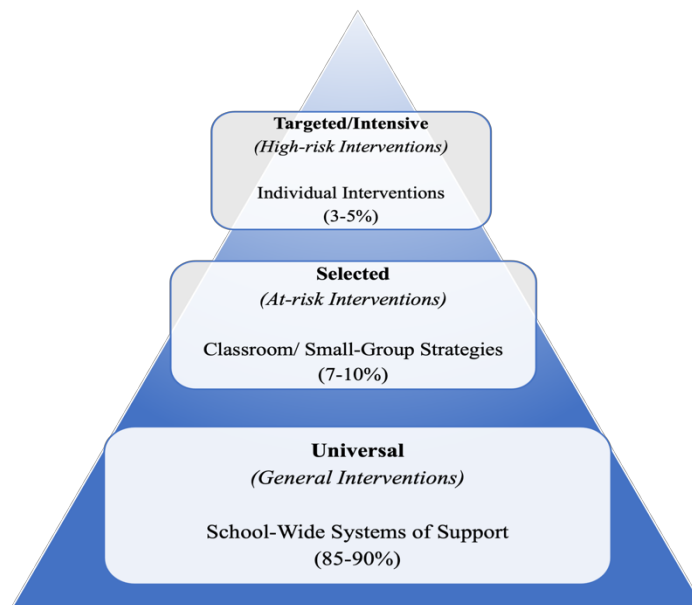


## ***PBIS***

Over the last 10 years, PBIS has grown in popularity nationwide and many school divisions have implemented the model across their schools. While it has taken hold quickly in the elementary level, there is a trend toward implementing the PBIS model in high school settings as well (Cressey et al., 2014; Judkins et al., 2019). Partnerships with school divisions designed to provide support for successful implementation and institutionalization, such as the Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) have provided support for schools. Figure 5 represents the Three-Tiered Model of School-Wide Discipline Strategies used to describe the PBIS, which is adapted from Sprague et al.'s (1999) article, "Using Office Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate School-Wide Discipline and Violence Prevention Interventions" (p. 7).

### **Figure 5**

*Three-Tiered Model of School-Wide Discipline Strategies*



*Note.* This represents the Three-Tiered Model of School-Wide Discipline Strategies, which is a tiered systems of support model. Part of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model is based on a three-tiered systems of support model like this one. Adapted from "Using Office Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate School-Wide Discipline and Violence Prevention Interventions" by J. R. Sprague, G. Sugai, R. Horner, & H. Walker, 1999, p. 7.

As shown in Figure 5, the Three-Tiered Model of School-Wide Discipline Strategies, which is a basis for part of the PBIS Model, is a three-tiered model that uses positive, preventative practices. The model uses a pyramid (three-tiered) structure to identify the level of support, strategies, and interventions that might be needed to facilitate positive behavior and maximize an effective learning environment (Sprague et al., 1999). The use of specific school data by the PBIS leadership team to design, monitor, and assess interventions implemented through the PBIS system is a central feature of the framework (Clonan et al., 2007). School-based PBIS leadership teams include members from each grade level or content area and specialization areas or are representative of the staff in the school; these members meet with the administrative team regularly to review building data for the development, implementation, and monitoring of intervention strategies (Clonan et al., 2007). Available school data can be used to identify problematic behaviors and trends, settings, and to assess pre and post intervention change with continuous monitoring and re-assessment. This model can be applied to universal-level interventions as well as selected group(s) and indicated individual levels (Clonan et al., 2007).

The three-tiered structure of the model allows for differentiated and focused support to students depending upon the tier/level they are identified with. The “Universal” level encompasses all students. At this level about 85-90% of students are successful through the school-wide systems of support. The six components of the school-wide systems of support are “social skills teaching, positive and proactive discipline, teaching school behavior expectations, active supervision and monitoring, positive reinforcement systems, and firm, fair, and corrective discipline” (Sprague et al., 1999, p. 7).

Approximately 7-10% of student supports and interventions are “at-risk,” and as such are identified in the “Selected” tier of the pyramid model. The supports and interventions the students receive are tiered, while the students themselves are not. Students receiving these interventions are supported through classroom and small-group strategies in addition to the school-wide systems of support. The classroom and small-group strategies incorporate focused support through “intensive social skills teaching, self-management programs, increased academic support, and adult mentors that check-in with students” (Sprague et al., 1999, p. 7).

The third tier is composed of the 3-5% of students that are identified as “high-risk.” If identified in the “Targeted/Intensive” tier, students receive support through case-by-case individual interventions in addition to classroom/small group strategies and the school-wide systems of support (Sprague et al., 1999). Sprague et al. (1999) explain that case-by-case individual interventions include: intensive social skills teaching, individual behavior management plans, parent training and collaboration, and multi-agency collaboration (wrap around).

Many school disciplinary actions remain exclusionary and are often viewed as punitive and reactive (e.g., suspension, expulsion, time-out), PBIS is viewed as proactive and uses positive, preventative practices (Clonan et al. 2007; OCR, 2021). School-based PBIS teams meet on a regular basis to review specific building and student data to develop, implement, and monitor intervention activities to address and reduce issues such as disproportionality, and therefore enhance and increase quality instruction time (Clonan et al. 2007, pp. 20-21). The PBIS model focuses on fostering positive, encouraging, and highly engaging learning environments, where students will be immersed in the academic components of their classes so they will be deterred from misbehavior (Clonan et al., 2007).

## **Common Characteristics and Best Practices for Effective School-Wide Discipline Models**

Whether a school implements a specific school-wide discipline model or chooses to design a plan rooted in components from multiple models, there are common characteristics that should be incorporated to ensure meaningful and effective implementation. According to research conducted by Colvin et al. (1994), there are six common and essential characteristics of effective school-wide discipline models. While this research study focused specifically on the PBIS framework since it underpins the study's conceptual framework; and in Virginia schools PBIS is the behavioral component of VTSS, as the VDOE has partnered with VTSS to promote and support PBIS implementation across Virginia schools (VDOE, 2022). These characteristics can be found in each of the three discipline models discussed. Further, they can be incorporated in any school-wide discipline plan that is created through a collaborative process. "Because teachers and administrators are invested in instruction, an 'instructional approach' to establishing a school-wide discipline plan appears to 'neutralize' extreme approaches to managing problem behaviors" (Colvin et al., 1994, p. 369). Using an instructional approach roots the discipline model in the effort to provide the most effective and efficient positive learning environments for engaging students (Colvin et al., 1994).

First, effective school-wide discipline plans, such as PBIS, use a proactive, rather than reactive, consistent approach to discipline that garners stakeholder buy-in and support (Colvin et al., 1994; Yell & Rozalki, 2008). Second, school discipline must be viewed as an instructional tool for student success, which enables instruction and enhances both the learning and learning environment (Colvin et al., 1994; Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014). Third, the school-wide discipline plan must include positive and preventative, rather than reactionary, strategies to manage problem behaviors (Colvin et al., 1994; Yell & Rozalki, 2008). Fourth, effectively

implementing a proactive school-wide discipline plan and introducing a change agent, such as a PBIS, requires a shift in mindset and thinking toward a more positive, preventative, problem-solving approach to discipline (Colvin et al., 1994; Yell & Rozalki, 2008). Fifth, active involvement and support from the building leadership (administrative) team is essential for success and effectiveness (Colvin et al., 1994; Ylimaki, 2014). Finally, collegial commitments to change and participate are integral to the success of an effective school-wide plan because they directly correlate with building culture and maintaining trusting relationships (Colvin et al., 1994; Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014). Further, there must be a plan for providing meaningful and effective staff development along the way as well as a teacher change strategy that targets teacher efficacy and collegiality (Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014). When the leadership team embodies Fullan's (2020) effective leadership components, and mindfully and proactively lead their building/ stakeholders through the change process of PBIS implementation, these six common and essential characteristics of effective school-wide discipline models can be met successfully (Colvin et al., 1994; Fullan, 2020; Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014).

The common characteristics of successful school-wide discipline models align with essential best practices for implementing effective school-wide discipline plans (Colvin et al., 1994; Villa et al., 2005). Failure to foster these characteristics can be detrimental to the efficacy of the plan. Administrative support, meaningful and ongoing professional development, relevant collaboration, effective and meaningful communication, instructional responsiveness, and consistency within the school-wide discipline model are best practices that will help foster stakeholder buy-in and ultimately a highly engaged, high-achieving student body (Villa et al., 2005). An administrative team with Fullan's (2020) strong leadership skills, high expectations and administrators that hold people accountable, while emphasizing the value of meaningful

professional development and relevant collaboration among staff members will have more success implementing a school-wide discipline plan (Villa et al., 2005).

Effective, meaningful, open communication among teachers and between stakeholder groups and the administrative leadership team provides the foundation of trust needed to establish and maintain a positive and effective school climate and culture (Villa et al., 2005). Instructional responsiveness includes attentiveness to the emotional, academic, and physical needs of the student, which leads to an increase in occasions for students to be successful since planning for deep and complete engagement of all students is more thorough and more intentional (Villa et al., 2005). Finally, consistency among best practices and within the school-wide discipline model is essential to the integrity and success of the plan. If collective buy-in and consistent implementation do not exist, trust will decline and stakeholders feel devalued (Villa et al., 2005).

When implemented, aligned, and supported appropriately, proactive school-wide discipline models have the potential to improve the learning environment and foster high student achievement (Colvin et al., 1994; Fullan, 2020; Villa et al., 2005). The ideas and theories behind proactive school-wide discipline models are sound and difficult to argue with, however, the improper implementation and management steps of the plans are where these models can lose value (Colvin et al., 1994; Fullan, 2020; Villa et al., 2005; Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014). Unless there is absolutely no turnover in a building, it is reasonable to assume that each year the plan would be remediated to all faculty to ensure new members are aware of procedures, and their role in the collaborative process of plan implementation based upon the key characteristics and best practice emphasis on continuous professional development, and a collaborative

development process to foster stakeholder buy-in (Colvin et al., 1994; Fullan, 2020; Villa et al., 2005; Yell & Rozalki, 2008; Ylimaki, 2014).

### **PBIS: A Deeper Look at Implementation in High Schools**

PBIS is a widely used, culturally responsive framework to address school-wide student prevention and intervention activities (Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; OSEP, 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006). As the field of education, and roles within it, continue to evolve, so should our models for discipline within schools. PBIS provides an alternative to reactive, punishment-oriented, exclusionary models that exist in many of our nation's schools (Colvin et al., 1994). Further, Colvin et al. (1994) claimed:

Proactive school-wide discipline models [PBIS] help to (a) utilize instructional procedures to teach and manage social behaviors, (b) treat problem behaviors as skill deficits and teach appropriate skills, (c) consider and respond to incidental or less frequent problem behaviors in similar ways as academic errors, and (d) re-direct students toward appropriate behavior, [which collectively increase academic achievement and success in schools]. (p. 379)

There are many research studies and discussions of PBIS implementation in the elementary and middle school levels. There is an increased need for sound research of PBIS implementation in the high school setting since PBIS implementation in the high schools has grown nationwide over the past ten years, therefore increasing the understanding of the challenges and new initiatives unique to high (Flannery et al., 2018).

#### ***PBIS in Context***

Effective PBIS organizations have four defining features: common vision/values, common language, common experiences, and quality leadership (Crone & Horner, 2003; OSEP,

2015; Sugai, 2014). Different approaches have been developed to address and meet the unique needs of high schools and their students (Flannery et al., 2018). As the number of high schools implementing PBIS continues to increase, there is a greater understanding of the unique characteristics of high schools that affect effective implementation of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2018). There are some unique challenges at the high school level, specifically contextual factors such as school size, school culture, and the age of the students that should be considered during initiation and implementation of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2018). However, according to *The Center on PBIS: High School PBIS* (2021a), the same critical features apply across school levels. It is important to note that the key elements of PBIS do not change at the high school level; implementation simply addresses contextual factors: school size, school culture, and the age of the students unique to high school settings (Center on PBIS, 2021a).

The importance of addressing these unique contextual factors directly correlates with the effectiveness of the administrators leading the change process, since the principal strongly influences the likelihood of the change process. As with implementation at other levels,

a representative school leadership team works with administrators, school personnel, and students to: (a) identify and monitor school-wide outcomes, (b) develop systems to support and sustain implementation, (c) implement evidence-based practices to create positive social and learning environments, and (d) develop data management systems to monitor progress and make decisions. (Center on PBIS, 2021a, para. 1)

According to *The Center on PBIS: High School PBIS* (2021a) the major difference with implementation in high schools is that the school's context carries an equally important weight. The three primary contextual influences that must be considered in high schools are: school size, school culture, and the age of the students. High schools are large and complex, with



representatively large administrative teams and faculty that is typically grouped by content/ departments rather than grade levels (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018). In some departments, there is a mixture of grade levels represented in classes. These factors can present challenges for PBIS implementation when attempting to build consistency and predictability (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018).

The organizational culture in high schools is made up of the values, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs held by the stakeholders (Center on PBIS, 2021a). In high schools it is not uncommon to find faculty that feel like teaching social skills/ behaviors or study strategies is not as high of a priority as the academic pieces (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018). The challenge for leaders in this situation is to garner buy-in and understanding that teaching and modeling appropriate social skills/behaviors as well as other academic support skills is vital to academic success, which ties into the schools' vision, mission, and values (Flannery et al., 2018). The SWPBIS framework focuses on changing the school environment by improving systems and procedures such as discipline, data management, office referrals, training, and leadership and creating positive environments for enhanced student engagement through collective buy-in of students and staff alike (Bosworth et al., 2018; Judkins et al, 2019; Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

Finally, the age of high school students provides a unique contextual influence as well since typically high school students expect to have input on decisions impacting their experience (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important for high school PBIS leadership teams to include students and facilitate their involvement in the implementation process at all levels where it is feasible. Using climate survey data and creating a student survey for the purpose of PBIS implementation are great ways to include student's voices and validate their desire and need to be heard (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018).

## **Principal Leadership and Implementation**

Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) explained, “Leadership determines if a school has a significant purpose and whether it meets that purpose effectively” (p. 14). Therefore, the principal and their leadership team serve vital roles in ensuring the schools’ success on every level. The principal sets the tone and serves as the barometer for how to handle tasks, challenges, change, and so forth. If the leader is unsettled, that feeling will quickly spread through the staff, students, and other stakeholders; however, if the principal takes these things in stride and with a success-driven positive attitude, the ripple effect is much more beneficial (Donaldson, 2001; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

In today’s culture, people have access to information all the time and can get answers at the push of a button. Cell phones and the internet on mobile devices have created a desire for immediate answers and have made us a less patient society. John Kotter (2012) explained the how increasing rate of change heavily affects society:

The rate of change in the world, [especially in education], is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up over the next few decades. Enterprises everywhere will be presented with even more terrible hazards and wonderful opportunities, driven by globalization of the economy along with related technological and social trends. (p. 169)

School leaders, especially in the high school setting, are faced daily with this reality as stakeholders are constantly “connected” and influenced by the demand for immediate answers all the time. These societal demands can compound the angst educators may feel during opportunities of change, especially if there is not a strong and effective leader.

An effective leader is essential for moving their school through these opportunities successfully, and in establishing buy-in from stakeholders and building a positive school culture (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). “Major change is never successful unless the complacency level is low” (Kotter, 2012, p. 170). Furthermore, as Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) explained, the principal sets the tone and has the greatest influence on a school’s culture, and this is successful when communication regularly occurs and is facilitated across and within all stakeholder groups. “When school leaders embrace the opportunity to lead with heart, healthy relationships unfold within the community, inspiring practices that are in children’s best interests. With a leader’s impact and direction, these relationships underpin the culture of a school” (p. 14). If leaders cultivate a leadership mindset that is proactively rooted in leading through change processes while using Fullan’s (2020) Leadership Framework, then trust is established by stakeholders and there is less reason to feel weary of the leader’s motives. All stakeholders are affected by the school culture, so it is imperative that school leaders have effective interactions because these interactions can be considered the most important non-negotiable in creating thriving schools (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

“The core elements of PBIS are integrated within organizational systems in which teams, working with administrators and behavior specialists, provide training, policy support and organizational supports needed for (a) initial implementation, (b) active application, and (c) sustained use of the core elements” (Sugai & Horner, 2009). In literature surrounding PBIS implementation there are recurring themes of the significance and importance of administrative support/leadership; collective/whole staff buy-in; and meaningful, high-quality training/leadership development. Goodman-Scott et al. (2017), conducted a case study on PBIS implementation in an urban middle school, in which results included “positive school outcomes

and the emergence of five themes: the importance of administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, creating consistency, building community, and school counselor integration” (p. 97). Administrative support has been identified as one of the most significant predictors in PBIS sustainability (Mathews et al., 2014). Administrative support demonstrates to the teachers and staff that the administration believes in and has buy-in to the program. Additionally, administrative support or perceived support has a direct correlation with staff buy-in (Mathews et al., 2014).

### ***Effective Change Leadership and PBIS Implementation***

Facilitating change in schools requires the leadership, time, and skills of a number of educators in the school community. While the principal usually initiates change activities such as implementing a new program or initiative or reform, the planning and the daily monitoring of the implementation becomes the purview of the teams of school personnel. (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 409)

It has become increasingly clear across the research that Fullan’s change model and effective leadership attributes may aid in promoting efficient and successful implementation of SWPBIS systems. Leading with these attributes creates administrative support, solicits, and sets the precedent for whole staff buy-in, and promotes quality training and leadership, which are all said to be vital to implementation success and sustainability of the SWPBIS system (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Judkins et al., 2019). Stakeholders buy-in and support, and strong leadership is critical to successful PBIS implementation and sustainability (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017). Further, successful implementation of all school-wide initiatives relies heavily on school leaders to facilitate conditions needed for success (Judkins et al., 2019).

Research has described the importance of various school staff as leaders in PBIS implementation, particularly the PBIS school leadership team and school administrators, such as the principal (Bohanon et al., 2006; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Weiland et al., 2014). The *PBIS Blueprint* (OSEP, 2015) defines Leadership Team Implementation and Coordination as follows: “Implementation of evidence-based practices and systems are guided, coordinated, and administered by a local team comprised of representation from leadership, stakeholders, implementers, consumers, and content experts. This team is responsible for ensuring high implementation fidelity, management of resources, and data-based decision making” (p. 12). Instructional leadership is having the capacity to facilitate, nurture, and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust-process oriented learning, and high expectations (Ylimaki, 2014). Yell and Rozalki (2008) explained:

Administrators and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that their students attend schools that have safe and orderly environments where they can receive a meaningful education. To do this, educational personnel need to develop school-wide discipline plans and behavior support programs that define, teach, and reinforce appropriate behavior while discouraging and reducing inappropriate behaviors. School-wide discipline programs should focus on a positive, proactive, problem-solving model for promoting appropriate behavior and discouraging inappropriate behavior. (p. 15)

Effective leaders ensure that the school mission is aligned to the PBIS implementation plan and uses it as a means for fostering a positive culture and climate for the optimal learning environment for stakeholders (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Ylimaki, 2014).

“PBIS school leaders can provide a unique, in-depth perspective on PBIS implementation due to their familiarity and involvement with the process” (Goodman-Scott et al., 2017, p. 100).

Essentially, school leaders, their effectiveness in leading through change processes, and their dedication to the successful implementation and institutionalization strongly determine the trajectory of the PBIS model. It is essential for the team to promote buy-in and collective participation/building support. Continuous Progress Monitoring, where “performance is reviewed on a frequent and regular schedule to identify the adequacy of growth trends, student responsiveness, fidelity of support implementation, and adaptations and modifications in supports,” is extremely vital to maintaining fidelity of the system (OSEP, 2015, p. 12).

### **Summary**

“Schools are complex organizations, and school leaders have a myriad of daily responsibilities including a mandate to develop and maintain a safe and supportive climate that promotes learning” (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 410). Research over the past few decades has clarified that the leadership provided by the principal is crucial to the success of the school and therefore the success of the implementation of initiatives (Judkins et al., 2019; Leithwood et al., 2008). Michael Fullan (2020) explains that effective leadership and leading in a culture of change involve qualities that are below the surface, not simply confidence, presence, and articulation. This framework for effective leadership is essential for school leaders, especially for those leading PBIS implementation since his framework is designed for successfully leading complex change. When aligned, the framework for effective leadership can positively affect the change process presented when SWPBIS systems are implemented. “When schools implement PBIS, they start by implementing it school-wide. Three critical features—systems, practices, and data—work together to promote positive, predictable, safe environments for everyone in all school settings” (Center on PBIS, 2021b). “Further, as PBIS implementation is dependent on

school leaders, their perspectives can elucidate the processes and outcomes of implementation” (Goodman-Scott et al., 2017, p. 98).

Studies suggest there is limited qualitative research examining PBIS implementation in secondary schools, especially research that uses perceptions of the school leaders including in-depth interviews, which highlights the need for this type of research (Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Judkins et al., 2019; Leithwood et al., 2007). Further, there are limited qualitative research studies on PBIS implementation and leaders’ roles in, and perceptions of, the process. The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what kind of leader attributes and actions facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. There is a need for further research that provides more context and a voice to school leaders implementing PBIS to provide a more in-depth understanding of the change process and principals’ perceptions of their role in and effect on the process.

