

DISTANCE LEARNING AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

by

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ABSTRACT

During the global pandemic, families, students, and teachers had to adapt/transition from their normal routines of in-person learning to a new online setting. This forced transition was difficult for many worldwide and had a great impact on children and their development. School frameworks, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), could not be properly implemented by parents and teachers. Now that students are returning from distance learning, implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports might be an effective way to address new behavioral issues in the classroom. The purpose of this study is to obtain information on teacher experiences with the transition from online learning back to in-person learning. The main objectives were to:

1. Review past studies regarding PBIS strategies that are being implemented within schools/districts to address behaviors in the classroom.
2. Construct a survey to gain an understanding of teacher experiences with student behavior and PBIS strategies.
3. Evaluate the survey responses to discern whether or not PBIS frameworks are effective in addressing these behaviors.

A quantitative methodological survey design approach was utilized to answer these research questions in order to gain information on the effectiveness of PBIS frameworks on student behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a strategy used to promote positive behaviors and utilizes data-driven interventions (Houchens et al., 2017). SWPBIS differs from other behavior supports as it strays away from punitive strategies and focuses more on recognizing positive behaviors. It is a multitiered system that requires involvement from a team, staff, and data-based decision making (Houchens et al., 2017). Tier 1 of PBIS caters to all students within the classroom and involves a variety of elements such as, creating effective classroom environments, redirecting problem behaviors, and providing students with direct praise for good behaviors (Center on PBIS, 2022). If Tier 1 supports are not effective for students, Tier 2 supports are implemented. Tier 2 strategies provide more targeted support for students who may be developing serious problem behaviors. These practices can involve group interventions, social skills, academic support, and self-management. Tier 3 involves individualized support for students. Students with Tier 3 supports have a team who design a behavior support plan that specifies goals for the school to implement within the classroom.

In 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic which resulted in the transitioning to online learning for students around the world. This sudden transition placed an abundant amount of stress on parents, children, and educators as they now had to learn how to navigate teaching curriculum from their homes. In addition, parents had to balance their work responsibilities with their children's new online school schedule. The stressors of remaining healthy during a global pandemic, navigating online learning, and

balancing work responsibilities all have an effect on child behavior. The literature review examines the impact that distance learning had on families and educators as well as information on proper positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) implementation. The aim of this research is to obtain more knowledge on the experiences of teachers and their return to in-person learning. These experiences can include the teacher knowledge of behavioral expectations and PBIS frameworks utilized by their school.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Review past studies regarding PBIS strategies that are being implemented within the school to address behaviors in the classroom.
2. Construct a survey to gain an understanding of teacher experiences with behavior and PBIS strategies.
3. Evaluate the survey responses to discern whether or not PBIS frameworks are effective in addressing these behaviors.

Proper implementation of PBIS frameworks can have a significant impact on students upon the return to in-person learning as they did not receive all the supports needed during online learning. Knowledge on these experiences will be obtained through surveys from teachers with questions addressing their experiences with distance learning, their knowledge of PBIS frameworks, and if they were acknowledged during distance learning.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The sudden closures of schools caused a lot of stress on not only families, but also educators who had to learn new ways in which to provide behavioral support online. This proved to be a difficult task for parents who have children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) (Simo-Pinatella et al., 2021). The most important goal for these special education teachers was to establish a routine with structured activities as a preventative strategy (Simo-Pinatella et al., 2021). Emotional support had a major impact on families as special education teachers within the study shared that they spent a lot of time listening to each family's concerns and needs (Simo-Pinatella et al., 2021). Implementing behavioral interventions was a challenge as parents were unable to understand their child's behavior problems and could not properly provide the correct behavior supports.

In addition, parents were also adapting to new work situations as many had to work from home and take care of another child's online schooling. Having to learn behavior language used by special education professionals and balancing a new way of living can be a stressful task for parents and their child. Schmidt and colleagues (2020) conducted a study that analyzed parent-child interactions during distance learning and the different factors that may contribute to positive or negative interactions. The researchers found that the more involvement a parent had in their child's online learning, the more negative parent-child interactions. These negative interactions were due to parents feeling the additional stress of learning how to navigate online learning that resulted in children's increased challenging behaviors.

Both of these studies highlight the impact that distance learning has on relationships amongst parents, children, and educators. It is important to note that these studies may not be completely generalizable to students within the United States as one study was conducted in Germany and the other in Spain. Regardless, the findings give readers a better understanding of the sudden obstacles that occurred on both sides of the computer screen during online learning. This understanding helps to reveal the importance of implementing an effective behavior system that can be utilized during in-person learning such as, PBIS.