This study examined principals’ perceptions of the change process, as well as how their leadership attributes embody the components of the effective leadership framework. The findings may provide a deeper understanding of the SWPBIS implementation process in high schools by surfacing the voices of the people who are tasked with leading the complexity of this change at that level. There is a critical need for more rigorous research to guide the work of implementing this framework at the high school level; specifically, that investigates the impact of the unique contextual characteristics of high schools, integrated systems of support, the overall implementation process, and factors related to sustainability (Freeman et al., 2019; Fullan, 2020; Horner et al., 2010; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation process of a SWPBIS and high school principal perceptions of leader attributes and actions that facilitate and challenge a school-wide change to implement PBIS successfully. I used Fullan's (2020) Framework for Effective Leadership model and the PBIS (OSEP, 2015) Implementation Framework model to create the Conceptual Framework that guided this study. Mixed method research relies on both quantitative and qualitative data and uses distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and conceptual frameworks to provide a rich description of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study explored specific components of Fullan's (2020) Effective Leadership Framework and elements of the PBIS (2015) Implementation Framework. Specifically, the study explored PBIS as a system for change and attempted to gain understanding of high school principals' perceptions of the change process according to Fullan's framework. I also investigated the way high school principals perceived specific components of Fullan's framework to be essential to their practices for implementation success and how they perceived those components to exist as part of the change process for PBIS. Further, the study focused on investigating high school principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS and their role in the change process.



I used a survey that provided responses using a 5-point Likert scale, as well as a focus group interview, and individual interviews to collect data. The participant criteria and how they were solicited are described in detail in the *Participants* section in this chapter. To answer the research questions, it is essential to capture the essence of the participants' perceptions through their lived experiences with the PBIS implementation process. Therefore, the focus group interview and individual interviews were vital components of the data collection and analysis processes. Initially, each participant completed a survey in which the first six questions of the survey contain demographic information that served as the criteria for purposeful sampling for the focus group interviews and individual interviews. The last question of the survey asked participants who are interested and willing to participate in a focus group or individual interview to provide their contact information. I used the responses to the demographic questions to determine which type of interview willing participants would be solicited for, mainly years of experience in the principalship and in leading PBIS.

Three research questions guided the study and influenced choices in data sources, data collection, and method of analysis of this study:

1. How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?
  - a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?
  - b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?
  - c. How has PBIS become embedded in the school's systems, policies, and practices?

2. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be *essential* to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?
3. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to *exist in* the successful implementation of PBIS?

## **Participants**

Participants for this study were practicing principals solicited from 166 high schools identified in 8 regions that participate in VTSS across the state, including rural, suburban, and urban settings. This is the number of high schools that exist in the divisions within each of the 8 VTSS regions. I sent the survey out to all ( $N = 166$ ) and the ones who completed the survey and met the demographic criteria became my sample ( $n = 26$ ). I chose to use school divisions that participate in VTSS because they help divisions with PBIS implementation from the ground up, provide support along the way, and their work has been acknowledged by the VDOE as well. However, I am aware that partnering with VTSS does not necessarily mean a division is implementing PBIS across all school levels or in their high schools. So, this is criteria addressed in the first six questions of the survey. I used purposeful convenience sampling to identify principals with at least 2 years of school leadership and experience with the PBIS process. Principals with these levels of experience may have a better understanding of the change process, may have experienced parts of the change process such as the implementation dip, and may understand the importance of becoming a lead learner and building strong relationships for collaboration (Fullan, 2020). Further, they might have the ability to discuss teacher buy-in and the effects on school culture, since they might have experience and perspective on the sustainability of the PBIS system beyond the first year of implementation, as it is typically 2

years between PBIS implementation of Tier 1 with fidelity before moving into Tier 2 and then an additional year or two after before moving into Tier 3 operation (Kittelman et al., 2022).

Information about school participation in PBIS was gathered through the VTSS, VDOE, and PBIS websites to determine which divisions/ high schools currently implement school wide PBIS systems, and it was asked in the survey as well. I attempted to recruit a sample of participants representative of the different regions across the state, including rural, suburban, and urban settings, as defined by their VDOE school report card demographics. However, most of the principals who met the criteria and completed the survey were in suburban schools. This was also the case for the principals who volunteered to participate in the focus group and individual interviews. Most of them lead high schools in suburban settings.

### **Data Sources**

Three main data instruments were used in this research study: a Qualtrics survey using a 5-point Likert type scale, a semi-structured focus group interview with high school principals, and semi-structured individual interviews with select high school principals. First, I invited each school principal to complete the Qualtrics survey, in which they answered questions based on their experiences in principal leadership and with implementation of school wide PBIS systems. Analysis of the survey response data along with volunteering to participate determined which principals were selected for the focus group interview and individual interviews. As a mixed-methods research study, each data instrument was important to the integration of findings to answer the research questions. It was essential to capture the essence of the participants' perceptions through their lived experiences with the PBIS implementation process. Therefore, the surveys paired with the interviews were each vital components of the data collection and analysis processes.

## *Survey*

The first data source for this research study was a researcher-developed survey titled *Survey: Leadership and PBIS (Change Process)*, which used a 5-point Likert type scale (see Appendix A). The survey was administered digitally through a hyper-link to Qualtrics. The survey was comprised of the participant's informed consent form followed by thirteen questions. The first six questions of the survey collected demographic information and included criteria for inclusion as participants in the study. These questions included information such as the school's PBIS status, length of time that PBIS had been at the school, the range of years the principal had been leading a school and the range of years of experience the principal had in leading PBIS implementation. If the qualifying criteria were met, principals were prompted to complete the remainder of the survey. If the criteria were not met, the survey ended, and they were thanked for their time.

Questions 7–10 were answered according to a 5-point Likert type scale. It ranges from 1 to 5 on the spectrum rating scale, where 1 is *Strongly disagree* and 5 is *Strongly agree*. Participants responded to questions which correlated with the application of the PBIS implementation framework and perceived leadership skills/attributes. Questions 11 and 12 asked participants to rank in order of importance a list of six or seven statements with 1 being the most important. While each of the statements about leadership components might have been deemed important, participants were asked to place them in the order they perceived to be most essential to their practice in the successful implementation of SWPBIS. The survey focused on investigating principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the implementation of PBIS and their role in the change process. I tested the Likert scale by piloting

it, along with the interview protocols, with experienced people in the field who were not participants in the research.

### ***Principal Focus Group Interviews***

The second data source for this research study was a Semi-structured Focus Group Interview with high school principals. Principals solicited for participation in the focus group interviews came from the initial sample from the survey. The invited participants would ideally have 2–4 years of experience in the principalship and experience with PBIS implementation. In the survey they range of years participants could select from are: 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, and 10+ years. Most of the focus group participants had 1-3 years of principalship experience and 4-6 years or more of PBIS leadership experience. There was one participant with 10 or more years of principalship experience. I attempted to schedule this principal for an individual interview; however, due to scheduling demands the participant was only available during the Focus Group interview time. Principals with these levels of experience might have a better understanding of the change process overall and may have unique experiences and perspectives on the sustainability of the PBIS system beyond the first year of implementation, since it takes about 2-3 years after initial implementation and fidelity in Tier 1 to move into Tier 2 and Tier 3 of PBIS (Fullan, 2020; Kittelman et al., 2022).

The informed consent and interview protocol (see Appendices B and C) were provided via email and through the Zoom chat feature to the principals at the beginning of the interview. The interview protocol consisted of fourteen semi-structured and probing questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The semi-structured questions allowed for the interview to flow naturally as a discussion and provide opportunities for elaboration, explanation, and/or questions the participants may feel are necessary. The questions asked the principals about how they learned

about PBIS and the process that led them to implementing the system in their schools. It asked them about their personal buy-in in the process as well as the impact of staff buy-in on implementation. I asked them to discuss their data sharing processes throughout the implementation, about the impact of PBIS implementation on the culture in their school, and about the positive aspects and roadblocks experienced throughout leading PBIS implementation. Focus Group principals were also asked to discuss the leadership components they feel are most essential to leading through change and to discuss specifically which components exist in their school. Focus groups provide an environment where the participants can fully express their views and opinions, which provides a greater opportunity to glean the perceptions of the principals and adequate data to provide answers to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Individual Principal Interviews***

The third data source for this research study was individual interviews with select principals. Principals solicited for participation in the individual interviews had the most experience, having 6 or more years of experience in the principalship and PBIS implementation. Selected high school principals participated in individual interviews via Zoom. A Zoom link was sent to each participant via email as soon as confirmation of participation was received, and the interview was scheduled. The individual interview protocol asked the same initial questions as the focus group interview, but in the individual setting I gleaned a deeper understanding for their perceptions and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). I was able to dig deeper in the individual interviews with principals who had more tenured experience leading schools and with PBIS implementation since the conversation did not involve additional participants. They might have had more experience with the additional Tiers associated with

PBIS and more ideas on what works and does not work regarding PBIS implementation in high schools, they might have been involved in PBIS implementation in more than one school and/or experienced the shift from implementation to institutionalization. They may be able to provide insight for those who do not have as much experience with leadership and/or PBIS implementation. Principals with these tenured levels of experience may have the ability to discuss authentic experiences and to provide perspective on the sustainability of the PBIS system beyond the first year of implementation, as it is typically 2 years between PBIS implementation of Tier 1 with fidelity before moving into Tier 2 and then an additional year or 2 after before moving into Tier 3 operation (Kittelman et al., 2022).

The informed consent and question protocol (see Appendices B and D) were provided via email and through Zoom chat feature to the principals at the beginning of the interview. The interviews involved 15 semi-structured questions and probing questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The open-ended questions attempted to allow an opportunity for the interview to flow naturally as a discussion. The individual interview allowed the principal to reflect on their years of experience with the process and elaborate and explain how they ended up with the perspective they have. Their lived experience provided a rich context for understanding leadership through the change process and PBIS implementation in the high school setting. The individual setting honored their tenure and allowed them ample opportunity to share their experiences and insight without potential interruption, which provided a greater opportunity to glean their perceptions and adequate data to provide answers to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Content Validity of Instruments***

The survey, focus group protocol, and individual interview protocol were researcher-developed measures created specifically for this research study. I used the research questions and

the conceptual framework that guide the research as a basis for the survey questions, focus group interview questions, individual interview questions, and components. Each instrument was field tested and reviewed by a panel of four content experts to ensure content and face validity, as well as, to guard against bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Revisions from the panel review were incorporated into each instrument based on their feedback.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected in three phases. Phase 1 consisted of a digital survey, which was sent through e-mail (see Appendix E) to each participant. All participants completed the survey (Appendix A). The demographic information incorporated criteria for inclusion as participants in the study, as well as guided selection for participation in focus group or individual interviews based on years of experience noted. These questions included information such as: the school's current PBIS status, how long PBIS has been at the school, and range of years the principal has been leading a building and range of years' experience leading PBIS implementation. If the qualifying criteria were met, principals were prompted to complete the remainder of the survey. If the criteria were not met, the survey ended, and the principals were thanked for their time. Further, the survey data determined which principals should be contacted for the focus group interview or individual interviews based on the principals that volunteer to be interviewed by leaving their contact information in the last question of the survey.

After the survey data were analyzed, principals who volunteered to be interview participants were contacted individually for participation in Phase 2: the focus group interview or Phase 3 of the data collection process: individual interviews with principals. Participants for the principal interviews were invited through written email. Selected high school principals participated in either a focus group interview or individual interview via Zoom; a Zoom link was



sent to each participant via email as soon as confirmation of participation was received, and the interview was scheduled (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). The focus group consisted of four high school principals and five high school principals participated in individual interviews.

Informed consent forms were distributed and reviewed with each participant in advance of data collection (see Appendices B, C, and D). Informed consent was included in the beginning of the survey and consent was collected from each interview participant at the beginning of the interview sessions. Participants were asked to type “yes” in the chat box to provide consent prior to beginning the interviews. Each participant provided written consent. Consent forms provided assurance of participant rights, confidentiality, and ability to withdraw from participation in the study at any time without harm. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed following their completion. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Zoom. The transcription from Zoom was used as a basis for the transcription process, as I went back through and transcribed each interview after it was completed as well. I conducted member checking by sending the transcribed interview to participants to verify agreement with the transcription and to ensure they had nothing more to add (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants’ identities, their respective schools, and school divisions were kept confidential and were not disclosed in the research study, as that information is not relevant to the findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Like the data collection, data analysis for this study occurred in three phases according to the instrument used to collect the data being analyzed. Analytic memos were used throughout data collection and analysis to record initial thoughts, questions, and ideas that came up (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Survey: Quantitative Data Analysis***

I conducted quantitative analysis of the survey (Likert scale) data using descriptive statistics such as modes and frequencies to report the participants' responses through the Qualtrics program. Since Likert scale data is ordinal, the analysis revealed that some scores were higher than one another not the distance between them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Likert scale responses were loaded into an Excel spreadsheet with a separate line for each participant response. The distribution of responses (percent that agree, disagree, etc.) were displayed using a spreadsheet. Once all the continuous and categorical data were loaded, I checked for accuracy of data, reliability of the survey instrument and normally distributed data, calculating whole scores.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

An initial codebook for the analysis of the focus group and individual interviews was created based on the Effective Leadership Framework (Fullan, 2020); PBIS implementation; and the PBIS Implementation Framework (OSEP, 2015), represented in Table 1 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

**Table 1***Coding Framework*

Categories	Subcategories	Explanation of Category
Change process	Culture	High-performing cultures thrive in change, while unhealthy or negative cultures do not respond well to change. Culture is vitally important to a successful change process: A school's core values, beliefs, behaviors. Positive school culture examples: Prioritizes school culture at all instances, provides a nurturing environment with high expectations, has an effectively engaged students and staff, prioritizes a commitment to lifelong learning, and a sense of responsibility for all stakeholders.
	Stakeholder Buy-in	Support for/ willing participation in processes (faculty, teachers, administration, students) Understands/acknowledges the sense of urgency for the change process (counter-example: noncompliant and not willing to support/ implement the process). Stakeholder buy-in is the process of involving these people in the decision-making process in hopes of reaching a broader consensus on the organization's future.
	Resistance	Opposite of stakeholder buy-in. Non-compliant and not willing to support/ implement the process. Often stems from feeling isolated or left out of the decision-making process, does not feel a sense of urgency for the change process.
Effective Leadership Traits	Moral Purpose	Acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of stakeholders.
	Understanding Change	Understanding the people you are leading, the more complex the change, the more that people with the problem must be part of the change.
	Relationships	Relationship building is the single factor common to every successful change initiative, relationships cannot improve without positive collaboration and teamwork based on trust built through purposeful interaction and problem-solving and intentionality. Focused collaboration in relation to the work is key.
	Knowledge Sharing	Effective leaders foster the generation and increase of knowledge [transparency and understanding through data sharing and analysis] both inside and outside of their organization.
	Coherence Making	Purposeful, intentional day-to-day work that brings unity and facilitates collaboration.
PBIS Process (Initiating, Implementation, Institutionalization)	Leadership Team	Designated building staff that oversees PBIS processes.
	Behavior Matrix	Shared expectations (building wide) for PBIS – usually an acronym correlates with school spirit/ mascot (e.g., SOAR, ROAR, PRIDE, etc.)
	Climate Survey	Survey given to all building staff and students – reports on various school data (explicitly the building climate – highlights strengths and areas for growth)
	Incentive System	Positive Rewards system designed to recognize desired behavior/ meeting shared expectations
	Stakeholder Buy-in	Support for/ willing participation in processes (cf. noncompliant and not willing to support/ implement process)
	Administrative Support	Building level administrative support and division level support (cf. not enough support)
	Professional Development	Training and best practices prior to initiation, during and continued throughout – this includes PD for the PBIS LT, building admin (division level) and within building to faculty/staff
	Communication	Sharing, Providing, Receiving of information throughout each phase of the implementation process (ex: PBIS LT to school faculty/staff; PBIS LT to School Admin.; School Admin. to PBIS LT; School Admin to faculty/staff; District to School Admin.; District to PBIS LT etc.).
	Consistency	Always happening or behaving in the same way, allows for harmony of conduct or practice with profession.
	School Culture	A school's core values, beliefs, behaviors... Positive school culture examples: Prioritizes school culture at all instances, provides a nurturing environment with high expectations, has an effectively engaged students and staff, prioritizes a commitment to lifelong learning, sense of responsibility for all stakeholders.

Categories	Subcategories	Explanation of Category
	Building morale	The professional interest and enthusiasm displayed towards the achievement of the school's goals, vision, strategic plan
	Facilitators Challenges	Factors/circumstances that helped/ aided in the PBIS implementation process. Factors/ circumstances etc. that had to be worked through to move forward with the PBIS implementation process.
PBIS Framework	Systems	Supports that are needed to enable the accurate and durable implementation of practices, efficient use of data, and achievement of outcomes
	Practices	Interventions and strategies that are evidence-based and empirically supported in achieving indicated, targeted outcomes
	Data Sharing	Sharing of Information that is used to select, monitor, and evaluate outcomes, practices, and systems, as well as, to monitor effective and equitable implementation and guide decision making
	Outcomes	Academic and behavior targets or indicators that are locally meaningful, culturally relevant, specified, endorsed, emphasized, and monitored because of their social and educational significance
	Cultural Responsiveness	Approach to provide equitable opportunities for students' learning; Uses students' backgrounds, social experiences, prior knowledge and learning styles to develop supports at each tier; Teachers and staff recognize their own values and biases, and reflect on the influence on behavioral expectations and interactions with their students

*Note.* Principal Focus Group Interview and Individual Interview A priori coding framework: Insights, patterns, themes, and trends related to Fullan's Effective Leadership Framework (Fullan, 2020), PBIS implementation and the PBIS Framework (OSEP, 2015). PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; PD = Professional Development; LT = Leadership Team.

**Principal Focus Group Interviews.** Inductive qualitative analysis was conducted using a two-cycle coding scheme to analyze the data collected from the principal focus group interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). The first coding cycle was a priori to find specific insights, patterns, themes, and trends related to Fullan's Effective Leadership Framework, PBIS implementation and the PBIS Framework. The second cycle was emergent and looked for any additional details and information that surfaced from the focus group principals as they discussed their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). The codebook included in Table 1 helped to organize the data as it was coded and themed in the analysis cycles. In addition to the interview protocols, the coding cycle insights, patterns, themes, and trends, and finally the coding frameworks are presented in a table and discussed in detail in Chapter 4 along with frequency of responses and supporting evidence from the data. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

**Individual Principal Interviews.** Similarly, inductive qualitative analysis was conducted using a two-cycle coding scheme to analyze the data collected from the individual principal interviews also (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). The first coding cycle was also a priori to find specific insights, patterns, themes, and trends related to Fullan’s Effective Leadership Framework, PBIS implementation and the PBIS Framework. The second cycle was emergent to surface more details and additional information based on these principal’s unique experiences, perspectives, and potential shifts in data collection during their interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). As previously mentioned with the Focus Group data analysis, the interview protocols, the coding cycle themes, and the coding frameworks are presented in a table and discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Saldaña, 2021).

The triangulation of data and the relationship to the research questions is represented in the table of specifications included in Table 2 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

**Table 2***Table of Specifications: Triangulation of Data Instruments and Research Questions*

Research Questions	Instrument		
	Survey Questions 7-12	Focus Group Interview	Individual Interview
1. How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?	7, 8.1, 8.3	1, 1a, 2, 3, 11, 12, 1	1, 1a, 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 15
a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?	8.4, 8.5, 8.6	4, 5	4, 5
b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?	8.2, 8.5, 8.6	6, 7	6, 7
c. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?	8.7	8	8
2. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be <i>essential to</i> their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?	9, 10.1-10.6, 11, 12	9, 13	9, 13
3. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to <i>exist in</i> the successful implementation of PBIS?		10, 13	10, 13, 14

*Note.* PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

### Data Analysis and Research Questions

The first research question was answered through analysis of data collected from the survey responses, focus group interviews and individual interviews with principals. Research Question 2 was also answered through analysis of data collected from the survey responses, focus group interviews and individual interviews with principals. Finally, Research Question 3 was answered through the analysis of data collected from the focus group interviews and individual interviews with principals. Data were analyzed separately and then integrated to form

a response to the questions. The research questions, data sources and process of analysis are represented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Research Questions, Data Sources, and Data Analysis*

Research Question	Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS? a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process? b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement? c. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?	Survey responses  Principal Interviews (Focus Group and Individual)	Descriptive statistics for Likert items (mean, median, mode); a priori and emergent coding
2. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be <i>essential</i> to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?	Survey responses  Principal Interviews (Focus Group and Individual)	Descriptive statistics for Likert items (mean, median, mode), a priori and emergent coding
3. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to <i>exist</i> in the successful implementation of PBIS?	Principal Interviews (Focus Group and Individual)	A priori and emergent coding

*Note.* PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

## **Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions**

### ***Delimitations***

Delimitations are the decisions the researcher makes concerning the parameters of the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The conceptual framework was built on specific models of effective leadership and behavior intervention systems. In this research study, participants selected included only those principals leading public high schools in Virginia that are implementing PBIS. Participants must have had experience in implementing a PBIS system

in a high school. To maintain feasibility, the numbers of principal participants selected for interviews were based on specific criteria. The focus of this study was to examine leader attributes and actions that facilitate and challenge a school-wide change to implement PBIS successfully, not the effectiveness of PBIS implementation or the PBIS system itself. As a mixed-methods study, the approach relied heavily on participant perceptions and descriptions of events as they experienced them.

### ***Limitations***

Limitations are elements that are beyond a researcher's control that should be acknowledged as potential influences on findings of the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There is limited research on SWPBIS systems in the high school setting, meaning there may be aspects of the implementation of PBIS that are unique to the context. While information from this research study will not be generalizable to other principals leading change and/or implementation of PBIS in all high schools, it may serve as a reference for district and school leaders to gain a deeper understanding of specific leader attributes and actions that facilitate and challenge a school-wide change to implement PBIS successfully. Obtaining interview participants based on principals volunteering via providing their contact information at the culmination of the survey could pose a limitation to the study. Another potential limitation may be hesitancy of participants to fully report their lived experiences because they do not want them to be interpreted or viewed negatively. Qualitative data in this study were based on participant perceptions and will not have statistical representation.

### ***Assumptions***

Assumptions of this research study included: accessibility, including time to conduct interviews, to high school building principals; participants would respond in a timely manner to



the survey; the survey responses would be truthful in their account and represent the participants' own perceptions; the interviews would elicit truthful and rich accounts of the principals' experiences; and finally that specific leader attributes and actions, as represented in the conceptual framework, exist and are essential to facilitating and/or challenging a school-wide change to implement PBIS; that PBIS is indeed a tool for change; the participants' values and beliefs align with the goals of PBIS and they are committed to it.

### **Positionality Statement**

I am a doctoral student, studying educational policy, planning, and leadership in the K-12 setting. I have 8 years of classroom teaching experience at the high school level and 4 years of administrative experience in the secondary setting. As an assistant principal, I led the PBIS Leadership Team and the implementation process when SWPBIS was initially implemented in two schools. I am experienced in the process of VTSS and PBIS training. I acknowledge that I have a passion for effective leadership and realize the value of PBIS in high schools. To mitigate this bias, I solicited assistance from a panel of field experts in PBIS leadership to review my data source instruments for content validity, as well as my processes and findings. Additionally, I engaged in reflexive journaling to surface and confront any bias that comes from my personal and professional experiences. Further, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018) "the researcher will keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the [process], not the meaning that [she] brings to the research" (p. 182). Although my experience is valuable, this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of the participants from the implementation of PBIS in their respective contexts which might be very different from mine.

## **Ethical Considerations**

I gained approval to conduct the study from the William & Mary School of Education Institutional Review Committee (EDIRC) by completing the forms and process currently in place. I used purposeful convenience sampling to determine which high school principals to contact requesting their participation in this study. Email addresses were obtained through the school and/or school district website(s). I sent each principal an initial email introducing myself, the study, and the reason for the email. They were given detailed information in the initial email request regarding the purpose of the study, and the steps and format of the data collection/participation process, as well as the link to the Qualtrics survey. Participants for the focus group interviews and individual interviews were invited through written email. I executed extreme care to ensure participants know their experiences are valuable and unique and protected from potential harm or embarrassment. Informed consent forms were distributed to, reviewed with, and collected from each participant. These forms were provided in writing and distributed via individual email. They provided assurance of participant rights, confidentiality, anonymity, and ability to withdraw from participation in the study at any time without harm (Appendices A-E).

Participants' identities and school divisions were kept confidential and were not disclosed in the research study, as that information is not relevant to the findings. I used a letter/number scheme to distinguish between participants in a confidential manner, the number was assigned during the transcription stage. Surveys were completed without individual identifying detail, unless principals chose to provide contact information in response to Question 13, which asks for willingness to participate in an interview. Audio files and transcripts from the individual interviews are kept on a password protected computer. Data collected for the study remains

secured and I alone have access to it. I was familiar with some of the school principals, having previously worked in two school divisions that implement PBIS. However, measures were taken to reduce the influence of assumptions and biases regarding these factors as much as possible.

### **Timeline**

The data collection time frame consisted of a 6-month window from late May 2022 to October 2022. Proposal and EDIRC approval through the College of William and Mary took place in May 2022. The survey data collection and coding took place in June-July. Principal focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted in August-October 2022 and then coded respectively. I reviewed and conducted final analysis of the data from October 2022–March 2023.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the PBIS implementation process in high school settings and high school principal perceptions of leadership qualities and actions that enable, and/or challenge, a school-wide change to initiate, implement, and institutionalize PBIS successfully. Further, I set out to provide an opportunity for high school principals to have a voice when it comes to PBIS leadership through sharing their personal experiences leading high schools through the PBIS process and their role in the change process. Data was collected from high school principals, who completed a survey and participated in a focus group interview and individual interviews. Chapter 3 described the methodology of this study in which survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, a semi-structured focus group interview and one-on-one interviews were coded and analyzed to answer the research questions:

1. How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?
  - a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?
  - b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?
  - c. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?

2. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be **essential to** their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?

3. How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to **exist in** their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?

Findings in this chapter will include quantitative data on participants' experience with leading the PBIS process in high schools, and perceptions of effective change leadership components. It also includes high school principal perceptions of leading the PBIS process especially as it pertains to data analysis, staff buy-in and staff engagement, and school culture, as well as the perceived facilitators and challenges of the PBIS process in the high school setting. Finally, it includes principal perceptions of the essential and existing components of the Effective Leadership Model (Fullan, 2020) in the successful implementation of PBIS in high schools.

### **Survey Participants**

Initially, an email including an introduction to my study, solicitation for the principals' participation, and a link to the Qualtrics Survey was sent to 166 ( $N = 166$ ) Virginia high school principals. The 166 principals were selected based on their school divisions' participation in a partnership with Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) for division-wide support with PBIS implementation in schools. Understanding that the VTSS partnership did not guarantee or specify that PBIS was being implemented at all levels in the partnering divisions, this was a criteria question answered early in the survey, in which a 'no response' ended the survey. To continue the survey, the School-Wide PBIS (SWPBIS) criteria needed to be met, which means when asked Survey Question 1: "My high school uses School-Wide PBIS (SWPBIS)," participants selected the answer "yes."

Of the 166 high school principals that received the survey link, 43 principals started the survey, and 26 completed the survey and met the SWPBIS criteria. All but five of the survey responses came from high school principals in suburban schools; one response came from a principal in an urban high school. This could be considered a limitation of the study and will be discussed further in Chapter 5 as it pertains to the findings and recommendations. Responses came from principals with varying years of experience in the principalship: eight participants had 1-3 years, eight participants had 4-6 years, four participants had 7-9 years, and six participants had over 10 years of experience in the principalship. The survey asked participants how long they have served as principal of their current high school: 10 participants had led their current school for 1-3 years, seven for 4-6 years, three for 7-9 years, and six had led their current school for 10 years or longer.

The next two demographic questions targeted years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS implementation. Three participants had 1-3 years of PBIS leadership experience, nine had 4-6 years of experience, eight had 7-9 years of experience, and six had 10 or more years of experience leading a school through SWPBIS. Finally, principals were asked how long SWPBIS had been implemented in their current school: nine participants' schools had SWPBIS for 1-3 years, five schools for 4-6 years, eight schools for 7-9 years, and five schools for 10 or more years. There was a range of experience among the participants' responses regarding years of principalship experience and experience leading SWPBIS. Table 4 illustrates demographic information about the high school principals who completed the survey and met the SWPBIS criteria, their school currently uses PBIS.

**Table 4***Survey Participant Demographic Information*

		Participants ( <i>N</i> = 43)	
		<i>n</i>	%
Completed Survey & met criteria of SWPBIS		26	25
<b>Demographic Information</b>			
<b>School Demographic Area</b>			
	Rural	4	15
	Suburban	21	81
	Urban	1	.04
<b>Years of Experience</b>			
<b>Total years in the principalship</b>			
	1-3 years	8	31
	4-6 years	8	31
	7-9 years	4	15
	10 + years	6	23
<b>Total years as principal of current school</b>			
	1-3 years	10	38
	4-6 years	7	27
	7-9 years	3	12
	10 + years	6	23
<b>Total years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS</b>			
	1-3 years	3	12
	4-6 years	9	35
	7-9 years	8	31
	10 + years	6	23
<b>Total years SWPBIS has been implemented in current school</b>			
	1-3 years	9	35
	4-6 years	5	19
	7-9 years	7	27
	10 + years	5	19

*Note.* SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

**Focus Group Participant Information**

At the end of the survey, principals were provided the opportunity to volunteer to participate in an interview to share and discuss their experiences regarding change leadership and the PBIS process by entering their name and email contact information into a text box provided.

I emailed principals that had 2-6 years of experience both in the principalship and with PBIS implementation to participate in a semi-structured focus group interview. One principal of the four focus group participants had 10 or more years of principalship and PBIS experience, so initially they were invited to participate in an Individual Interview. However, due to scheduling reasons, the focus group interview was a better fit. The other three participants in the focus group had 1-3 years of principalship experience as well as 1-3 years of experience as principal of their current school. All but one of the focus group's participants were leading schools in suburban areas and one led in an urban area. Three of the participants' schools have implemented PBIS for 1-3 years, while one school has had PBIS implemented for 7-9 years. There was a range of years of experience leading a school through SWPBIS: one principal had 1-3 years of experience, one had 4-6 years of experience, one had 7-9 years of experience, and one had 10 or more years of experience leading a school through SWPBIS. This diversity in years of experience leading a school through SWPBIS allowed for variety and richness in conversation as participants shared and discussed their experiences in response to interview questions.

Table 5 illustrates demographic information about the four high school principals who completed the survey, volunteered to participate in an interview, and had one to three years or more of experience in the principalship, a range of years of experience leading a high school through SWPBIS, and currently lead schools in which SWPBIS has been implemented for 1-3 years or more.



**Table 5***Focus Group Interview Participant Demographic Information*

		Participants ( <i>N</i> = 13)
		<i>n</i>
Completed Survey, met criteria of SWPBIS, & volunteered for interview		4
<b>Demographic Information</b>		
<b>School Demographic Area</b>		
	Rural	-
	Suburban	3
	Urban	1
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
<b>Total years in the principalship</b>		
	1-3 years	3
	4-6 years	-
	7-9 years	-
	10 + years	1
<b>Total years as principal of current school</b>		
	1-3 years	3
	4-6 years	-
	7-9 years	-
	10 + years	1
<b>Total years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS</b>		
	1-3 years	1
	4-6 years	1
	7-9 years	1
	10 + years	1
<b>Total years SWPBIS has been implemented in current school</b>		
	1-3 years	3
	4-6 years	-
	7-9 years	1
	10 + years	-

*Note.* SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

**Individual Interview Participant Information**

Principals with 4-6 years or more of experience in both the principalship and with PBIS implementation who volunteered to participate in an interview were invited to participate in a semi-structured one-to-one individual interview. Five high school principals participated in individual interviews: two participants had 4-6 years of principalship experience, one had 7-9

years of principalship experience, and two had 10 or more years of experience in the principalship. Similarly, two participants had 4-6 years of experience as principal of their current school, two had 7-9 years of experience as principal of their current school, and one participant has been the principal of their current school for 10 or more years. All five of the individual interview participants were leading schools in suburban areas, which will be noted and further discussed as a limitation in Chapter 5. One participant's school has had PBIS implemented for 1-3 years, one participant's school has had PBIS implemented for 4-6 years, one participant's school has had PBIS implemented for 10 or more years, and two of the participants' schools have had PBIS implemented for 7-9 years. Regarding the number of years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS: one principal had 1-3 years of experience, one principal had 4-6 years of experience, two principals had 7-9 years of experience, and one had 10 or more years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS. The principals who participated in the individual interviews had more tenured experience leading schools and generally more experience leading schools and stakeholders through change like the PBIS process, which is the rationale behind selecting them for individual interviews.

Overall, when looking across the participant groups, including the survey participants, most leaders implementing PBIS have between 1-6 years of experience. There might be varying reasons for this, however, one that research supports is the lack of high schools that have successfully implemented PBIS and implementing SWPBIS in the high school context is a more recent initiative (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2017).

Table 6 illustrates demographic information about the five high school principals who completed the survey, met the SWPBIS criteria, volunteered to participate in an interview, and

have 4-6 or more total years of experience in the principalship and 4-6 or more years of experience leading a high school(s) through SWPBIS.

**Table 6**

*Individual Interview Participant Demographic Information*

		Participants ( <i>N</i> = 13)
		<i>n</i>
Completed Survey, met criteria of SWPBIS, & volunteered for interview		5
<b>Demographic Information</b>		
<b>School Demographic Area</b>		
	Rural	-
	Suburban	5
	Urban	-
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
<b>Total years in the principalship</b>		
	1-3 years	-
	4-6 years	2
	7-9 years	1
	10 + years	2
<b>Total years as principal of current school</b>		
	1-3 years	-
	4-6 years	2
	7-9 years	2
	10 + years	1
<b>Total years of experience leading a school(s) through SWPBIS</b>		
	1-3 years	-
	4-6 years	2
	7-9 years	2
	10 + years	1
<b>Total years SWPBIS has been implemented in current school</b>		
	1-3 years	1
	4-6 years	1
	7-9 years	2
	10 + years	1

*Note.* SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

The findings in this chapter include the perceived description of the PBIS process throughout initiation, implementation, and institutionalization among high school principals' experiences. Findings are organized and discussed by research question and triangulated across the data sources according to the respective themes and subthemes.

### **Research Question 1**

*How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?*

- a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?*
- b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?*
- c. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?*

Data from Survey Questions 7–8.8 aligned to Research Question 1 and helped describe high school principals' experiences with components of the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS in their schools. Overall, the survey data supports the themes that emerged when principals shared their experiences with and perceptions of the PBIS process leadership during the interviews. In the focus group and individual interviews, participants responded to questions about the following:

- where the idea for implementing PBIS in their school came from, their own buy-in regarding the PBIS process
- what PBIS as a system looks like in their school (specifically, institutionalized components unique to their schools)
- how PBIS has changed from initial implementation to now
- types of data that are used to inform PBIS in their school

- how data analysis has been used at each stage of the PBIS process
- ways staff buy-in has impacted each stage of the process
- strategies that have been used to foster staff engagement
- the ways school culture has impacted (or been impacted by) the stages of the PBIS process
- positive experiences or roadblocks in the experience with the PBIS process.

Due to the one-to-one structure in the individual interview, the principals participating in individual interviews were able to dive deeper into their experiences and provide more in-depth responses than the focus group responses at times. Since they are more tenured in their principalship and school leadership experiences, principals participating in individual interviews were also given the opportunity to impart wisdom from their experiences to future school leaders when they answered one of the final questions of their interview, in which they were asked if they had any advice for those leading implementation of SWPBIS in their schools.

The data from the survey responses are triangulated with the data from the focus group interview with four high school principals and five individual interviews with high school principals. This analysis is embedded in the discussion of themes across each stage of the PBIS process. Table 7 shows the frequency of responses from 26 high school principals in their answers to Survey Questions 7 and 8.1–8.8.

**Table 7***Participant Responses to Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question 1*

Participants <i>N</i> = 26		Rating			
Survey Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
7. I am familiar with the PBIS Implementation Framework	-	-	1	15	10
8.1. School-Wide PBIS implementation is a district-wide initiative for all schools in my school division.	-	1	-	9	16
8.2. A vision and common values have been established and embraced by the majority of stakeholders.	-	3	1	14	8
8.3. A PBIS leadership team has been established.	-	-	1	8	17
8.4. Specific PBIS supports have been identified and implemented.	-	-	1	15	10
8.5 A data sharing process has been implemented for communicating SWPBIS information to all faculty and staff as appropriate and necessary.	-	4	1	15	6
8.6 Academic and behavior target outcomes have been identified and communicated.	-	1	1	18	6
8.7 Evidence-based interventions have been implemented and supported.	-	1	1	18	6
8.8 The SWPBIS system has had a positive impact on the building culture and morale.	-	2	5	13	6

*Note.* PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

## *Initiating PBIS*

**Division-Led Initiation.** The survey results show 25 of 26 principal participants somewhat or strongly agree that: they are familiar with the PBIS Implementation Framework, that School-Wide PBIS implementation is a district-wide initiative for schools in their respective divisions, and a PBIS leadership team has been established. These responses are in line with the experiences the principals discussed in the interviews both in the focus group and individually. Three out of the four principal participants in the Focus Group interview reported that PBIS implementation in their school was division led or mandated by the central office of their respective school divisions. Of the five principals who participated in individual interviews, four reported that PBIS implementation was a division-led initiative. In instances where PBIS already existed in the school when they began their tenure, implementation originated through a division-wide initiative communicated via central office. The survey data supports the details that principals discussed in the focus group and individual interviews when they talked about knowledge of the PBIS implementation framework and the school PBIS leadership team. Principals also discussed varying levels of division support for initiating the PBIS process. Ultimately, they had to find ways to embed and operationalize PBIS into the culture and daily routines of their specific buildings and based on the needs of their stakeholders.

- “Central office...it was kind of a thou shalt do PBIS.”
- “It came from Central Office.”
- “It was a division decision that was made, and they did it in 3 different cohorts.
- “It was really district wide when I moved in...It was already here because again, it was a county wide initiative to go PBIS... We actually have a PBIS coordinator that

oversees this in our county... But overall, where it came from, a countywide initiative.”

**Data Analysis.** Analyzing data is integral to PBIS Data Sharing, the sharing of information that is used to select, monitor, and evaluate outcomes, practices, and systems, as well as, to monitor effective and equitable implementation and guide decision making (OSEP, 2015). The survey responses show that 25 of 26 principals *somewhat* or *strongly agree* that specific PBIS supports have been identified and implemented. PBIS supports are defined as:

foundational systems [that] establish the way schools and programs operate. Systems include teaming structures, training, coaching, and other supports for educators. In PBIS, these systems support accurate, durable implementation of practices and the effective use of data to achieve better outcomes. (Center on PBIS, 2023, p.1)

Further, a continuum of academic, behavioral, social, and emotional supports is essentially matched to students’ needs and then are provided across three tiers of support (Center on PBIS, 2023). Examples of supports that would be identified and established across all three tiers during PBIS initiation include: a shared vision for positive school culture, establishment of a PBIS leadership team, actively engaged families, supportive and involved school administration, ongoing access to professional development for preparing all staff to implement each tier of PBIS, the systematic collection of screening, progress-monitoring, outcome, and fidelity data, ongoing use of data for decision making, and disaggregating data to examine equity among student subgroups (Center on PBIS, 2023). When principals discussed data analysis during PBIS initiation, they talked about looking at school discipline data, and student data (such as attendance reports, grade reports, and graduation indicator reports) to identify areas of concern, get a big picture idea of where they are, and create a plan to move forward.



***Discipline and Student Data to Identify Areas of Concern and Create a Plan.*** All four of the focus group principals referenced the use of discipline and other student data, such as attendance, to identify areas of concern and create a plan to address these students and concerns as part of initiating PBIS. Additionally, all five of the principals interviewed individually discussed analyzing discipline and other student data to identify areas of concern and commonalities among them such as high-level issues, common behavior issues, location/time of behaviors, repeat behaviors, and students who are at risk in multiple areas like behavior, attendance, and low grades. Principals discussed using data analysis initially to share information with staff and highlight areas of focus when creating a plan to address the concerns at the school level and in the classroom. By having the big picture through the data, more effective procedures and interventions could be targeted with the initiation of PBIS.

- “I think we probably mainly use a lot of discipline data. To see who our students are, kind of our frequent flyers, and how can we address their behavior. What can we do to support them? That would probably be the biggest data point that we use.”
- “What we’re using a lot is our intervention assistant request data that comes in and breaks it down by time, location, date, student, race, gender, grade level. We break down everything. We break down the referrals, and then we break down the tier 2 interventions...”

**Staff Buy-In and Fostering Staff Engagement.** One way to increase staff-buy in related to a vision and beliefs about PBIS is to ensure that everyone collectively understands the big picture, that they know what the vision and common values are and are on-board with them. The survey responses show that 22 of 26 principals somewhat or strongly agree that a vision and common values have been established and embraced by most stakeholders. Three principals

somewhat disagreed with this statement and one neither agreed nor disagreed. Throughout the interviews, principals discussed that higher levels of staff agreement with the goals of PBIS produced higher levels of engagement with PBIS implementation. Stakeholder buy-in is support for or willing participation in the PBIS processes, while the counterexample would be noncompliance and staff who are not willing to support or implement the PBIS process. All principals in the focus group and individual interviews also discussed how empowering teachers and providing opportunities for teachers to lead positively impacted staff buy-in and engagement in the process of initiating PBIS. The principals in this study shared the belief that empowering opportunities made teachers more willing to be a part of the process.