PBIS and School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Multiple studies have found that implementing PBIS strategies results in higher achievement and lower rates of truancy. Following a PBIS framework has been proven to be effective in schools, but it also requires proper training and commitment from educators.

Tier 1 Practices

Before a school can begin implementing Tier 2 and 3 practices, schools should be implementing all Tier 1 practices. The Center on PBIS (2022) suggests that schools create three-five easy school wide expectations for all students to follow on campus. All students should be able to list these expectations and give examples for each one. Teachers can utilize these expectations to help combat any new behaviors found within the classroom due to distance learning. For example, students may struggle with being respectful with their peers as they have spent a long period of time being isolated from them. The school can establish a school wide expectation that focuses on being respectful. A teacher can provide examples of what respectful interactions with peers looks like and give specific praises to students who successfully perform these actions. Scheuermann et al. (2022) refer to Tier 1 practices as the universal level and primary prevention. These preventions are intended for all students with frequent behavioral

monitoring to identify students who do not meet the behavioral expectations. School wide expectations can be enforced further through the use of a token system that is used by at least 90% of all school personnel (Center on PBIS, 2022). The Tier 1 team also calls for input from families during meetings to determine each expectation's effectiveness. To help students implement these behaviors at home, teachers can provide information on the Tier 1 practices, such as the school wide expectations. With knowledge of these practices, parents can also praise their child for respectful interactions with siblings or other individuals at home. Overall, Tier 1 practices require participation from all team members in order to successfully address behaviors in the classroom.

Tier 2 Practices

Once a strong foundation of Tier 1 practices has been established, Tier 2 practices can be implemented if/when a student needs further assistance. Tier 2 practices focus on providing more supports as a form of prevention. Before implementing practices, the Tier 2 team members try to understand the function of the student's problem behavior to help them pick an intervention (Center on PBIS, 2022). Student progress will then be monitored and documented in order to decide whether or not to continue, modify, or change a student's intervention.

An example of a Tier 2 intervention would be a Check-in Check-out feedback session. These sessions can involve the student's teacher and other adults meeting in the school five to seven times a day. Students will be more likely to engage in expected behaviors after receiving positive reinforcement from their teacher and other adults. A teacher can also help their students by identifying what motivates their students and thus help them find an alternative to unwanted behaviors. If Tier 1 practices did not help alleviate a student's behavior of being respectful

toward one's peers, the Tier 2 members can discuss the function behind the student's behavior to formulate more effective interventions for that student, such as, a check-in check-out system.

Impact on Child Behavior

Furthermore, Pas and Bradshaw (2012) analyzed the effect that SWPBIS had on student outcomes and truancy rates. Higher implementation of SWPBIS resulted in higher student outcomes in math and reading along with lower truancy rates. A school can develop higher fidelity levels of SWPBIS strategies through proper training. Johnson (2017) examined the process in which positive behavior interventions and supports were implemented in K-12 school systems. His research supported the PBIS framework as the implementation of these strategies had a positive impact on a child's educational experience. His study highlights the importance of prioritizing the appropriate training needed to successfully follow PBIS framework.

PBIS Team Members

Houchens and colleagues (2017) examined whether the fidelity level of SWPBIS implementation affects a teacher's perception of it and whether or not this affects student outcomes. They found that higher fidelity levels resulted in more positive teacher perceptions of teaching conditions within their school. Although the researchers were unaware of teaching conditions prior to the implementation of SWPBIS, their study revealed higher student outcomes with SWPBIS strategies. Consistency and knowledge of how to implement SWPBIS within schools is vital to the success of these strategies. Sullivan and colleagues (2011) found that knowledge within different domains of behavior is essential in SWPBIS. Not only do teachers need to be well versed in PBIS strategies, but also other members of leadership teams. These members can include special educators, support staff, parent, school psychologists, and behavior specialists. The Center on PBIS (2022) also states that Tier 1 practices require 90% or more

participation from teachers and administration. In addition, a strong foundation of Tier 1 practices and team members with behavior support expertise is required to utilize Tier 2 practices.

Bradshaw (2008) and colleagues analyzed the difference in implementation of PBIS amongst trained and non-trained schools. Each school was assessed on seven key features of school-wide PBIS such as, System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations, Monitoring and Evaluation, and District Level Support. Their results showed that schools that were trained had a greater increase in implementation of various features. Non-trained schools showed minimal increase in only three key features. It is also noted that a possible limitation of the study is the awareness and familiarity of school-wide PBIS framework amongst both the trained and non-trained schools.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

One vital member of implementing PBIS strategies is the parent of the child. Baker and colleagues (2016) explain the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement. Parent involvement addresses the presence of parents in schools while engagement refers to the intentional effort to acknowledge parent voices. The study focuses on how schools can transition from involvement to engagement with the responses they received from their focus groups with staff and parents. A variety of barriers can keep families from engaging in their child's education such as language barriers, lack of communication, and negative experiences with the school that leave the parent feeling inadequate. Creating an environment that is welcoming and encouraging to all families can help with the development of a positive relationship with parents. Positive relationships are essential to the implementation of PBIS strategies as it creates more meaningful and long-lasting behavior improvements.