***High Staff Buy-In, High Staff Engagement.*** All four of the focus group principals referenced the importance of having teacher buy-in when initiating PBIS and agreed that it does not take many naysayers to negatively affect progress. Further, with a division-lead, or top-down initiative, the principals acknowledged that it can be more challenging to garner full teacher buy-in, but part of effective change leadership is to embrace all stakeholders and understand where every one of them is at, to meet them there and encourage them to bring them along. All five of the principals interviewed individually expressed similar feelings. During the individual interviews, principals were able to expand in greater detail when answering questions and providing examples. They explained when staff are included in the process, it becomes meaningful to them, which increases their buy-in and engagement.

- “It doesn’t work if you don’t have staff buy-in. Teacher buy-in is where it’s got to start. If that group doesn’t have buy-in it’s not going to work.”
- “Any program in a school goes as the staff goes, if the staff do not buy-in, the program will not succeed. So, you talk about change, if you take a look at Kotter’s

model of change, part of what you want to take a look at is creating that sense of urgency...they've got to see a purpose of this.”

- “I think a huge part of our rebranding had to do with that teacher consistency in the buy-in...and with that consistency, everyone can find success.”
- “Increasing the role of teachers and giving the leadership team the latitude to make decisions and present data and information...they run things by me and seek input, but it goes to staff from them, not admin...that's helped with the buy-in tremendously.”

***Empowering Teachers.*** Empowering the teachers and providing opportunities for them to lead and showcase what works for them and what might not work, positively impacted staff buy-in and engagement in the process of initiating PBIS according to all four focus group principals and all five principals individually interviewed. Principals interviewed individually strongly emphasized the powerful impact of having teachers rather than administration share information regarding PBIS initiation and other stages of the process. They explained that having teachers be involved in the dissemination of information has positively impacted and helped increase teacher buy-in as well as fostered higher level staff engagement. They suggested having teachers make presentations at faculty meetings to help in the data sharing and/or training for PBIS as well as during professional development opportunities, to share what is working and tips for other teachers.

- “We've taken a step in giving admin a much smaller role in that so teachers could step up...Anytime its being presented its going to come from a teacher, not from admin or any other staff. That's really been a big change for us in the past year and a half, but a very positive one that's helped.”

- “It was the presentations, and bring a variety of people on, you know, not just people who are always in a leadership role. It’s giving other people an opportunity to share what they’re doing and it’s working in their classroom, so we want them to showcase it.”
- “Because if you don’t have that staff buy-in, you’re not going to have that consistency approach that you’re looking for. So, getting the right staff in front of them too and not necessarily having to be admin led, makes a huge difference. We implemented a change this year where we had two staff members in front of this faculty, and I guarantee it helped tremendously abide.”

**School Culture.** The survey responses show that 24 of 26 principals somewhat or strongly agree that evidence-based interventions have been implemented and supported. Nineteen of 26 principals somewhat or strongly agree that the SWPBIS system has had a positive impact on the building culture and morale. It is noteworthy that two principals somewhat disagreed with this statement and five principals neither agreed nor disagreed. School culture is a school’s core values, beliefs, behaviors (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018).

Examples of a positive school culture include:

- school leadership teams that prioritize school culture at all instances by providing a nurturing environment with high expectations,
- students and staff that are effectively engaged,
- a commitment to lifelong learning is prioritized,
- there is a sense of responsibility for all stakeholders (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018).

When discussing the ways school culture has affected, or been affected by, the stages of the PBIS process, principals cited the importance of building relationships, and building the community and unity within the stakeholder groups. All four principals in the focus group and all five of the principals interviewed individually referenced the importance of school culture about the PBIS process. During the initiating stage they discussed the importance of embracing the naysayers, in essence getting those who are skeptical, hesitant, and/or resistant on board and collectively bought-in to PBIS and the process. One principal explained the importance of modeling what you are looking for from teachers, to teach them the common language, and not assume they just know what the expectations are.

- “So, your culture has to drive what it is that you’re trying to accomplish, and where you see your areas of growth and areas of strength.”
- “I would say, the intent was for it to become part of the school culture. So, the teacher perception of behavior changes a little bit in high school. They don’t necessarily buy into a matrix and acronyms to changing student behavior. The vibe I get is, that’s not their job.”
- “So, we are going to try to do two big service-oriented projects to build that sense of community and teamwork.”

### ***Implementing PBIS***

**Principal Buy-In.** All four of the principals in the focus group interview reported that they have greater buy-in when they themselves see the process working successfully in their school and when implementation feels more authentic, rather than another thing to check-off the list. Principal buy-in is defined the same as stakeholder buy-in, meaning support for and willingness to participate in the process. Additionally, when responding to the question about

their own buy-in, all five of the individual interview principal participants discussed similar feelings about greater buy-in when PBIS is implemented with fidelity, with highly visual success, and measurable outcomes. Individual participants discussed factors that increase effectiveness of the process in greater detail, such as the way PBIS provides a platform for administration, teachers, and students to engage positively and address student behaviors in a way where they are not humiliated, which helps preserve the teacher-student relationship and all involved can move forward. Additionally, a principal explained the level of detail in the data analysis allows administration and staff to understand more trends and details around behaviors occurring. Another discussed the way using data through PBIS implementation allows for a more in depth understanding of what is going on in the building and provides opportunities to enrich building meaningful relationships among stakeholders. Experiencing these positive impacts directly increases their buy-in for the implementation process.

- “A teacher group has worked throughout the summer kind of building the consistent procedures that are going to be coming out for us this year. My buy-in, after working with them over the summer, is a lot greater than it was in my previous places where it you could feel that this was a mandate that was getting pushed down versus something that was getting built from the ground up.”
- “When we took it where we implemented in the classroom, where it wasn’t just like this committee, and they were doing PBIS norms and how does this apply to your classroom, then we started to take that, and teachers had to do their course expectations using PBIS language. So, in order for that to happen, we had to teach them and inform them what PBIS is and what that language is...it’s more positive.

So, when we could actually see it in action in the classroom is when it made it more real at the high school level for me.”

- “Once I researched and really started looking at it, there are a lot of positives to it. Like how to address students and how to frame things in a more productive manner. So once teachers begin to see that, and I’m very big on the root foundation of anything that happens in the classroom, the schoolhouse relationships. And so if you can engage positively, while also taking corrective action without a student feeling humiliated, then that helps move everyone forward. So, I think in PBIS...you also have the deep dive into the data piece, where we are seeing referrals, what’s happening with parts of the building, all of that I am absolutely a big proponent of that alright.”

**Data Analysis.** Of the 26 principals who completed the survey, 21 *somewhat* or *strongly agreed* that a data sharing process had been implemented for communicating SWPBIS information to all faculty and staff as appropriate and necessary. When principals discussed data analysis during PBIS implementation, they talked about using school discipline data, and student data to build positive relationships with students, and teachers who need assistance or ideas on positive ways to reach kids, and to inform best practices and interventions in place to address areas/behaviors of concern. Principals also discussed data sharing in various ways, at faculty meetings, in team meetings, as professional development, all to provide support to both teachers and students. They explained that consistent data sharing, and data analysis helps keep the big picture in mind since it is important to continue look at the data to see how far you have come, but also where you need to go.

***Discipline Data to Build Relationships and Inform Best Practice/Interventions.*** The focus group principals did not have the same in-depth responses/ discussion of using data sharing to build relationships, both among staff and with students, the way the individual interview participants did. This could be due to the nature of the different structure of the interview a group versus one-on-one, or perhaps the individually interviewed principals more tenured experiences affected the difference in responses here. All five principals in the individual interviews discussed the use of discipline data analysis to foster building relationships as well as to inform best practice and interventions being implemented. For example, some discussed ensuring every student has an adult in the building that they can go to, so using data to determine at-risk students, who may benefit from having an adult mentor in the building outside of their regular teachers. Data sharing also helps build relationships among staff, while increasing transparency and accountability. Teachers can help each other strategize and plan, as well as help find ways to assist with shared students. Another principal discussed the way analysis of the school student data created a sense of urgency and PBIS was naturally selected to address the needs based on existing division support that was being provided as well.

- “The more proactive [interventions] would be assigning a mentor to a student, maybe having that person have a check in process with teachers in the building on things of that nature.”
- “We have a Tier 1 team, we have a Tier 2 team. We started identifying students who, we believe are Tier 2 so they’ll get a mentor. They’ll sit down and discuss Tier 1 students and what’s working in classes.”
- “So, we had that sense of urgency [through our data] and that was pretty easy to go ahead and start some form of change. Our county has a tiered system support



specialist in each area of PBIS. And with that we wanted to focus on consistency and positivity.”

***Data Sharing to Provide Support to Teachers and Students.*** Three of the four focus group principals and all five of the individual interview principal participants expressed the importance of data sharing to provide support to teachers and students during PBIS implementation. The data helps identify what supports are needed based on what picture the data is portraying by taking the procedures that are laid out in the PBIS initiation stage and making them systematic parts of the process.

- “We look at breakdowns with regards to suspensions, in school restrictions, absences. We have essentially a PBIS team that meets...and review data with regards to both, again, macro, what’s happening in the school and then drilling down to individual students and coming up with plans...we talk about the top 25 of our [at risk] students, and then we will talk about them every 2 weeks about what’s happening, what plans do we have in place for them, communicating to teachers and somebody owning that to make sure that that student is doing well.”
- “And so that’s also data I share in faculty meetings, so that the staff is aware of the big picture of discipline. And you know for me, it’s getting them out of the habit of just writing kids up for I think, where the phone call home could certainly take care of it.”

**Staff Buy-In and Fostering Staff Engagement.** When moving from the initiating stage to PBIS implementation, consistency across all components of the process is important (Villa et al., 2005). When there is consistency everyone knows what the expectations are, so everyone can be successful, which keeps teachers engaged and their buy-in high (Goodman-Scott et al., 2017;

Mathews et al., 2014). Throughout the interviews, when principals discussed staff buy-in and fostering staff engagement as PBIS moved from initiation to implementation, the more they consistently empowered teachers in various ways, the more they saw higher staff buy-in and engagement increase. Principals interviewed individually also discussed the importance of showing positive results and allowing teachers to show what they are doing successfully.

***Empowering Teachers to Lead Consistently.*** All four of the focus group principals referenced the importance of consistently facilitating opportunities for teachers to lead and have ownership in the PBIS implementation process. All five of the principals interviewed individually also expressed these feelings and reiterated the importance of involving staff in the process along the way, giving them options and listening to their feedback. They discussed the importance of giving teachers more ownership. Principals explained that as leaders, by facilitating these opportunities and relinquishing control, they can foster meaningful ways for those closest to the problem, namely teachers, to create and brainstorm proactive solutions. As the PBIS process shifts to implementation, they explained that consistency in providing this level of support and opportunities is important. One principal explained how powerful it was for teachers to hear how other teachers were successfully using and implementing PBIS strategies in their classrooms. It makes the process more real when they can learn from one another. Principals also explained the importance of providing options and choices to their faculty when it comes to the focus of instructional meetings, which can be done through staff surveys.

- “They’re the ones presenting it. It’s not coming from admin, it’s all of them. The things that they’ve seen work, the things that they didn’t see work, throwing out examples and going through the data.”

- “We use faculty meetings as instructional, we’ll give staff like a playlist, and we’ll say the focus is on this and a lot of these are PBIS strategies, but we’ll let them select, what would help you do what you do? We give them essentially that choice...But before we even get to that we’ll put a survey out to the staff.”
- “We started to have the committee members actually present to the staff around what PBIS is? How could this look in your classroom? What are some things you could do and...how does that impact students? So, it was coming from teachers who are in the classroom, utilizing it and we had examples of them, how PBIS was implemented in their classroom. So, I think that’s where we started to get a little bit more buy-in versus just there’s this committee and they’re sending stuff out, and this is what you need to do. You know, kind of making it more real.”

**Show Positive Results.** All five of the principals interviewed individually discussed in detail that importance of showcasing the positive results and celebrating the successes with teachers. This is an important aspect of PBIS implementation and keeps teacher buy-in and engagement high. Principals make time to validate what the teachers and staff are doing that is making a positive effect on PBIS implementation. They allow teachers to plan and lead professional development so they can learn best practices from each other and can share their successes with their colleagues. One principal explained that they incorporate staff recognition into all faculty meetings to recognize the hard work that is being done positively, which creates positive energy and excitement, then break up into groups for professional development training, this allows the time to start positively and be productive.

- “We’ve got staff members that are exceptional at what they do, and we validate them because they become teacher leaders...We do a drop in the bucket to recognize staff

you know, staff recognizing staff and then we split out and let them do [professional development]...and that's been very helpful.”

- “It’s giving other people an opportunity to share what they’re doing and it’s working in their classroom, so we want them to showcase that.”
- “The celebrations, I think, help showing the positive results. Again, getting the right teacher leaders in place to help support it, and celebrating success.”

**School Culture.** Principals were asked: “Is your life, the teachers/staff lives, and/or the students’ lives any different because of the implementation of PBIS?” Three of the four of the focus group principals and four out of five principals interviewed individually agreed that life at school for stakeholders is more positive overall because of the implementation of PBIS. When principals responded to this question, the overall response was “yes,” and some “yes, with reservations.” Focus group principals acknowledged that this felt like a somewhat “loaded question” and in a way were hesitant to directly link positive momentum to the PBIS implementation, stating optimistically they think a lot of this is yet to be seen this year. This could be due to the nature of their years of experience in the principalship and leading a school through the PBIS process since some of the more tenured principals interviewed individually made more direct links to the positive impact of PBIS implementation.

When principals they began discussing their feelings, their responses showed that PBIS implementation had a positive effect overall because it supports the positive focus on students, behavior, relationships, and so forth. When principals reflected on their responses, their answers supported aspects of enhancing, strengthening, and improving school culture through PBIS implementation. The aspects they discussed alluded to an enhanced school climate and that essentially PBIS becomes embedded in the school culture, which might positively affect the

morale (Freeman et al., 2017; Freeman et al., 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2017; Horner et al., 2020; VDOE, 2008). They explained that systems and operations associated with the implementation of PBIS become ingrained in the everyday life at school, it becomes such a part of the culture, that they don't necessarily notice as much that it is because of PBIS.

- “It’s a little bit of a loaded question because I don’t know if it’s PBIS. PBIS to me is focused on kids. And so yes, whenever your focus can be entirely on your kids and your staff doing what’s right for your kids and staff, then yes. I don’t think it made anybody’s life harder to do this, if that’s the flip of the question, it didn’t make our lives harder. I hope that it is making their lives better and my life better. There’s less discipline that’s good.”
- “Yeah, I think there is ultimately a high level of awareness of expectations. And with teachers, it’s been cool to watch a lot have a realization that you can’t assume just because [the students] 14-to-18 years old that they know all these things...No, we need to demonstrate to them the expectation, and what they should be doing and when appropriate, model it. And that’s been something that’s been really positive to watch, the buy-in there and seeing more teachers doing that with [students]. And it’s helping.”
- “It’s got to become part of the culture I think that’s the biggest thing moving forward. It has to be embedded; it can’t be something that stands alone. It has to be how you do business in your building.”

***Building Relationships.*** Building relationships is a cornerstone of PBIS implementation and an everyday part of life for administrators and teachers alike (Center on PBIS, 2021b; Fullan, 2020). When implemented successfully (with fidelity) PBIS implementation provides

many levels of support for relationship building across and within stakeholder groups (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). When talking about how PBIS has affected daily school life, each principal talked in some way about how relationships had grown, were stronger, more meaningful, more student focused and overall, more positive, which highlights the importance of building meaningful relationships to successful PBIS implementation and a more positive school culture. The five principals interviewed individually made direct connections between their school's culture and building relationships. They provided more context and rich examples in their discussions, which is likely due to the nature of the one-to-one individual interview versus a group discussion setting. One principal discussed how they encourage teachers to get to know their students individually, in a conversation surrounding a student they might ask the teacher or teachers to tell them five things they know about the student. Another principal talked about how they have created a culture in their school to attempt to make all students feel included, like they belong. They strive to ensure each student in the building is paired with an adult outside of their content teachers that they can go to if they need something or someone to talk with. These supports that are put in place from PBIS implementation become normalized and operationalized, they become a way of standard operation, which may have great positive impacts overall and pushes the PBIS process from implementation into institutionalization.

- “I think our school culture has really been about the relationships piece.”
- “I would say yes, but I don't think we notice it as much because it is such a part of the culture. But yes, because it does change the way that we are talking to students and the language that we're using with them...without PBIS, we probably would not have been at this point.”

- “I’d say it’s because of our overall philosophy about it. It’s tied to our mission statement, it’s a piece of PBIS, it’s a piece of everything we do and that is meaningful relationships. Every time we run into a situation with a kid, however big or small, whether it be gradational time or behavior or anything else, we always come back to the relationship. It’s really because of a lot of the things we do, but PBIS being one of those, is the relationships.”
- “So I think it’s more where our students created a culture of belonging. So, we’ve been really focused on, do students have an adult in the building, does every student have at least one adult they can go to in the building...because if they do, then they’ll have that person they can go to and that’s a person that’s going to give them positive reinforcements and so forth.”

### ***Institutionalizing PBIS***

**Data Analysis.** When it comes to data analysis and the PBIS process, Survey Question 8.6 emphasized the institutionalization of PBIS because it asked about identified and communicated outcomes that can be perceived as resulting from successful initiation and implementation with fidelity throughout the PBIS process. First, specific PBIS supports are identified and implemented (initiating), then a data sharing process is implemented for communicating PBIS information to all faculty and staff as appropriate and necessary (implementing), and finally academic and behavior target outcomes have been identified and communicated (institutionalizing). Of 26 high school principals who completed the survey, 24 somewhat or strongly agreed that academic and behavior target outcomes have been identified and communicated. One principal somewhat disagreed with this statement and one neither agreed nor disagreed. This survey data is supported in the data collected from the interviews;

when principals discussed data analysis as an institutionalized component of the PBIS process, they talked about how the practice of sharing and analyzing student and school data has become a natural, normal step in the process. In this PBIS stage, principals referenced using school discipline data and student data in their data sharing procedures for progress monitoring and to continue to inform consistent procedures.

***Progress Monitoring: Inform Consistent Procedures.*** All five principals interviewed individually discussed the importance of the continued use of school discipline data and student data in their data sharing procedures for progress monitoring and to continue to inform consistent procedures as PBIS becomes institutionalized in their schools. One principal talked about the way data analysis has become a reevaluation tool; and another talked about how they created a student support team, a committee that spends time discussing individual students, trends they are seeing, and whether the data shows improvements or not. Principals discussed how through consistently using procedures established from initiation and throughout the implementation of PBIS, this has become a way of doing business in their schools. The use of data analysis has become a way of recognizing when an intervention or support is successfully addressing the problem and a way to adjust along the way if something is not working. Ultimately, they are now using data to identify problems and trends and to create specific plans very intentionally and to address them in their schools.

- “It’s really used to kind of reevaluate what you’re doing and then make potential changes or stay put and collect more data. But it just helps you really pinpoint where are the areas of concern? Are there students that are of concern? Is there a disproportionality issue? And then what can we do and what can we possibly change



to improve upon this negative data? Or could it help inform so we have celebrations and things like that as well.”

- “We actually spent a significant amount of time in what we call an SST, student support team, talking about the individual kids and the trends that we’re seeing. We’ll actually look at the numbers and say, ‘Ok, is this improving or staying the same or maybe not improving, or going in the direction or not we want?’”

**Staff Buy-In and Fostering Staff Engagement.** As PBIS implementation becomes institutionalized in the school, principals explained that maintaining the themes discussed in the initiating and implementation stages are important. All four of the focus group principals and all five of the principals interviewed individually expressed the importance of consistency in procedures, empowering teachers, and continuing to recognize the positive work teachers are doing and allowing these components to become embedded in the everyday operations. One principal used the example of tapping teacher leaders by finding the teachers that are excelling in specific areas and giving them the opportunity to go in front of the faculty and share what is working for them in their classroom. Another principal explained that consistency keeps people “on board” and understanding that the procedures being implemented are schoolwide, which allows for things to be maintained in positive way. These components keep staff buy-in high and foster continuous staff engagement, otherwise complacency sets in and then forward movement stops and growth is stifled.

- “Identifying your teacher leaders in the building and getting them involved. One person is rocking [example] in your building and doing a really good job and getting great results, growing the program and all those things, get that person in front of the staff and have them share what they’re doing.”

- “It’s getting people on board and understanding that if we are consistent no one has to look like the bad guy and no one has to end up trying to be a buddy with the kids. There are schoolwide procedures, and this is what we’re implementing, and you could do it in very positive way.”
- “It’s going through like a complete rebrand and focusing. It’s sort of started las year, but a teacher group has worked throughout the summer kind of building consistent procedures that are going to be coming out for us this year.”
- “But I think comparatively speaking, it’s much more saturated throughout the whole school community.”

**School Culture.** As PBIS implementation becomes institutionalized in the school, principals explained that maintaining the themes discussed in the initiating and implementation stages are imperative. When discussing school culture and the PBIS process, the Behavior Matrix is pivotal (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021b; OSEP, 2015; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). The principals discussed the process of revising the matrix as PBIS becomes institutionalized and including all stakeholders in the process. COVID-19 presented opportunities to re-configure and re-work the behavior matrices in many cases, according to the principals interviewed.

**Revised Behavior Matrix.** According to the PBIS Blueprint (OSEP, 2015) one of the core features of the PBIS process that schools must pay careful attention to creating, implementing, and upholding is the behavior matrix (Center on PBIS, 2021b). The behavior matrix is created by using the schools shared vision and approach to supporting and responding to student behavior to create positively-stated school-wide expectations, as defined and displayed in a school behavior matrix, usually using an acronym that is related to school spirit, like SOAR, ROAR, RAMS,

GATOR, RISE, and so forth (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). The school behavior matrix helps in teaching and reminding students of the school-wide expectations (Center on PBIS, 2021b; Sugai & Horner, 2009).

During the interviews principals were asked questions about what PBIS looks like in their respective schools and if there are institutionalized components of PBIS as a system that are unique to their school. Principal participants in the focus group mainly discussed garnering student and staff input in the process to create or re-create their school's behavior matrices. All four principals in the focus group discussed the process of establishing their matrix as one of the most significant components of PBIS as a system in their buildings. Expectedly, there was more variation, detail, and depth among the individually interviewed principals' responses to these questions; however, all five principals also discussed revising their matrix and/or improving their procedures as well. The matrix embodies and operationalizes the school's culture. Therefore, it becomes embedded into the culture. The principals explained that when students and staff (stakeholders) are involved in creating, establishing, or in some cases revamping, the PBIS Behavior matrix there is a stronger sense of responsibility which positively affects their buy-in and embeds it within the school culture.

- “The matrix was built with student and staff input at the beginning of last year. So, it's a little hard to walk in and not have it in place, because I like things in place, but that opportunity for the students to help build that matrix was very empowering for them, and they have had more ownership of it...it was nice to have them have that part in the process.”

- “So I think it is building wide but it’s become part of the culture. It’s not necessarily that we have to say this is PBIS...this is just the way it is done here now.”
- “I think each of the high schools here, the matrix, the acronyms, are very much embedded in the school cultures.”

***COVID-19 Pandemic Impact.*** Inevitably discussion surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts came up in the interviews with principals both in the focus group and the individual interviews. One commonality of the principals’ experiences that emerged in the discussion was the way they used the effects of the pandemic to spur positive tweaks and changes to existing PBIS components, specifically to the behavior matrix. Multiple principals used the phrase “re-brand” and “re-vamp” when discussing changes made to the behavior matrix resulting from the pandemic. Essentially, the overall feeling was that it provided a natural opportunity to re-evaluate what was in place and then re-structure, or even adopt a completely new, behavior matrix based on teacher and student input and buy-in. This emerged as a sub-theme when participants were talking about their schools’ culture in the focus group as three of the four principals discussed these experiences and three of the five principals interviewed individually discussed similar experiences as well.

- “We were kind of in a transition spot just before the pandemic. So, coming back from COVID was a good time to re-work our matrix. We’ve switched our PBIS matrix, so now it goes with [our school letters]. Our change to [school name acronym] the students helped us come up with this and I thought that was really a good genuine way to go about it.”
- “COVID, I don't know where we'd be without COVID... it might be slightly different...but all those tenants of PBIS are still there. So, now we have the posters

around the building, [with the matrix] that reminds students of what those expectations are, what those like core values are that are aligned to PBIS.”

- “I think a huge part of like our rebranding or reframing had to do with that teacher consistency in the buy in. So, we are really trying to refocus that it's not just, ‘Oh, they get these gifts for doing stuff,’ but, ‘hey, we have consistency.’ And with consistency, everyone can find success, because everyone knows what the expectations are. And we've tried to carry this into our updated matrix, ours is [acronym]. We're a school that's really big on school spirit with athletics and performing arts so everything we do in our school is done with [acronym]. It kind of helped to flow what our belief system was, and that consistency and procedure across everything.”
- “Well, I would say our change to [acronym]. Coming back from the pandemic what we had before, which was [letters], but the kids couldn't remember what that they were, and I can barely remember it now. They, the students were the ones that said, ‘we want something to go with our school's name somehow’. We talked through the process and agreed as a group, students, and the teachers I had working with me, and then admin, that would be a good way to kind of focus our energies on that. So, the idea of changing it came from them and then how we fleshed it out was kind of a joint opportunity we worked together on as a school.”

***PBIS Process: Meaningful Planning, Don't Rush the Rollout***

Individually interviewed principals were asked: “If you could give any advice to those leading implementation of schoolwide PBIS in their buildings in the future, what would it be?”

When responding to this question, all five principals emphasized taking the time to have a sound

understanding of the PBIS process, carefully and meaningfully plan the initiative, and do not rush the rollout. When they were talking about this, principals said to keep the rollout simple and to be sure to have a sound understanding of the process first. The committee selection for the PBIS leadership team should be intentional, ensuring a well-balanced team is put together. This team should include: a school administrator, a variety of classroom teachers, a school counselor, community/family representation, and student representation in the high school context (OSEP, 2015). It is also important to put people with a variety of leadership strengths on the team for balance as well. They said, if possible, a good year of planning would be ideal, but nonetheless to have reasonable expectations, and start small because it is not a quick 1-year process. Two principals discussed the change process specifically when they mentioned their advice, one spoke to using the data to create the sense of urgency needed to gain positive momentum and garner buy-in. The other spoke to being mindful of providing enough information since people don't like change, so that teachers can see the vision and understand what the overall goal for implementation is since that helps reduce resistance to the change process. Another principal encouraged leaders to be sure they include students, as well as teachers, in the process along the way as well.

- “It needs to be a collected team movement forward with the community. So, educate, get information, find your stakeholders, teachers, leaders, then get some community and their students’ eyes on this, and then begin to methodically plan...Because many people we know don’t like change or the status quo, give them some vision of what it’s going to look like, if we have this fully implemented.”
- “To really understand it first, and to have people on the committee that relate to their staff that they're able to roll it out and share it. I think that that's really important, I

don't think it can come from an administrator at all. It has to come from staff, and you have to have them on the committee, because if it comes from an administrator then it's, this is being done to them versus we're in this together.”

- “Don’t get the ‘dumbstruck effect.’ Which is this initiative seems greater, or that initiative seems great and it’s going to save the day, but it's really the initiatives are no better than the people with them. Whether it be PBIS or personalized learning or new wave schools. I think the thing that is going to be really in the future, is how we integrate students right in the future. The integrated initiative and making sure students are involved, which is a great thing. Don't be in awe by it you’ve got to make it yours.”

### ***Summary***

Overall, the high school principals I interviewed expressed that PBIS has had a positive impact in their buildings and on their stakeholders. Many of them explained that, when implemented with fidelity and consistency, PBIS became embedded in their school cultures and became a normal part of daily school operations. Principals I spoke with in individual interviews consistently expressed the opinion that focused, high-school specific, division/central office support for PBIS is extremely beneficial and helps increase faculty and staff buy-in. Further, the high school principals explained that it is important for school leadership teams to take a great deal of time to plan the foundation for the initial roll-out of PBIS initiation into implementation. In some instances, principal participants encouraged other leaders to take a full semester to a year, if feasible, to plan the PBIS process for their school. They explained that taking this time on the front end to prepare for the PBIS process carefully and adequately might significantly decrease skepticism among stakeholders and positively affect buy-in and engagement, making

the process from initiation to institutionalization of PBIS more efficient and effective.

Ultimately, this may lessen potential roadblocks and might lead to higher yield successful implementation initially, and therefore might assist in the successful institutionalization of PBIS.

Table 8 summarizes and illustrates evidence used in findings from the focus group interview and individual interviews for Research Question 1.



**Table 8***Research Question 1 Interview Findings*

PBIS Stage	Theme	Sub-theme	Participants	
			Focus Group	Individual Interview
			<i>n</i> = 4	<i>n</i> = 5
<b>Initiating</b>				
	Division Led Initiation		3	4
	Data Analysis	Discipline & student data to identify areas of concern, create a plan	3	5
	Staff Buy-in and Fostering Staff Engagement	High staff buy-in, high staff engagement	4	5
		Empowering teachers	3	5
	School Culture		4	5
<b>Implementing</b>				
	Principal Buy-in		4	5
	Data Analysis	Discipline data to build relationships and inform best practice/ interventions	-	5
		Data sharing to provide support to teachers and students	3	5
	Staff Buy-in and Fostering Staff Engagement	Empowering teachers to lead consistently	4	5
		Show positive results	-	5
	School Culture		3	4
		Building relationships	-	5
<b>Institutionalizing</b>				
	Data Analysis	Progress monitoring: Inform consistent procedures	-	5
	Staff Buy-in and Fostering Staff Engagement		4	5
	School Culture	Revised behavior matrix	4	5
		COVID-19 Impact	3	3
	PBIS Process: Meaningful Planning, Don't Rush the Rollout		-	5

*Note.* PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

## Research Question 2

*How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be **essential** to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?*

### ***Survey Responses: Effective Leadership Components Essential for Successful PBIS Process***

Data from Survey Questions 9–12 aligned to Research Question 2 and help identify and describe the components of the Effective Leadership Model that high school principals perceive to be *essential* to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. Further, in the focus group and individual interviews principals were asked to talk about the leadership components they feel are essential to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. The data from the survey responses is triangulated with the data from a focus group interview with four high school principals and five individual interviews with high school principals, which are discussed in the sections after the survey data. The survey data analysis by question is provided in the subsections below. Tables that shows these responses are provided at the end of this section.

**Effective Leadership Framework.** The survey results to question 9 show varied familiarity with Fullan’s (2020) Effective Leadership Framework: 12 principal participants *somewhat* or *strongly agreed* that they are familiar with framework, while eight principals *somewhat* or *strongly disagreed*, and six neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Leadership Approaches.** Survey Question 10 (10.1-10.6) asked principals to select the most appropriate answer regarding which leadership approaches they believe to be essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of SWPBIS based on their experiences. Each question presented a phrase and description that lines up with one of six major leadership styles/approaches described by Fullan (2004) in his Personal Action Guide and Workbook as they were identified by Goleman (2000). The six styles described, but not labeled, were:

coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching. Fullan (2004) expanded on the leadership styles in his workbook as he explains:

Two of the six styles negatively affected climate and, in turn, performance: the coercive style (people resent and resist) and the pacesetting style (people get overwhelmed and burn out). All four of the other styles had a significant positive impact on climate and performance. (p. 44)

The participants' survey responses are in line with this explanation, as the coercive (10.1) and pacesetting (10.5) styles receiving the least agreement in being essential to principals' practice. According to the survey responses, the coercive leadership approach, in which the leader demands compliance, is the least essential (Fullan, 2004). Out of 26 principals, 19 felt this approach was not essential to their practice for PBIS implementation success. Six principals *somewhat* or *strongly agreed* that it is essential and one neither agreed nor disagreed. The survey responses indicate that the pacesetting leadership approach is more essential than coercive, but not as highly rated as the other three approaches. The pacesetting leadership approach (10.5) is one in which the leader sets high standards for performance and has a "do as I do, now" approach (Fullan, 2004, pp. 43–44). Six principals felt this approach was not essential to their practice for PBIS implementation success. Although it was found to have a negative effect on climate (Fullan, 2020), 12 principals *somewhat agreed* and 3 *strongly agreed* that it is essential to their practice, and five neither agreed nor disagreed.

The survey responses show 25 principals *somewhat* or *strongly agree* that the authoritative leadership approach (10.2), in which the leader mobilizes people toward a vision and has a "come with me" approach, is the most essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of PBIS (Fullan, 2004, p. 43). One principal neither agreed nor disagreed.

Twenty-four principals' responses show agreement that both the affiliative and democratic approaches are essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of PBIS. In both questions, two participants neither agreed nor disagreed. The affiliative approach (10.3) is one where the leader creates harmony, builds emotional bonds, and has a "people come first" approach; democratic (10.4) forge a consensus through participation and has a "what do you think" approach (Fullan, 2004, p. 43). Finally, the survey responses show 21 principals *somewhat* or *strongly agree* that the coaching leadership approach (10.6), in which the leader develops people for the future and has a "try this" approach, is essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of PBIS (Fullan, 2004, p. 43).

**Ranking Leadership Component Statements by Perceived Importance.** Survey Questions 11 (11.1-11.6) and 12 (12.1-12.7) asked principals to rank the statements provided about leadership components in order of importance from 1 to 6 or 7, with 1 being the most important. Although all statements might arguably be deemed important in various contexts, participants were asked to place them in the order they perceived to be most essential to their practice in the successful implementation of SWPBIS. I have provided a breakdown of the statements that were ranked the most important, the statements that had the most rankings of 1 or 2; and the statements that were ranked the least important, the statements that had the most rankings of 5 and 6 or 6 and 7 as shown in Table 10.

Question 11 provided six statements for principals to rank 1 through 6 by importance, with 1 being most important. Statement 11.1, act with the intention of making a positive difference in lives of stakeholders (have a "making-a-difference" sense of purpose), was selected by the most principals as most essential to their practice with nine principals ranking it as a 1 and two ranked it as a 2. Statement 11.6, foster purposeful interaction, problem solving, and focused

collaboration with stakeholders/team members about the work with PBIS, was the next highest selection for being essential to their practice as seven principals ranked it with a 1 and six ranked it with a 2. Statement 11.5, help people carry out the strategies to ensure all feel like they are a part of the success story, was selected by the most principals as the least essential to their practice with eight principals ranking it as a 5 and four ranked it as a 6. Finally, Statement 11.3, use measurable indicators of success for accountability and be accountable for/to them, was also ranked less essential to the principals' practice with five principals ranking it as a 6 and four ranking it as a 5.

Question 12 provided seven statements for principals to rank 1 through 7 by importance, with 1 being most important. Statement 12.1, focus on and facilitate meaningful relationship building opportunities with stakeholders, was selected by the most principals as most essential to their practice as ten principals ranked it as a 1 and four principals ranked it as a 2. Statement 12.4, engage employees in gaining knowledge/understanding and work collaboratively/systematically through problem-solving., was the next highest selection for being essential to their practice as seven principals ranked it with a 1 or 2. Statement 12.5, engage in trust building activities/professional development regarding the school's PBIS systems, practices, data, and outcomes regularly to provide transparency, was selected by the most principals as the least essential to their practice as nine principals ranked it as a 7 and four ranked it as a 6. Statement 12.7, interact purposefully and intentionally with team members and staff daily, was also ranked less essential to the principals' practice as six principals ranked it as a 7 and one ranked it as a 6. Finally, there was one statement that had mixed responses in the way principals ranked its essence to their practice. Statement 12.6, have the support and trust of school building faculty/staff regarding the vision and process for successful PBIS

implementation, was ranked by seven principals as the most essential to their practice in the successful implementation. However, there were eleven principals who ranked it as the least essential as eight ranked it as 6 and three as a 7. This is a noteworthy gap in the principals' perceptions that will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Summary.** Based on survey responses, the high school principal participants were more familiar with the PBIS Implementation Framework (2015) and its components than Fullan's (2020) Effective Leadership Framework components. The leadership component statements that principals ranked the highest in Questions 11 and 12 are aligned with the following components in Fullan's (2020) model: moral purpose (11.1), coherence making (11.6), relationships (12.1), and knowledge building (12.4). The way principals ranked the statements in questions 11 and 12 align with their responses to Survey Question 10 about the most, and least, essential leadership approaches for principals facilitating successful implementation of PBIS. These themes and ideas were also apparent in the focus group and individual interviews and will be discussed further in the following sections. Tables 9 and 10 show the frequency of responses from 26 high school principals in their answers to Survey Questions 9, 10.1–10.6, 11.1–11.6, and 12.1–12.7. Table 9 shows the frequency of responses of the principals in their answers to Survey Questions 9 and 10.1–10.6.

**Table 9***Participant Responses to Survey Items Aligned to Research Question 2a*

<b>Survey Item</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>9.</b> I am familiar with the Michael Fullan's (2020) Effective Leadership Framework.	3	5	6	10	2
<b><i>For SQ 10: Based on your experience, select the most appropriate answer regarding which leadership approaches you believe to be essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of SWPBIS.</i></b>					
<b>10.1.</b> Demands compliance - Has a “do what I tell you” approach.	5	14	1	5	1
<b>10.2.</b> Mobilizes people toward a vision - Has a “come with me” approach.	-	-	1	15	10
<b>10.3.</b> Creates harmony and builds emotional bonds - Has a “people come first” approach.	-	-	2	20	4
<b>10.4.</b> Forges consensus through participation - Has a “what do you think” approach.	-	-	2	17	7
<b>10.5</b> Sets high standards for performance - Has a “do as I do, now” approach.	1	5	5	12	3
<b>10.6</b> Develops people for the future - Has a “try this” approach.	-	1	4	11	10

*Note.* N= 26. SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

Table 10 shows the frequency of responses of the principals in their ranked answers to Survey Questions 11.1–11.6, and 12.1–12.7.

**Table 10**

*Participant Responses to Survey Items Aligned to Research Question 2b*

**For SQ 11 and 12: Rank statements in order of importance from 1 to 6/7 with 1 being the most important. (While all may be deemed important, place them in the order you find to be most essential.) From the list of statements provided about leadership components, please rank the statements in the order YOU PERCEIVE to be ESSENTIAL to YOUR PRACTICE in the successful implementation of SWPBIS**

<b>Survey Item (Ranking Statements)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>11.1.</b> Act with the intention of making a positive difference in lives of stakeholders (have a “making-a-difference” sense of purpose).	9	2	7	-	2	2	-
<b>11.2.</b> Use leadership strategies/actions that energize and mobilize people to pursue goals and tackle tough problems.	1	7	4	5	1	4	-
<b>11.3.</b> Use measurable indicators of success for accountability AND be accountable for/to them.	2	3	2	6	4	5	-
<b>11.4.</b> Be an active participant in the implementation (change) process.	2	3	2	8	3	4	-
<b>11.5.</b> Help people carry out the strategies to ensure all feel like they are a part of the success story.	1	1	4	2	8	4	-
<b>11.6.</b> Foster purposeful interaction, problem solving, and focused collaboration with stakeholders/team members regarding the work with PBIS.	7	6	3	1	2	3	-
<b>12.1.</b> Focus on and facilitate meaningful relationship building opportunities with stakeholders.	10	4	3	1	3	2	-
<b>12.2.</b> Make a conscious effort to listen to stakeholders' concerns, seeks out those doubting and tries to build good relationships with them to increase mutual trust regarding the change process.	2	4	6	6	2	3	-
<b>12.3.</b> Attempt to understand/empathize with stakeholders regarding the change process to build capacity and confidence, and to anticipate, address, and reduce anxiousness and potential resistance	-	3	4	7	5	2	1
<b>12.4.</b> Engage employees in gaining knowledge/understanding and work collaboratively/systematically through problem-solving.	2	5	1	5	4	3	3
<b>12.5.</b> Engage in trust building activities/PD regarding the school’s PBIS systems, practices, data, and outcomes regularly to provide transparency.	-	1	1	1	6	4	9
<b>12.6.</b> Have the support and trust of school building faculty/staff regarding the vision and process for successful PBIS implementation.	7	1	2	1	1	8	3
<b>12.7.</b> Interact purposefully and intentionally with team members and staff daily.	1	5	5	2	1	1	6

*Note.* N= 26. SWPBIS = School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; PD = Professional Development.



### *Essential Effective Leadership Components*

**Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making.** Moral purpose, relationships, and coherence making go together when it comes to effective leadership (Fullan, 2020).

According to the survey responses, principals ranked these three components among the most important and essential to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. When asked questions about day-to-day leadership, many of the principals' responses could be categorized under each of these components, since it is hard for one to exist without the other (Fullan, 2020). When defined by Fullan (2020) and described through the interactions in the effective leadership framework, moral purpose is acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of stakeholders, specifically teachers. Fullan (2020) explains that coherence making is the purposeful, intentional day-to-day work that brings unity and facilitates collaboration. Relationship building is the single factor common to every successful change initiative, relationships cannot improve without positive collaboration and teamwork based on trust built through purposeful interaction and problem-solving and intentionality (Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Further, focused collaboration in relation to the work is key when it comes to fostering positive relationship-building.

When responding to questions about leadership components they feel are essential to the successful implementation of PBIS, the principals' responses in the interviews support the overall data from the survey responses. Three out of the four focus group principals cited the importance of providing support for their stakeholders. They expressed the necessity of intentionally facilitating opportunities for their teachers to have the ability to try new ideas without the fear of failure or retribution. It is difficult to have many of the other leadership attributes without including or focusing on building relationships and coherence making as well

(Fullan, 2020). These focus group principals who discussed the importance of providing support and opportunities for their teachers, were also referencing the importance of positive relationship building, as well as the importance of fostering collaboration among teachers and building a sense of unity among them. This is in line with the leadership statements that were ranked the most important by principals in the survey: (11.1) act with the intention of making a positive difference in lives of stakeholders (have a “making-a-difference” sense of purpose), (12.1) focus on and facilitate meaningful relationship building opportunities with stakeholders, and (12.6) have the support and trust of school building faculty/staff regarding the vision and process for successful PBIS implementation.