While family involvement is encouraged in schools, it is not always effectively practiced. Garbacz and researchers (2016) address this issue by providing a framework for engaging families in School-wide PBIS. Current approaches to involving families are not consistently utilized and do not provide a way to connect families with the school. The three activities recommended by this study are to establish a family representative on the school PBIS team, identify cultural considerations, and utilize a data-based, problem-solving framework (Garbacz et al., 2016). A family representative will allow the leadership team to discuss the effectiveness of different family engagement procedures. Cultural considerations can involve having members who are fluent in the languages within the school community. The leadership team can utilize focus groups with family representatives to obtain the data needed to understand the strengths and needs of their school's community.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF INQUIRY

Due to the global pandemic, students and teachers had to unexpectedly transition to an online learning format. It made it challenging for teachers to implement the proper behavioral supports for their students. Now that students are returning from distance learning, implementing positive behavior interventions and supports might be an effective way to address new behavioral issues in the classroom. The implementation of distance learning has impacted teachers and families all around the world. This research can provide more knowledge on the experiences of teachers and families and their return to in-person learning. With the return to in-person learning, educators are now dealing with new unaddressed behavioral issues. Positive behavior interventions and supports has been proven to lower truancy rates and increase academic achievement. There is little information on how these behaviors are being addressed.

The aim of this research is to obtain more knowledge on the experiences of teachers and families and their return to in-person learning. These experiences can include the teacher knowledge of behavioral expectations and PBIS frameworks utilized by their school. Knowledge on these experiences will be obtained through surveys from teachers with questions addressing their experiences with distance learning, their knowledge of PBIS frameworks, and if they were acknowledged during distance learning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the PBIS strategies that are being implemented within their school to address behaviors in the classroom.

2. What are teachers' perceptions with student behavior and PBIS strategies during online learning and with the return to in person learning.
3. What do quantitative data suggest regarding the PBIS frameworks effectiveness in addressing student behaviors.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sullivan et al. (2011) administered a survey via email to members of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) to examine school psychologist's preparation, participation, and perception of SWPBIS. Schmidt et al. (2021) utilized a baseline assessment, a 21-day diary, and post-assessment to obtain information on the parent-child relationships during distance learning. Simo-Pinatella et al. (2021) conducted interviews via the Google Meet platform to learn more about teacher experiences with addressing behaviors during the pandemic.

A quantitative methodological survey design approach will be utilized to answer these research questions in order to gain information on the effectiveness of PBIS frameworks on student behaviors. In addition, the data collected will also give more information on the new behavioral problems that teachers and parents are experiencing due the abrupt transition from in-person learning to distance learning. There are not any anticipated ethical considerations for the surveys as they will remain anonymous.

RESEARCH METHODS

The investigator obtained permission from the school administrator to survey teachers. Once official written permission was obtained by school administration, the investigator completed the IRB research application. The IRB reviewer contacted the investigator a week later requesting adjustments to various parts of the application. The investigator revised the

application and resent for IRB approval. One week later, the research application was IRB approved and initial emails were sent to teachers of the elementary school.

Setting and Sample

Participants were elementary teachers in San Bernardino County. This study employed a convenience sampling as they were easier to access and appropriate for conducting this type of PBIS research (Bickman & Rog, 2009; [Nikolopoulou, 2022](#)).

Data Collection

A Qualtrics survey will contain a variety of questions regarding observed behaviors in the classroom and at home, along with teacher, administration and parent perceptions of the effectiveness of a PBIS framework. The Center on PBIS (2022) provides a variety of surveys that can be distributed to teachers and administration in order to obtain knowledge on each individual's perception of PBIS at their school. Some of the questions involve school safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and institutional environment. The responses to these question require the individual to mark "strongly disagree," "somewhat disagree," "somewhat agree," or "strongly agree." Questions regarding new behavior change will require the same response from participants. For example, two questions will state, "Did you witness any behavior changes from your student during the transition to distance learning?" and "After returning to in-person learning, did you witness any behavior change from your student?"