All four of the focus group principals highlighted the importance of having positive relationships with their teachers that ultimately garner reciprocal trust as the change process ensues through PBIS implementation. Of the five principals interviewed individually, four of them discussed the significance of supporting teachers so the teachers feel comfortable taking risks. Four of the five principals interviewed individually also referenced the importance of building relationships to foster unity among the team of teachers, to provide for balanced collaboration among them. This allows teachers to work together to support one another and students. When the principals were asked to talk about the leadership components that they feel are essential to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS they emphasized the importance of modeling what is desired, so as the leader you should model the desired behavior through how you interact with them, teachers, and students. They discussed the importance of the buy-in of the leader, being mindful of the tone of the leader and endorsement of the leader because everyone pays attention to these things, and it can affect the buy-in of others. In essence, the principals’ responses talk about the change process and the importance having the ability to

take risks themselves, allowing their own vulnerability, while fostering the same in teachers and allowing them to do so also without fear.

- “I always like to start from a place of Yes. If you’ve got people willing to come and try different things that might be a little bit out of the box, go for it. You can try to convince me what the No is, but let's start from Yes, and we can work from there.”
- “For me it was vulnerability. I had to stand in front of a brand-new staff and say no we’re going to shake it up. We’re going to do things differently. So that personal vulnerability and then follow through on my part and being intentionally in the trenches the whole time.”
- “We have to model it. We have to work with teachers in the same way we’re asking them to work with students and use the same type of language that we’re asking them to use with their students, then they could see we’re working with students in the same way. So it’s not just we’re telling you in the classroom that you need to be doing this, but we’re also working to implement the same strategies through administration.”
- “Identifying your teacher leaders in the building and getting them involved. One person is rocking [example] in your building and doing a really good job and getting great results, growing the program and all those things, get that person in front of the staff and have them share what they’re doing.”

**Knowledge Sharing.** When responding to questions about leadership components they feel are essential to the successful implementation of PBIS, all four focus group principals and all five principals interviewed individually referenced data sharing, but not all referenced specific details of this process when answering this specific question. The importance and

significance of data sharing and analysis to the PBIS process, which does embody knowledge building and sharing, was discussed in extensive detail throughout the interviews. One principal explained that by sharing the data, in this case descriptive data pertaining to monthly infractions, “everyone knows what we’re looking at and therefore transparency exists, and trust is built, which facilitates positive relationship building.” The principal emphasized that when sharing the information, their leadership team is showing the numbers, frequency of behaviors, and then triangulates that with student achievement via correlation to the grade distribution report and absenteeism. According to one of the principals interviewed, through doing this, it “builds community among the teachers and facilitates a whole school approach to behavior.” This idea of transparency and ensuring everyone knows what the data is showing was supported by most of the principals in the focus group and individual interviews.

- “The fact that we meet as a faculty, and this time is dedicated to this and that’s a way to show the importance, and the emphasis on why this is something that we should do and then giving them the feedback.”
- “Well, I think first and foremost, everybody needs to know what the score is. So, sharing data, ...it’s kind of like a whole school approach to behavior...because we all live in this community.”

**Understanding Change.** “It is essential for leaders to understand the change process,” (Fullan, 2004, p. 4). To understand the change process, leaders must understand the people they are leading (Fullan, 2020). When principals are discussing the courage, it takes for taking risks and empowering teachers to do so without fear, they are talking about the change process, which demonstrates their understanding of the complexities of the process. Evidence of principals’ view of the essence of embodying this can be seen throughout the entirety of the discussions in

the focus group and the individual interviews even though it was not directly addressed when principals were answering this specific interview question. All participants demonstrated their understanding of the complexities of the change process over the course of the discussion in the interviews. When answering this question, principals spoke a great deal about providing various types of support to their teachers, which comes with understanding the needs of the people you are leading through change. This could potentially be an implication for the earlier variance in survey question 12.6, which speaks to the importance of having the support and trust if the school faculty/staff regarding the vision and process for successful PBIS implementation. There was a wide range in the responses from principals, where 10 principals put it in the top three and 11 principals put it in the bottom two. Principals discussed seeing the potential worth in others and then teaching and showing them they have that potential worth. They talked about the importance of creating an environment where staff can really do the things essential to the process while providing feedback along the way.

- “I think support for those folks who you want doing those things to be brave and go out there and take the risks, so they don’t get hammered by those few people who are really not bought in.”
- “I think leadership’s about seeing potential worth in others so much that they see it in themselves. PBIS, if you think fundamentally about it, is about that...When you think about school improvement, PBIS being one component of school improvement, if you want to improve schools...you need to create an environment where staff can really do that...So, you have to create an environment where they feel like they can perform, and they’re going to get supported on taking risks.”

- “The tone of the leader, the endorsement of the leader, the buy-in of the leader, the modeling that the leader does, that I too am right there demonstrating the attributes of what I would want a teacher to do, and how I interact with them, or how I interact with students, that is incredibly important.”

### *Summary*

Fullan (2004) says, “good leaders foster good leadership at all levels” (p. 8). This resonates with the survey responses and all throughout the experiences shared by principals in the focus group and individual interviews. Principals perceive all the leadership components to be essential to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS, as the conceptual framework for the study shows they are all intertwined and work together, so it is hard to have them effectively in the absence of each other. Moral purpose, relationships, and coherence making are especially apparent through supporting stakeholders, building positive relationships, and the fostering of collaboration and facilitating unity. Knowledge sharing can be seen most effectively when leaders are transparent and intentional about sharing and analyzing school data. Finally, the more leaders attempt to understand the people they are leading the more established their understanding for the change process becomes, which is essential to the success of leading through change such as the PBIS process effectively. Table 11 illustrates evidence from the focus group interview and individual interviews used in findings for Research Question 2.

**Table 11***Research Question 2 Findings: Essential Leadership and PBIS Practices*

Essential Effective Leadership Component	Perception	Participants	
		Focus Group <i>n</i> = 4	Individual Interview <i>n</i> = 5
<b>Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making</b>			
	Support for stakeholders	3	4
	Building positive relationships	4	4
	Fostering collaboration and unity	3	4
<b>Knowledge Sharing</b>			
	Data sharing and analysis	4	5
<b>Understanding Change</b>			
		3	5

*Note.* Participant perceptions of the components of the Effective Leadership Model essential to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

**Research Question 3**

*How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to exist in the successful implementation of PBIS?*

Data from the responses and discussion in the focus group and individual interviews help identify and describe the components of the Effective Leadership Model that high school principals perceive to *exist in* their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. Principal participants in the focus group and individual interviews were asked how the components they described as essential to their practice exist in their schools. There were not specific survey questions that directly asked principal participants about leadership approaches or statements they perceived to exist in their practice and/or schools' successful implementation of SWPBIS in the way they were asked about their perceptions of those that are essential to their practice,

therefore the data that answers this research question comes from the lived experiences shared by principals in the focus group and individual interviews.

### ***Existing Effective Leadership Components***

In interview questions that respond to Research Question 3, principals were asked about effective leadership components they perceive to exist in the successful implementation of PBIS. The purpose of asking these questions in this way is to provoke thought and discussion around what perceptions of ideal effective leadership components are versus how and what truly exists in practice and do they align with each other. There are five leadership components in Fullan's (2020) Effective Leadership framework: moral purpose, relationships, coherence making, understanding change, and knowledge sharing. They can be applied as follows: "moral purpose is [striving to make] a positive difference, relationship building among diverse people, knowledge [building must be fully understood as] information becomes knowledge through a social process, and coherence making is integrating, focusing amid complexity" (Fullan, 2004, p. 8-9). Finally, when understanding change its important to know that "innovation is not change; there will be an implementation dip; resistance is a potential positive force; reculturing is required; and change is complex" (p. 9). Examples of a principal who embodies these components while successfully leading their school through the PBIS process might include a principal who: communicates the vision and plan to stakeholders often and consistently; uses the PBIS team and success stories from teachers to share information with the staff; includes stakeholders in establishing the building matrix and expectations/ establishing common language; models the way; engages in and places high value on data sharing and analysis in order to build knowledge, create plans, and encourage growth; consistently encourages teachers and students and does not become complacent.



**Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making.** When responding to questions about leadership components they feel exist in their practices for the successful implementation of PBIS, three out of the four focus group principals discussed the importance of providing support, both for teachers and students. Throughout the discussion of providing support, principals talked about the importance of building stakeholders' efficacy while simultaneously building relationships and community as well. They also discussed building credibility and genuineness as means for relating to students to build their efficacy and ultimately relationships and collaborative and unified community. To build credibility and genuineness, principals talked about taking the time to show teachers and students that they value their opinions, first by asking for their input and then by following up to show how their input is being put into practice. Building a collaborative and unified community means that teachers and students are encouraged to work together to accomplish goals, which means they may have to take risks at times, but the environment that exists is supportive for these opportunities. A unified community exists when all stakeholders feel like they are a part of and invested in what the school and school community is doing.

The focus group principals' perceptions of essential effective leadership components align with what exists in their practice. There was also alignment among responses for principals interviewed individually regarding essential and existing effective leadership components; this means that what they say should ideally be present for successfully leading implementation of PBIS (change) does exist in their buildings as they lead the PBIS (change) process. In the responses about existing effective leadership components, all five principals discussed the significance of support, empowering the staff and building their collective and individual efficacy, the importance of building meaningful relationships, and promoting unity within the

building community. Their responses were more in depth and descriptive than responses from focus group participants due to the nature of their interview because of the opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion about their perceptions and experiences. Descriptions of principals' perceptions of leadership components that exist in their practices for successful PBIS implementation included: "empowering staff and collective and individual efficacy is everything in a school"; "it's about what can I do to support you, so you can support this kid"; "tailor to their strength"; "it's got to be shared leadership, consistent"; and "more of a community buy-in."

- "They run it, they plan it, they bring in the outside parts, and my job is just to sit here and say, yes what do you need to make it happen?"
- "So how can I make them feel a better part of it [the school]. So, I try to do that part... They don't think you are being genuine at first... but after a while I saw that if you keep inviting them back, and they have that input, they actually start owning what they're asking to be done. They want to see things done and they see that we're going to value their input."
- "I mean, like I said, empowering staff and collective and individual efficacy is everything in a school... when I need to go to a teacher about a kid in a micro level, it's a PBIS issue, it's a behavior issue, it's a multi-tiered systems interventions issue, it's a graduation rate issue, it's a data issue, there's lots of issues there, but they don't feel like they have to defend themselves to me. I sit down next to them just like I ask them to sit down next to a kid. It's not evaluative, it's not accountability, it's about what can I do to support you, so you can support this kid."
- "But part of that is me building up the capacity of assistant principals, teacher leaders, these coordinators that I've created here, and letting them take the lead and spreading

that out. When you do that, you've got this wide web that for different departments, they've got the ability to affect change here. That again is a big part of the success as well, because when they have that validation, they see that success. Then much like negativity can kind of go down, positivity can build very quickly as well."

**Understanding Change.** Understanding change means you understand the systems in place, the people being led, the dynamics of relationships and how change might affect these components. The more complex the change is, the more that people with the problem must be part of the change and the more they might be required and willing to adjust their practice and strategies along the way (Fullan, 2020). This component is intertwined among the others, all four focus group principals and all five principals interviewed individually did speak to it across the entirety of the interviews when discussing effective leadership components that exist in their practice leading to successful implementation of PBIS. When answering the question about effective leadership components that exist in their practice leading to successful implementation of PBIS principals talked about recognizing success and openness and adaptability regarding approach to situations. Which essentially means awareness of the impact of the change process both on the school, stakeholders, and oneself is important, therefore the ability to find comfort growing yourself is as important as fostering growth in others.

- "That again is a big part of the success as well, because when they have that validation, they see that success...positivity can build very quickly."
- "You have to be open to seeing how this might change the way you approach situations or people or students, whatever the case may be. So, you have to be willing to adjust and it might not have been an actual part of how you were leading or how you interact... you have to have that growth mindset... It's all in the way you are

selling it to your staff. You've got to brand [PBIS] in a way that it's going to be impactful and it's going to make a difference. Then you got to live that in front of everybody.”

**Knowledge Sharing.** Knowledge sharing is intentionally engaging stakeholders (teachers, students) in the pursuit of knowledge (data sharing and analysis) and problem-solving (Fullan, 2020). Effective leaders foster the generation and increase of knowledge, or transparency and understanding through data sharing and analysis, both inside and outside of their organization (Martinez et al., 2019). Throughout many areas of the interviews, details were discussed in depth about how embedded data analysis is in the successful initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS. When responding to questions about leadership components that exist in their building practices for the successful implementation of PBIS, all principals (all four focus group principals and all five principals interviewed individually) referenced data sharing, but not specific details of this process as a leadership component.

### ***Summary***

Principals' perceptions of what is essential to their success aligns with what they talked about existing in their practice for successfully leading their school through the PBIS process. There were not major discrepancies that arose between the essential or ideally should exist and what does exist in their practice of leading through the PBIS process. Fullan (2004) explains that “moral purpose is concerned with direction and results; understanding change, building relationships, and knowledge building honor the complexity and discovery of the journey; and coherence making extracts valuable patterns worth retaining” (p. 5). As principals discussed what exists in their practice, this notion from Fullan can be seen woven through their discussion and examples. In summation, as garnered from the shared experiences of the principals, all the

components come into play when leaders genuinely strive to make a positive difference, communicate the vision effectively, empower their stakeholders and foster personal growth, intentionally build relationships, and facilitate relationship building, maintain transparency and consistency in data sharing, and live and model what you are selling. Table 12 illustrates evidence from the focus group interview and individual interviews used in findings for Research Question 3.

**Table 12**

*Research Question 3 Findings: Existing Leadership and PBIS Practices*

Essential Effective Leadership Component	Perception	Participants	
		Focus Group	Individual Interview
		<i>n</i> = 4	<i>n</i> = 5
<b>Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making</b>			
	Support for stakeholders	3	5
	Building positive relationships	3	5
	Fostering collaboration and unity	3	5
<b>Knowledge Sharing</b>			
		3	5
<b>Understanding Change</b>			
		4	5

*Note.* Participant perceptions of the components of the Effective Leadership Model that exists in their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS. PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The nationwide exclusionary discipline data in K-12 public schools continues to present a need for behavior support systems, such as PBIS (OCR, 2021). As school divisions rollout initiatives like PBIS implementation in their schools, it is important to provide specific support, tools, and resources to the school leaders based on the school level they are leading in; just as understanding the fundamentals and dynamics of this type of change leadership is imperative to their success (Freeman et al., 2019; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). As mentioned in Chapter 1, “schools are complex organizations, and school leaders have a myriad of daily responsibilities including a mandate to develop and maintain a safe and supportive climate that promotes learning” (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 410).

There are unique contextual challenges at the high school level such as school size, school culture, and the age of the students that should be considered, addressed, and supported during the PBIS process (Center on PBIS, 2021a). However, even when considering the unique challenges the high school context presents, the same critical features of the PBIS process apply across all school levels, which means the key elements of the PBIS process do not change (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Flannery et al., 2018). It becomes the responsibility of the school leaders to address these factors throughout the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS in their schools (Center on PBIS, 2021a). Therefore, the importance of addressing these factors directly relates to the school principals’ effectiveness in leading the change (PBIS)

process. This is especially important, since an effective leader is essential for moving their school through opportunities successfully and in establishing buy-in from stakeholders (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Further, the leaders have the greatest influence on building a school's culture, and ultimately the principals set the tone for the school (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Fullan (2020) explained that,

by effectively leading in a culture of change, leaders also develop greater courage (in themselves and others) to do even more...The most effective leaders become more courageous because of their experiences. Yet they retain their humility and empathy for others. (p. 13)

Since research shows there is a gap that exists regarding experience with leading PBIS implementation in high schools, it is important to provide an opportunity for high school principals to share their experiences with the PBIS process while leading in a culture of change (Freeman et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017).

The purpose of this study was to expand the understanding of high school principal attributes and actions embedded in the Framework for Effective Leadership (Fullan, 2020) which enable the implementation of a school wide program such as PBIS. This research study explored PBIS as a system for change and attempted to gain understanding of high school principals' perceptions of the change process as examined through the elements of the study's conceptual framework, which includes Fullan's (2020) components of effective leadership and components of the PBIS implementation framework (OSEP, 2015). It concentrated on investigating high school principal's perceptions of facilitators and challenges that influence the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS and their role in the change process. Data

sources included a survey, a focus group discussion, and semi-structured interviews with high school principals.

## **Summary of Research Findings**

This chapter begins with a summary of findings for each research question integrated with supporting literature followed by recommendations and future research opportunities.

### ***Research Question 1***

*How do principals describe the process of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS?*

- a. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process?*
- b. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process? What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?*
- c. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?*

Six major themes emerged in the survey data, focus group discussion, and individual interviews with high school principals when discussing interview questions that address the first Research Question. The major findings for Research Question 1 are further discussed as they relate to each of the major themes and related literature.

**Division-Led Initiation.** Providing adequate, meaningful, appropriate, and effective division support to school principals and leadership teams is important to the success of new initiatives implemented in schools (Freeman et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

Participants identified that the PBIS process was initiated by the school division and typically was part of a division-wide initiative. Top-down initiatives are common and hard to get away from, which makes the lift even more challenging for principals to build trust and buy-in from teachers, but this supports the necessity and importance of effective change leadership (Fullan,



2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Participants identified varying and, sometimes, inconsistent levels of division support for the PBIS process. Further, when initiatives (change opportunities) are not viewed or treated as isolated events that require a solution; and instead, are adequately, carefully, and intentionally planned and prepared for then the implementation of systems such as PBIS become welcome opportunities for positive long-term change (Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

Participants perceived that it was their responsibility to find ways to normalize, operationalize, and embed the PBIS process into the culture and everyday procedures/ routines of their specific schools based on the needs of their stakeholders. Implementing PBIS can be viewed as an opportunity for positive long-term change (Judkins et al., 2019). Participants identified the importance of these steps to facilitate collective buy-in, ensuring the PBIS process became a “way of doing business and everyday school life” and to ensure teachers did not view the PBIS process as “just another initiative”. They discussed one way to cultivate this mindset and achieve collective buy-in is to consistently foster an environment promoting collective and shared ownership of the PBIS process. To do this, principals facilitate opportunities for teachers, closest to the problem, to lead and have ownership in the PBIS implementation process. Specifically, the principals perceived that by giving up control in some areas, they opened doors of opportunity for teachers to create and brainstorm proactive solutions, which is especially important as the PBIS process shifts to implementation.

**Data Analysis.** Participants perceived data analysis, mainly discipline and student data, to be integral to the successful initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS (the PBIS Process). Fullan (2020) explains that effective leaders facilitate opportunities for knowledge building, creating, and sharing, which can occur through gathering, analyzing, and

sharing data. Other scholars emphasize that transparency in data sharing is integral to PBIS practices and success because the absence of it may lead to resentment and skepticism (Martinez et al., 2019). Fullan (2004) wrote, “in collaborative cultures, sharing and support create trust” (p. 121). Participants discussed by having transparency in this process, trust is built between the school leaders and the teachers and staff. Essentially, this means everyone understands what the numbers look like, for example this would include student data such as discipline data, attendance data, tardy data, graduation rates, club attendance. Further, it means everyone understands what these numbers communicate and how they will be used to create a plan. Therefore, this creates a level playing field for addressing areas of concern and celebrating areas of improvement or success. Participants discussed ways this is achieved in their buildings and the significance of ensuring all are included in the process of unpacking the data, for example one principal mentioned the focus in their building this year is a “whole school approach to data sharing”. Others discussed how the data is shared and discussed within different committees, faculty meetings, and groups dedicated to brainstorming and providing plans for student support.

Participants perceived that when initiating PBIS, data analysis procedures identify areas of concern and facilitate creating a plan to intentionally address the problem. Participants perceived data analysis procedures during PBIS implementation to be a means for checking that the plan is addressing the problem areas of concern adequately or if adjustments to supports/interventions are necessary. These procedures ensure that meaningful, observable, and measurable goals are set for students and provides accountability to ensure the goals are being met (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012).

Participants identified the use of data analysis procedures as an important way to foster relationship building and provide support to teachers and students in PBIS implementation (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Fullan, 2020). Knowledge building through data sharing increases stakeholders' trust and buy-in because they feel included and a valuable part of the process (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008). Participants perceived that when PBIS is institutionalized, data analysis procedures established in initiation and implementation are used to continuously monitor progress and adjust as necessary. Fullan (2020) explained that knowledge at every level is essential. Further, he said that "successful organizations create organizational knowledge, disseminate it through the organization, and embody it in products, services, and systems" (Fullan, 2004, p. 121). Participants perceived that these procedures become a normal part of everyday school life when the PBIS process is successful. Fullan (2004) explained that "environment shapes behavior, people do not voluntarily share knowledge unless the culture favors exchange (there is a moral commitment to share)" (p. 121). Participants discussed ways to integrate data sharing and analysis into meetings because it makes them more meaningful and productive for providing student support. One example is triangulating data reports, like tracking attendance reports along with grade reports and discipline reports, to analyze if students are high risk in multiple capacities, therefore needing higher levels of support.

**Staff Buy-In and Fostering Staff Engagement.** While it may be more difficult to achieve in high schools considering the unique contexts that exist such as more teachers on staff, more students in the building and, in some cases, more severe behavior issues; support from teachers, is one of the most critical elements for successful implementation of PBIS in high schools (Flannery et al., 2018; Martinez et al., 2019). Participants identified the importance of

consistency in procedures initiated and implemented in the PBIS process to empower teachers, giving them more autonomy over the supports and interventions they are providing students. Participants perceived that releasing more ownership to those who are closest to the problem fosters higher staff buy-in and engagement, which occurs when meaningful collaboration and quality relationships are prioritized (Donohoo et al., 2018). These steps are impossible without specific, intentional, and meaningful collaboration. Quality relationships and focused teamwork that leads to high quality collaboration results in success (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000). Participants perceived that continuing to recognize the positive work teachers are doing helps create an environment where the PBIS process components become embedded in everyday school operations.

**School Culture.** As research suggests, the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve, which is also vital to building a positive school culture (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Likewise, participants identified the importance of building relationships and fostering a sense of community and unity within stakeholder groups to establish and maintain positive school culture and build confidence in those who are apprehensive throughout the successful PBIS process (Flannery et al., 2018). “The biggest impediment to creating change in a group is culture...culture changes only after you have successfully [changed] people’s [attitudes] and actions” (Kotter, 2012). Participants perceived the school’s PBIS behavior matrix to embody and operationalize the school’s culture as it becomes embedded into the culture. This is supported by Ylimaki’s (2014) and Bradshaw et al.’s (2015) research that explains effective leaders ensure that the school mission is aligned to the PBIS implementation plan and uses it as a means for fostering a positive culture and climate for the optimal learning environment for stakeholders.

Participants identified the process of creating, establishing, and revising the behavior matrix as one of the most significant components of the PBIS process and returning post-COVID presented a prime opportunity for revising the matrix according to school needs. Participants perceived that when students and staff have input in the process of creating, establishing, or revising the behavior matrix there is a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership which positively impacts stakeholder buy-in and embeds it within the school culture (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001).

**Principal Buy-In.** Participants perceived their own buy-in to the PBIS process to be higher when they can see the process working with fidelity in their schools. Essentially, some acknowledged that they were hesitant at first, and they knew they had a big task at hand to garner the necessary support and buy-in from their schools and some principals inherited PBIS when they took over the principalship. Participants perceived their own buy-in to be greater when PBIS is implemented with fidelity, with highly visible success, measurable outcomes, and PBIS process procedures become embedded in the school culture. Many researchers discuss suggest it is imperative that principals create and set observable and measurable goals when implementing SWPBIS (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021b; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). Researchers state further that these goals provide accountability, which is vital to successful PBIS initiation, implementation, and institutionalization (Center on PBIS, 2021b; Sugai & Horner, 2009). It is important to have stakeholder support for a change initiative in high schools is important to success (Martinez et al., 2019). Participants identified that experiencing positive impacts with the PBIS process also increases their overall buy-in (Flannery et al., 2018).

**PBIS Process: Meaningful Planning, Don't Rush the Rollout.** It is imperative and fundamental for lasting success that leaders take adequate and necessary time to carefully prepare their stakeholders and the school environment for change through innovative leadership approaches (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Participants identified the necessity for school leadership teams to take adequate time and preparation in training to ensure they have a sound understanding of the PBIS process before initiation. These leadership approaches become vitally important when leaders are seeking to implement systems for change, establish new procedures, and potentially challenge the existing status quo (Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Participants identified the importance of carefully and meaningfully planning the initiative, putting together the leadership team, and introduction of the PBIS process. “Successful implementation of any school-wide initiative relies heavily on the school leaders [ability] to create conditions for success” (Judkins et al., 2019, p. 411). Participants cautioned leaders to ensure they do not rush the rollout of the PBIS process, and they emphasized to take as much time as needed to successfully initiate and implement the procedures in the high school setting.

### ***Research Question 2***

*How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to be **essential** to their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?*

The leadership components can be grouped according to three major themes that emerged in the survey data, focus group discussion, and individual interviews with high school principals when discussing interview questions that address Research Question 2. The major findings for Research Question 2 are further discussed as they relate to these themes and the related literature.

**Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making.** As research suggests and is previously discussed, teachers are more likely to value and follow leaders who demonstrate that they are trustworthy, open, and affirming, and who intentionally develop authentic connections and meaningful relationships with their stakeholders (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008). Principal participants identified the importance of fostering an environment where they can take risks themselves while allowing teachers to do so without fear as well. When discussing PBIS as a change process, participants perceived that providing support for stakeholders, building positive relationships, and fostering collaboration and unity among their teachers are essential in the successful implementation of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Kotter 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Participants perceived that building positive relationships with and providing support to their teachers cultivates trust and comfort with the PBIS process (Flannery et al., 2018; Judkins et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Further, study participants perceived that fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among their teachers allows teachers to work together to support one another and students throughout the change (PBIS) process (Flannery et al., 2018; Judkins et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2019).

**Knowledge Sharing.** Study participants identified the importance of data sharing and analysis to the PBIS process. Effective leaders foster the increase of knowledge (transparency and understanding through data sharing and analysis) both inside and outside of their organizations (Fullan, 2004, 2020; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Study participants perceived that when everyone knows what the data shows, it provides transparency and builds trust among stakeholders. Research supports this perception as data sharing and analysis increases relevance of the PBIS process, and when teachers are included in the data sharing process, their trust and

buy-in increase exponentially (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Donaldson, 2001; Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008)

**Understanding Change.** “People look to leaders to define what is normative for the group” (Donaldson, 2001, p. 59). Principals in this study identified the importance of providing various types of support to their teachers. They perceived that seeing the potential worth in others is very important to leading effectively through the change (PBIS) process. Fullan (2020) explained that understanding stakeholders’ needs is essential to understanding change because, because to understand change you must understand the people you are leading through change. Participants further identified the importance of facilitating the creation of an environment where staff can feel comfortable to try new strategies, to empower teachers and provide feedback along the way (Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). When stakeholders feel empowered, they are more likely to be in favor of the change process, such as PBIS implementation (Flannery et al., 2018). When this empowerment exists, buy-in increases and initiatives in any capacity move forward more smoothly because more stakeholders are in favor of the change process (Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

### ***Research Question 3***

*How do school principals perceive each of the components of the Effective Leadership Model to exist in their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?*

The leadership components are grouped according to the same three major themes for the Research Question 3 as in Research Question 2. Research Question 2 addressed perceptions of how the leadership components are essential to principals’ practice, while Research Question 3 addressed how the leadership components exist in principals’ practice in the successful



implementation of PBIS. The major findings from the focus group and individual interviews with high school principals when discussing interview questions that aim to answer Research Question 3 are further discussed as they fall under these themes.

**Moral Purpose, Relationships, and Coherence Making.** “When school leaders embrace the opportunity to lead with heart, healthy relationships unfold within the community, inspiring practices that are in [student’s] best interests, (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016, p. 14). High quality relationships paired with focused teamwork that leads to high quality collaboration results in success with the change process, such as PBIS implementation (Badaracco, 2002; Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000; Pascale et al., 2000). Participants in this study perceived the following to be ways the leadership components exist in their practice in the successful implementation of PBIS: providing support to teachers, empowering the staff, and building teachers’ collective and individual efficacy, building meaningful relationships, and promoting unity within the building community (Center on PBIS, 2021b; OSEP 2015; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012). Research supports the notion that building these leadership components and developing strong personal leadership characteristics helps establish credibility of the leader and increase teacher buy-in for initiatives such as the PBIS process (Fullan 2020; Martinez et al., 2019; Smith, 2008). This is important as staff and teacher support for change is vital to the successful implementation of PBIS in high schools (Flannery et al., 2018; Martinez et al., 2019).

**Knowledge Sharing.** Fullan (2020) explained that creating and sharing knowledge plays a crucial role in effective leadership and requires “a new conception of learning, greater and bigger moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, and teamwork” (p. 12). Further, transparency in data sharing is integral to successful PBIS practices (Flannery et al., 2018;

Martinez et al., 2019). Principals in this study perceived data sharing and analysis to be embedded in the PBIS process, and therefore it must exist in their successful initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS. Essentially, their perception was that in order to have success with the PBIS process, data sharing and analysis, knowledge building and sharing, must become second nature.

**Understanding Change.** It is important for leaders to carefully prepare their stakeholders and the school environment for change through an innovative leadership approach, which is fundamental for lasting success (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Continuing to foster this approach through the entire PBIS process is important, as study participants identified the value of recognizing success, and openness and adaptability regarding approach to situations (Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). This is especially true when implementing systems for change, seeking to establish new procedures, and potentially challenging the existing status quo (Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Principal participants perceived their awareness of the impact of the change process both on the school, stakeholders, and oneself to be very important as it exists their practice leading to successful implementation of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2019).

### **Recommendations for Practice**

“Over the past decade, high schools have faced challenges and new initiatives, [like the PBIS process], which have resulted in the development of approaches to address these and meet the unique needs of high schools and their students” (Flannery et al., 2018, p.1). As the number of high schools implementing PBIS continues to grow, it becomes more important to understand the experiences of principals who have led schools through the PBIS process. Further, it is

important fully understand the complexities and the unique characteristics of high schools that impact effective implementation of PBIS (Flannery et al., 2018; Judkins et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2019). It is also imperative to understand and facilitate ways to support leaders throughout the PBIS process, which can be enhanced by increasing the understanding of how to lead stakeholders through the change process. Further, it is vital to provide successful opportunities for leaders to grow, develop, and enhance their effectiveness to lead in a culture of change (Fullan, 2020). There are seven recommendations based on the findings of this study. Table 13 provides a summary of the findings, related recommendations, and supporting literature.

**Table 13**

*Recommendations for Practice Related to Corresponding Findings*

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Participants identified that the PBIS process was typically part of a division-wide initiative. Participants identified varying levels of division support for the PBIS process. Participants perceived that it was their responsibility to find ways to normalize, operationalize, and embed the PBIS process into the culture and everyday procedures/ routines of their specific schools based on the needs of their stakeholders. Participants identified the importance of these steps to facilitate collective buy-in, ensuring the PBIS process became a “way of doing business and everyday school life” and to ensure teachers did not view the PBIS process as “just another initiative.”	School divisions and division level PBIS coordinators should specifically package PBIS initiation and implementation for the high school level. School divisions and division level PBIS coordinators should provide ways to support the leadership of the PBIS process specific to the unique contexts in the high school level.	Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Flannery et al., 2018 Freeman et al., 2019; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Martinez et. al., 2019 Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012
Participants identified the importance of consistency in procedures initiated and implemented in the PBIS process to empower teachers, giving them more autonomy over the supports and interventions they are providing students. Participants perceived that releasing more ownership to those who are closest to the problem fosters higher staff buy-in and engagement. Participants perceived that continuing to recognize the positive work teachers are doing helps create an environment where the PBIS process components become embedded in everyday school operations.	School leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to showcase their successes with PBIS. School leaders should create a positive recognition system for teachers to recognize the positive work they are doing within the PBIS process.	Donaldson, 2001; Donohoo et al., 2018; Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000; Martinez et. al., 2019; OSEP, 2015; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
<p>Participants identified the importance of building relationships and fostering a sense of community and unity within stakeholder groups to establish and maintain positive school culture and build confidence in those who are apprehensive throughout the successful PBIS process. Participants perceived the school's PBIS behavior matrix to embody and operationalize the school's culture as it becomes embedded into the culture. Participants identified the process of creating, establishing, and revising the behavior matrix as one of the most significant components of the PBIS process and returning post-COVID presented a prime opportunity for revising the matrix according to school needs. Participants perceived that when students and staff have input in the process of creating, establishing, or revising the behavior matrix there is a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership which positively impacts stakeholder buy-in and embeds it within the school culture.</p>	<p>School leaders should create a system for providing opportunities for teachers and students to have input, provide feedback, and collaborate in the process of creating, establishing, or revising the school's behavior matrix and other PBIS components when feasible. In high schools this can be used as an opportunity to build school spirit.</p>	<p>Badaracco, 2002; Boulden, 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Conger &amp; Benjamin, 1999; Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2007; OSEP, 2015; Pascale et al., 2000; Sanfelippo &amp; Sinanis, 2016; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001; Ylimaki, 2014</p>
<p>Participants perceived data analysis, mainly discipline and student data, to be integral to the successful initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of PBIS (the PBIS Process). Participants perceived that when initiating PBIS data analysis procedures identify areas of concern and facilitate creating a plan to intentionally address the problem. Participants perceived data analysis procedures during PBIS implementation to be a means for checking that the plan is addressing the problem areas of concern adequately or if adjustments to supports/ interventions are necessary. Participants identified the use of data analysis procedures as important to foster relationship building and provide support to teachers and students in PBIS implementation. Participants perceived that when PBIS is institutionalized, data analysis procedures established in initiation and implementation are used to continuously monitor progress and adjust as necessary. Participants perceived that these procedures become a normal part of everyday school life when the PBIS process is successful.</p>	<p>Leaders should have a plan and system established for consistently and continuously monitoring all forms of student data necessary. Ideally, divisions will purchase or provide support with student information systems that are optimized to include all necessary access to data in one place.</p>	<p>Bradshaw et al., 2008; Brown &amp; Duguid, 2000; Center on PBIS, 2021b; Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2007; Martinez et al., 2019; Sanfelippo &amp; Sinanis, 2016; Simonsen et al., 2009; Smith, 2008; Sugai &amp; Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012</p>

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Participants identified the importance of change process. Participants perceived that when everyone knows what the data shows, it provides transparency and builds trust among stakeholders.	School leaders should promote and embrace a data-driven culture to effectively lead through the change process. Opportunities for leaders to enhance their skills with data should be provided through division sponsored professional development or conference attendance.	Brown & Duguid, 2000; Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Flannery et al., 2018; Kotter, 2012; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Martinez et al., 2019; OSEP, 2015; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008
Participants identified the necessity for school leadership teams to take adequate time and preparation in training to ensure they have a sound understanding of the PBIS process before initiation. Participants identified the importance of carefully and meaningfully planning the initiative, putting together the leadership team, and introduction of the PBIS process. Participants cautioned leaders to ensure they do not rush the rollout of the PBIS process, and they emphasized to take as much time as needed to successfully initiate and implement the procedures.	School leaders should provide adequate space and time to prepare for leading the PBIS process to include meaningful planning and ensuring that leaders don't rush the rollout.	Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Flannery et al., 2013; Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016
Participants identified the importance of fostering an environment where they can take risks themselves while allowing teachers to do so without fear as well. Participants perceived that providing support for stakeholders, building positive relationships, and fostering collaboration and unity among their teachers are essential. Participants perceived that building positive relationships with and providing support to their teachers cultivates trust and comfort with the change process. Participants identified the importance of recognizing success and openness and adaptability regarding approach to situations. Participants perceived their awareness of the impact of the change process both on the school, stakeholders, and oneself to be very important to successful change leadership.	Division and school leaders should provide professional development training on change leadership for principals. These professional development experiences should be led by trained facilitators in change leadership who have expertise in leading in a culture of change.	Bradshaw et al., 2008; Center on PBIS, 2021a, 2021b; Donaldson, 2001; Donohoo et al., 2018; Fullan, 2004, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; R. Lewin & Regine, 2000; Martinez et al., 2019; OSEP, 2015; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Simonsen et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2012

*Note.* PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; OSEP = Office of Special Education Programs.

### ***Recommendation 1***

As more high schools engage in the PBIS process and implement SWPBIS, it is important that leaders are prepared and have the tools and support necessary for success schools (Freeman et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). As the PBIS process was typically part of a

division-wide initiative for participants in this study, it would be beneficial for divisions to package the initiative rollout by level to account for the unique contexts that come with each, especially high school. School divisions and division level PBIS coordinators should specifically package PBIS initiation and implementation for the high school level (Center on PBIS, 2021a). Principal participants in this study said this would greatly help with initial teacher buy-in and success during PBIS initiation.

School divisions and division level PBIS coordinators should provide ways to support the leadership of the PBIS process specific to the unique contexts in the high school level (Center on PBIS, 2021a; Martinez et al., 2019). This would help them strategize ways to normalize, operationalize, and ultimately embed the PBIS process into the culture and everyday procedures and routines specific to their schools and based on the needs of their stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2019; Judkins et al., 2019; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Strong district support and guidance when implementing PBIS can enhance the outcomes and sustainability, which can be achieved through providing leadership and management, providing professional development, and promoting effective environments (Flannery et al., 2018). If this is not already in place through partnerships with entities such as Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS), it would be beneficial to have specific positions or coordinators dedicated to supporting the PBIS process by level, which ideally would mean there are at least three coordinators or coaches who can provide level-specific support to elementary, middle, and high schools respectively. Staff in these positions can help train and coach leaders and PBIS leadership teams in the schools and provide additional support and coaching as needed.

### ***Recommendation 2***

Participants perceived that releasing more ownership to those who are closest to the problem fosters higher staff buy-in and engagement. If the initiative is district-driven, principals can provide autonomy and ownership at the school level for *how* the initiative is implemented. “Faculty confidence and hope grow as they see in the leader’s actions clear evidence of optimism about the school’s work and his or her own confidence in them” (Donaldson, 2001, p. 59). It is important for leaders to provide consistent, meaningful feedback to teachers regarding the PBIS process as it helps build engagement and increases buy-in (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020). Further, participants perceived that continuing to recognize the positive work teachers are doing helps create an environment where the PBIS process components become embedded in everyday school operations. Finding places and ways to celebrate the efforts and successes of staff members with the PBIS process is important to building positive culture and increasing staff buy-in and engagement because when you share their work with others you validate their efforts and prove you value them (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). School leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to showcase their successes with PBIS. School leaders should create a positive recognition system for teachers to recognize the positive work they are doing within the PBIS process.

### ***Recommendation 3***

Principal participants in this study perceived the school’s PBIS behavior matrix to embody and operationalize the school’s culture as it becomes embedded into the culture. Further they identified the process of creating, establishing, and revising the behavior matrix as one of the most significant components of the PBIS process. Therefore, school leaders should create a system for providing opportunities for teachers and students to have input, provide feedback, and

collaborate in the process of creating, establishing, or revising the school's behavior matrix and other PBIS components when feasible (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Flannery et al., 2018; Ylimaki et al., 2014). In doing this, school leaders create a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership in the PBIS process which positively impacts stakeholder buy-in and embeds it within the school culture (Boulden, 2010; Sprague et al., 1999; White et al., 2001).

#### ***Recommendation 4***

Participants identified the use of data analysis procedures as an important way to foster relationship building and provide support to teachers and students in PBIS implementation (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Fullan, 2020). Therefore, school leaders should have a plan and system established for consistently and continuously monitoring all forms of student data necessary. By having a consistent plan and data analysis procedures in place, teachers will know what to expect which increases comfort, buy-in, engagement, and ultimately contributes to a positive school culture (Flannery et al., 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). Ideally, divisions should purchase or provide support with student information systems and software that are optimized to include all necessary access to data in one place (Flannery et al., 2018).

#### ***Recommendation 5***

School leaders should promote and embrace a data-driven culture to effectively lead through the change process (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016). As previously discussed, knowledge building through data sharing increases stakeholders' trust and buy-in because they feel included and a valuable part of the process (Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Smith, 2008). Opportunities for leaders to enhance their skills with data gathering, analysis, and ways to share data should be provided through division sponsored professional development or conference attendance. These



opportunities give leaders a chance to become familiar and comfortable with innovative ways to promote and embrace a data-driven culture, which they can then bring to and implement in their schools (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Kotter, 2012).

### ***Recommendation 6***

In Flannery et al.'s (2013) study of PBIS implementation in high schools, they found that it took a minimum of two years for significant and meaningful changes to be visible in schools with the full implementation of PBIS practices. Further, principals in this study identified the necessity for school leadership teams to take adequate time and preparation in training to ensure they have a sound understanding of the PBIS process before initiation. Flannery et al. (2018) explain that as high school leaders,

work to implement and sustain PBIS practices and systems, it is critical to [take sufficient time to] consider the contextual influence of the size, organizational culture, and the age of the students, especially on the three key systems of leadership, data and communication. (p.14)

Therefore, school leaders should provide adequate space and time to prepare for leading the PBIS process in high schools to include meaningful planning and ensuring that leaders do not rush the rollout.

### ***Recommendation 7***

Principals in this study identified the importance of fostering an environment where they can take risks themselves while allowing teachers to do so without fear as well. School divisions play a significant role in helping facilitate such an environment by supporting the PBIS process in the schools, especially in high schools; therefore, the direction and actions from division leadership can greatly enhance implementation (Flannery et al., 2018). Further, principal

participants perceived their awareness of the effects of the change process both on the school, stakeholders, and themselves to be very important to successful change leadership. Therefore, division and school leaders should provide professional development training on change leadership for principals, which should be led by trained facilitators in change leadership who have expertise in leading in a culture of change (Fullan, 2004, 2020; Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Experiencing change leadership is inevitable when leading schools. There will always be new initiatives to implement, however, the more we strive to understand change and how the process and people work within it, the more effective and efficient we will be as change leaders. There were a few limitations in this study that future research might attempt to address. All but one of the principals that participated in the focus group and individual interviews lead in suburban high school settings. Future research might seek to capture the experiences of principals leading the PBIS implementation process in urban or rural high schools. While I did seek to capture these experiences, principals in these settings did not respond in the same way suburban principals did whether it is due to time, interest, feasibility; I am not sure, but their voices and experiences are valid and valuable as well. There were survey questions that specifically aligned to research questions one and two, however, there were not questions geared directly to research question three. Questions in the survey that specifically asked principals about the leadership components that exist in their successful leadership of PBIS implementation may add to existing themes or present emergent ones. Similarly, as a novice researcher with limited experience conducting research interviews, there was a lack of deep probing in some of the questions. For some of the questions, more in depth probing questions during data collection

in the focus group and individual interviews may have led to more rich and concise answers especially regarding the components of effective leadership addressed in research questions two and three.

As PBIS implementation continues to grow more prevalent in high schools, the more we hear from the experienced high school leaders who have led through all stages of the PBIS process, the better we can support the unique needs the high school context presents. Further, the more we understand the needs for providing implementation fidelity for PBIS in the high school setting, the better we can package the necessary tools and training for the rollout all together. There are eight regions in VTSS, an attempt to gain a sample representative across all eight regions may be beneficial. Overall, this study provides a foundation for understanding how to effectively lead through the change (PBIS) process in the high school context, however, as PBIS is implemented in more and more high schools, a larger study could be conducted attempting gain more representative results.

## **Summary**

When “leading in a culture of change,” stakeholders will rise to the challenge if they are led with grace (kindness, understanding, given the benefit of the doubt) and efficiency and made to feel the task at hand is both individually and collectively worthwhile (Fullan, 2020). An administrative team that embodies Fullan’s effective leadership components, has high expectations and administrators that hold people accountable, while emphasizing the value of relevant professional development and meaningful collaboration among staff members will have more success with the entire PBIS process from initiation through institutionalization (Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Martinez et al., 2019; Villa et al., 2005). The daily work of school leaders requires balance and adaptability, especially when leading change initiatives such as the

PBIS process, Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) effectively capture this as they describe the role of school leaders in our ever-changing culture,

The daily work of a school leader is no longer just being an administrator or manager or even a boss; instead, a school leader needs to model transformative practices so that innovating becomes a norm and working with common principles becomes a collective goal for [all stakeholders]. (p. 13)

As the student discipline and other supporting data in schools continues to show the need for systems like SWPBIS, the more important it is for school leaders to be change-savvy and steeped in the effective leadership components (Center on PBIS, 2023; Flannery et al., 2018; Fullan, 2020; Judkins et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2019; OSEP, 2015). Furthermore, as more high schools implement PBIS it is imperative that division and school leaders understand and plan for the complexity of the high school context (Flannery et al., 2018; Flannery et al., 2013; Judkins et al., 2019). Although the PBIS features and implementation framework do not change across levels, research supports the notion that regarding “high schools there is an impact on the implementation process due to the added complexity of the high school context” (Flannery et al., 2018, p.15). As discussed throughout this study and by principal participants as well, the complexities brought by the high school context “can influence the sequence of implementation, the resources needed for implementation and the time it may take to put a practice or system in place” (p. 15). Therefore, it is imperative for leaders to consider these factors as they plan for initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing PBIS in their high schools. It is equally imperative for school divisions to provide adequate support for high schools and their leaders as they embark on the journey of leading in a culture of change in their buildings to foster the PBIS process successfully. Leadership through change matters and context matters.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey (Qualtrics) with Participant Informed Consent

#### **SURVEY: Leadership and PBIS (Change Process) by Jaimie Clougher Brandt**

##### Informed Consent PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM:

I agree to participate in a research study involving principals who have experienced School Wide PBIS implementation. My study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. The mixed methods research study will explore PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process.

I understand that all high school principals in school divisions that partner with VTSS will be solicited and have the opportunity to participate in the research process, and that my participation in the study is purposeful and voluntary. Data collection will be ongoing throughout the cycle from 2022-05-30 to 2023-05-30. Data collection methods will include an online survey, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Specific participants, determined based on selection criteria gleaned via responses to question 1-6 of the survey, will be invited to participate in semi-structured focus group or individual interviews that are conducted between the participant(s) and researcher, based on participant interest.

I understand that the interviewer has been trained in the research of human subjects, my responses will be confidential, and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I understand that the data will be collected using an audio recording device and then transcribed for analysis. Information from the audio recording and transcription will be safeguarded so my identity will never be disclosed. My true identity will not be associated with the research findings. I understand that there is no known risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time. I agree that should I choose to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the study that I will notify the researcher listed below, in writing. A decision not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher, William & Mary generally or the School of Education, specifically.

If I have any questions or problems that may arise because of my participation in the study, I understand that I should contact Jaimie C. Brandt, the researcher, at phone number: (757)810-4770 and/or email at: jrclougher@wm.edu. I understand that I may also contact Dr. Peggie Constantino CHAIR at (757)221-2323 and/or email at meconstantino@wm.edu. You may also contact Dr. Tom Ward at (757) 221-2358 or EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

Select 'Yes' below to provide consent. It signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form via this survey (emailed upon request), and that I consent to participate in this research study.

**Yes, I consent. (7)**

**No, I do not consent. (8)**

**Start of Block: Demographic Information**

**Question 1: My high school uses School-Wide PBIS (SWPBIS).**

Yes (1)

No (2)

***Skip To: End of Survey If My high school uses School-Wide PBIS (SWPBIS). = No***

**Page Break**

**Question 2: How long have you served as a principal? (Total number of years in the principalship.)**

1-3 years (1)

4-6 years (2)

7-9 years (5)

10+ years (6)

**Question 3: How long have you served as principal of your current school?**

1-3 years (1)

4-6 years (2)

7-9 years (3)

10+ years (4)

**Question 4: How many total years of experience do you have in leading a school(s) through SWPBIS implementation?**

1-3 years (1)

4-6 years (2)

7-9 years (3)

10+ years (4)

**Question 5: How many years has SWPBIS been implemented in your current school?**

1-3 years (1)

4-6 years (2)

7-9 years (3)

10+ years (4)

**Question 6: How would you identify your school?**

Urban (1)

Rural (2)

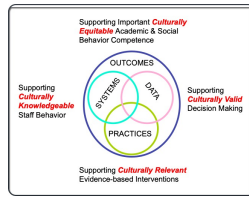
Suburban (3)

**End of Block: Demographic Information**

**Instructions: Responses to questions 7 through 10 will be answered according to a 5-point Likert scale. It ranges from 1 to 5 on the spectrum rating scale, where 1 is 'Strongly disagree' and 5 is 'Strongly agree'.**



**Question 7: I am familiar with the following PBIS Implementation Framework (click on image to see it full-size/larger):**



<p><b>Image: Pbis 2015 (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
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**Question 8: Provide your response to the following statements about the SWPBIS Implementation Process according to your experience(s) in your current principalship and in your current school (unless otherwise specified). Select the most appropriate answer on the scale for each question.**

<p><b>8.1 School-Wide PBIS implementation is a district-wide initiative for all schools in my school division. (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>8.2 A vision and common values have been established and embraced by the majority of stakeholders. (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>

**8.3 A PBIS leadership team has been established. (5)**

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b>	<b>Somewhat agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>

**8.4 Specific PBIS supports have been identified and implemented. (12)**

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b>	<b>Somewhat agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>

**8.5 A data sharing process has been implemented for communicating SWPBIS information to all faculty and staff as appropriate and necessary. (7)**

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b>	<b>Somewhat agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>

**8.6 Academic and behavior target outcomes have been identified and communicated. (8)**

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b>	<b>Somewhat agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (5)</b>

8.7 Evidence-based interventions have been implemented and supported. (9)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)

8.8 The SWPBIS system has had a positive impact on the building culture and morale. (11)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)

Question 9: I am familiar with the Michael Fullan's (2002) Effective Leadership Framework: (click on image to see it full-size/larger)

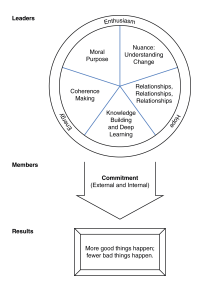


Image: Fullan If 2020 p. 9 (1)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)

**Question 10: Provide your response to the following statements regarding leadership approaches. Based on your experience, select the most appropriate answer regarding which approaches you believe to be essential for leaders facilitating successful implementation of SWPBIS.**

<p><b>10.1 Demands compliance - Has a “do what I tell you” approach. (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>10.2 Mobilizes people toward a vision - Has a “come with me” approach. (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>10.3 Creates harmony and builds emotional bonds - Has a “people come first” approach. (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>10.4 Forges consensus through participation - Has a “what do you think” approach. (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>10.5 Sets high standards for performance - Has a “do as I do, now” approach. (5)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>
<p><b>10.6 Develops people for the future - Has a “try this” approach. (6)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly disagree (1)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat disagree (2)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Neither agree nor disagree (3)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Somewhat agree (4)</b></p>	<p><input type="radio"/></p> <p><b>Strongly agree (5)</b></p>

Questions 11 and 12 ask you to rank statements in order of importance from 1 to 6/7 with 1 being the most important. (While all may be deemed important, place them in the order you find to be most essential.)

**Question 11: From the list of statements provided about leadership components, please rank the statements in the order YOU PERCEIVE to be ESSENTIAL to YOUR PRACTICE in the successful implementation of School-Wide PBIS.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Act with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of stakeholders (have a “making-a-difference” sense of purpose). (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ Use leadership strategies/actions that energize and mobilize people to pursue goals and tackle tough problems. (2)

\_\_\_\_\_ Use measurable indicators of success for accountability AND be accountable for/to them. (3)

\_\_\_\_\_ Be an active participant in the implementation (change) process. (4)

\_\_\_\_\_ Help people carry out the strategies to ensure all feel like they are a part of the success story. (5)

\_\_\_\_\_ Foster purposeful interaction, problem solving, and focused collaboration with stakeholders/team members regarding the work with PBIS. (6)

**Question 12: From the list of statements provided about leadership components, please rank the statements in the order YOU PERCEIVE to be ESSENTIAL to YOUR PRACTICE in the successful implementation of School-Wide PBIS.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Focus on and facilitate meaningful relationship building opportunities with stakeholders. (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ Make a conscious effort to listen to stakeholders’ concerns, seeks out those doubting and tries to build good relationships with them to increase mutual trust regarding the change process. (2)

\_\_\_\_\_ Attempt to understand/empathize with stakeholders regarding the change process to build capacity and confidence, and to anticipate, address, and reduce anxiousness and potential resistance. (3)

\_\_\_\_\_ Engage employees in gaining knowledge/understanding and work collaboratively/systematically through problem-solving. (4)

\_\_\_\_\_ Engage in trust building activities/PD regarding the school’s PBIS systems, practices, data, and outcomes regularly to provide transparency. (5)

\_\_\_\_\_ Have the support and trust of school building faculty/staff regarding the vision and process for successful PBIS implementation. (6)

\_\_\_\_\_ Interact purposefully and intentionally with team members and staff daily. (7)

**Question 13: Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. I will be conducting Focus Group Interviews and Individual Interviews in my next round of data collection. If you would be interested and willing to participate in an interview regarding your experiences with PBIS Implementation and leadership, please type your name and the best email to reach you in the text box provided below.**

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End of Survey.

## APPENDIX B

### **Informed Participant Consent Form (Hard Copy)**

I agree to participate in a research study involving principals who have experienced School Wide PBIS implementation. My study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. The mixed methods research study will explore PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process.

I understand that all high school principals in school divisions that partner with VTSS will be solicited and have the opportunity to participate in the research process, and that my participation in the study is purposeful and voluntary. Data collection will be ongoing throughout the cycle from 2022-05-30 to 2023-05-30. Data collection methods will include an online survey, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Specific participants, determined based on selection criteria gleaned via responses to question 1-6 of the survey, will be invited to participate in semi-structured focus group or individual interviews that are conducted between the participant(s) and researcher, based on participant interest.

I understand that the interviewer has been trained in the research of human subjects, my responses will be confidential, and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I understand that the data will be collected using an audio recording device and then transcribed for analysis. Information from the audio recording and transcription will be safeguarded so my identity will never be disclosed. My true identity will not be associated with the research findings. I understand that there is no known risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time. I agree that should I choose to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the

study that I will notify the researcher listed below, in writing. A decision not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher, William & Mary generally or the School of Education, specifically.

If I have any questions or problems that may arise as a result of my participation in the study, I understand that I should contact Jaimie C. Brandt, the researcher, at phone number: (757)810-4770 and/or email at: jrclougher@wm.edu. I understand that I may also contact Dr. Peggie Constantino CHAIR at (757)221-2323 and/or email at meconstantino@wm.edu. You may also contact Dr. Tom Ward at (757) 221-2358 or [EDIRC-L@wm.edu](mailto:EDIRC-L@wm.edu).

Type 'Yes' in the zoom chat box to provide consent. It signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form via this focus group (emailed upon request), and that I consent to participate in this research study.

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2022-05-30 AND EXPIRES ON 2023-05-30.

## APPENDIX C

### Principal Focus Group Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a building principal with SWPBIS implementation. You were selected to participate based on your responses to the first six questions in the survey, namely your years of experience leading a building with PBIS, and your interest expressed by providing your contact information in survey question 12. This is important because I want to gain your insights and perceptions regarding your experiences with PBIS leadership and how a principal's leadership qualities and attributes impact PBIS implementation.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am seeking the range of perspectives that can emerge from your varying experiences, so please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from that of others you may hear. Feel free to engage in conversation with one another about the questions. I am here to listen, ask questions, and make sure that there's equity of voice. Your responses will become part of my doctoral research which seeks to gain deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. The mixed methods research study will explore PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process.

Our conversation today should take no more than 45 minutes. I am audio-recording our session for transcription and analysis and will provide a transcription to each of you to verify accuracy. Please note that all of your responses will remain confidential and identifying information will be redacted from the transcript. You may withdraw from this interview at any time without penalty.



Before we begin, I'd like to ask that you maintain several norms for this conversation.

- Speak your truth from your lived experiences. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Listen fully & seek clarification, if needed.
- Avoid identifying other staff in your buildings by name. You may refer to them instead as “a student,” “an administrator,” or “a teacher.”
- In order to maintain group confidentiality, what is said in the group should remain in the group.

Please do not share or discuss ideas or information from this session with others.

Semi-Structured Principal Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. Where did the idea for implementing PBIS in your building come from?
  - 1a. (If not discussed in first response) How would you describe your own buy-in regarding the PBIS implementation process?
2. What does PBIS as a system look like in your building? Are there institutionalized components of PBIS as a system that are unique to your school?
3. How has PBIS changed from initial implementation to now in your building?
4. What types of data are used to inform PBIS in your building?
5. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process from initiating PBIS implementation to now?
6. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process?
7. What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?
8. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?
9. What leadership components do you feel are *essential* to your practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?

10. How do the components you discussed in the previous question *exist in* in your school? Please provide examples.
11. What has been particularly positive about your experience with PBIS implementation?
12. Have you experienced roadblocks in your experience with PBIS? How can this be fixed in future situations?
13. Is your life at school any different because of the implementation of PBIS?  
Is the life of the teachers/staff any different because of PBIS implementation?  
Is the life of the students any different because of PBIS implementation?
14. Is there anything else that you feel it is important to mention or discuss regarding leadership and PBIS implementation?

## APPENDIX D

### Individual Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a building principal with SWPBIS implementation. You were selected to participate based on your responses to the first six questions in the survey, namely your extensive years in the principalship and experience leading a building with PBIS, as well as your interest expressed by providing your contact information in survey question 12. This is important because I want to gain your insights and perceptions regarding your experiences with PBIS leadership and how a principal's leadership qualities and attributes impact PBIS implementation.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am seeking the range of perspectives that can emerge from your experiences, so please feel free to completely share your point of view. Your responses will become part of my doctoral research which seeks to gain deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. The mixed methods research study will explore PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process.

Our conversation today should take no more than 45 minutes. I am audio-recording our session for transcription and analysis and will provide a transcription to you to verify accuracy. Please note that your responses will remain confidential and identifying information will be redacted from the transcript. You may withdraw from this interview at any time without penalty.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask that you maintain several norms for this conversation.

- Speak your truth from your lived experiences. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Listen fully & seek clarification, if needed.

- Avoid identifying other staff in your building by name. You may refer to them instead as “a student,” “an administrator,” or “a teacher.”
- In order to maintain confidentiality, what is said in the interview session today will remain in the interview session. Please do not share or discuss ideas or information from this session with others.

Semi-Structured Principal Individual Interview Questions:

1. Where did the idea for implementing PBIS in your building come from?
  - 1a. (If not discussed in first response) How would you describe your own buy-in regarding the PBIS implementation process?
2. What does PBIS as a system look like in your building? Are there institutionalized components of PBIS as a system that are unique to your school?
3. How has PBIS changed from initial implementation to now in your building?
4. What types of data are used to inform PBIS in your building?
5. How has data analysis been used at each stage of the process from initiating PBIS implementation to now?
6. In what ways has staff buy-in impacted each stage of the process?
7. What strategies have been used to foster staff engagement?
8. In what ways has school culture impacted, or been impacted by, the stages of the process?
9. What leadership components do you feel are *essential* to your practice in the successful implementation of PBIS?
10. How do the components you discussed in the previous question *exist in* in your school? Please provide examples.

11. What has been particularly positive about your experience with PBIS implementation?
12. Have you experienced roadblocks in your experience with PBIS? How can this be fixed in future situations?
13. Is your life at school any different because of the implementation of PBIS?  
Is the life of the teachers/staff any different because of PBIS implementation?  
Is the life of the students any different because of PBIS implementation?
14. If you could give any advice to those leading implementation of SWPBIS in their buildings in the future, what would it be?
15. Is there anything else that you feel it is important to mention or discuss regarding leadership and PBIS implementation?

## APPENDIX E

### Solicitation to Participate

Good Morning *NAME*,

I am currently working on my Doctorate of Education in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership at William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. I have recently been approved to conduct my research and I would like to invite you to participate in a mixed methods research study involving principals who have experienced School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) implementation. My study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of leader attributes and actions that facilitate a school-wide change to implement a system like PBIS successfully. The mixed methods research study will explore PBIS as a system for change and attempts to gain understanding of principals' perceptions of the change process.

Participation would include completing an online survey through Qualtrics (a link is provided below) and if interested, engaging in a semi-structured interview (either in a focus group or individually) that focuses on your knowledge of and experiences with leading a school through SWPBIS implementation. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

I can be reached by email at jrclougher@wm.edu or by phone at (757)810-4770.

Thank you very much for your time and participation!

Survey Link:

[https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_erIzLx907nwfle6](https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_erIzLx907nwfle6)

Respectfully,

Jaimie C. Brandt

## APPENDIX F

### Checklist for Focus Group & Individual Interviews

#### Advance Notice

- Contact participants by email two weeks (or more) before the session.
- Send each participant an email confirming time, date, and zoom link to virtual video conference.
- Give the participants a reminder email prior to the interview.
- Arrive early: sign into the zoom meeting room 10 minutes early.
- Check background noise so it doesn't interfere with audio recording.
- Share copy of focus group/individual interview questions to the chat or send via email 30 minutes prior.

#### Moderator Skills

- Practice introduction without referring to notes.
- Practice questions. Know the key questions. Be aware of timing.
- Be well rested and alert.
- Listen. Are participants answering the question?
- Know when to probe for more information and when to move on.
- Avoid head nodding.
- Avoid verbal comments that signal approval.
- Avoid giving personal opinions.

#### Immediately After the Interview Session

- Check to see if the audio recorder captured the comments.
- Prepare a brief written summary of key points as soon as possible.
- Send follow-up thank-you emails to participants in addition to mailing thank-you cards.

Adapted from M. A. Casey and R. A. Krueger. (2000). *Focus groups* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

## VITA

### JAIMIE CLOUGHER BRANDT

**jaimie.brandt@gmail.com**

#### **Educational Experience**

Doctorate in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership: William & Mary (May 2023)

Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, Secondary Social Studies: William & Mary (May 2008)

Undergraduate in Politics, Foreign Affairs: University of Virginia (May 2007)

#### **Professional Experience**

Assistant Principal, Middle School (2019-2020)

*PBIS/VTSS Building Coordinator, Crisis Team Coordinator, ELL Site Coordinator*

Assistant Principal, High School (2016-2019)

*PBIS/VTSS Building Coordinator, NMSI School Liaison and Site Director, ELL Site Coordinator*

General Education Teacher, Social Studies, High School (2008-2016)

#### **Professional Committees and Presentations**

- Division Committees: VTSS/PBIS; Technology and Innovation; Code of Conduct; Dress Code; Safety and Crisis Team; Family Engagement
- Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services School Safety Conference (2016-2019)
- Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Threat Assessment Training (2020)
- Division Restorative Practices Training (Trainer) (2017-2020)
- SURN Leadership Conference, William & Mary (2019)
- Co-Presenter at 2018 Leadership Academy YCSD, **Overcoming Disproportionality in Discipline Using SWIS and PBIS: A discussion of the use of restorative practices, PLC teams, and building committees to create a positive school culture that cut discipline incidents nearly in half while also overcoming disproportionality.**

#### **Certificates**

Certification/ Endorsement: Virginia K-12 Administration and Supervision

Certification/ Endorsement: Virginia Secondary Education (6-12) Social Studies