The methodology for this study differs in that it follows essential PBIS framework concepts and gives all participants the opportunity to respond with anonymity. The sampling method used to select participants will be convenience sampling as it involves a voluntary response from those who wish to participate in the online Qualtrics survey. Participants will have

two weeks to respond to the online Qualtrics survey and will ideally contain a sample size of 27 with a response rate of 20.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Survey

A survey with quantitative measures was completed by eight teacher participants at a public elementary school. Participants were asked a total of 14 questions regarding their experience with distance learning and new behaviors in their classrooms upon the return to in-person learning. Participants were given the option to answer with strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree to the following questions:

1. I feel comfortable communicating with parents at my school.
2. Staff at my school communicates well with parents.
3. Parents at my school attend PTA meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and/or school activities.
4. I witnessed a behavior change from my students during the transition to distance learning (Spring 2020-Spring 2021).
5. I witnessed a behavior change from my students after the return to in-person learning (Fall 2021).
6. My students have difficulty with peer social interactions after the return to in-person learning.
7. Aggression is a problem behavior that my students had after the return to in-person learning.

8. Disruption is a problem behavior that my students had after the return to in-person learning.
9. Unresponsiveness is a problem behavior that my students had after the return to in-person learning.
10. I felt my students received the proper support to address any of the previously listed behaviors upon the return to in-person learning.
11. My school sets clear school-wide behavior expectations.
12. I use language of the behavior expectations regularly with my students.
13. I clearly communicate classroom behavior expectations with parents.
14. I believe we teach and reteach behavior expectations frequently

The results from the survey will be organized as follows: Communication with Parents and Administration, Student Behaviors and the Transition to Online Learning/Return to In-Person Learning, and Utilization of PBIS Framework.

Communication with Parents and Administration

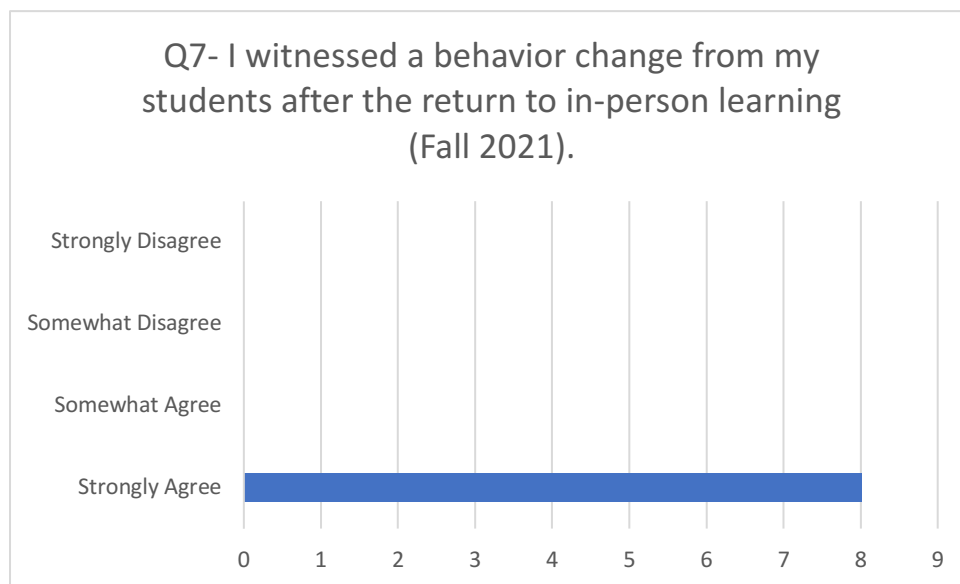
Participants were first asked to answer questions regarding their comfort with communicating information to parents, the staff's ability to communicate with parents, and parent willingness to attend school activities/PTA meetings. One hundred percent of the participants strongly agreed that they were comfortable communicating with the parents at their school. About 63% of participants strongly agreed that their staff communicates well with parents while about 37% somewhat agreed. About 37% strongly agreed that parents at their school attend PTA meetings, parent teacher conferences and/or school activities and about 63%

somewhat agreed. Overall, participants felt that their staff and parents were/are able to properly communicate with one another.

Student Behaviors and the Transition to Distance Learning/Return to In-Person Learning

Participants were asked six questions regarding the behavior changes they did or did not witness during the transition to distance learning and upon the return to in-person learning. About 88% of participants strongly agreed that they witnessed a behavior change from their students during the transition to distance learning (Spring 2020- Spring 2021) and about 12% somewhat agreed. One hundred percent of participants strongly agreed that they witnessed a behavior change in their students after the return to in-person learning (Fall 2021). The results of Question 7 are displayed below in Figure 1.

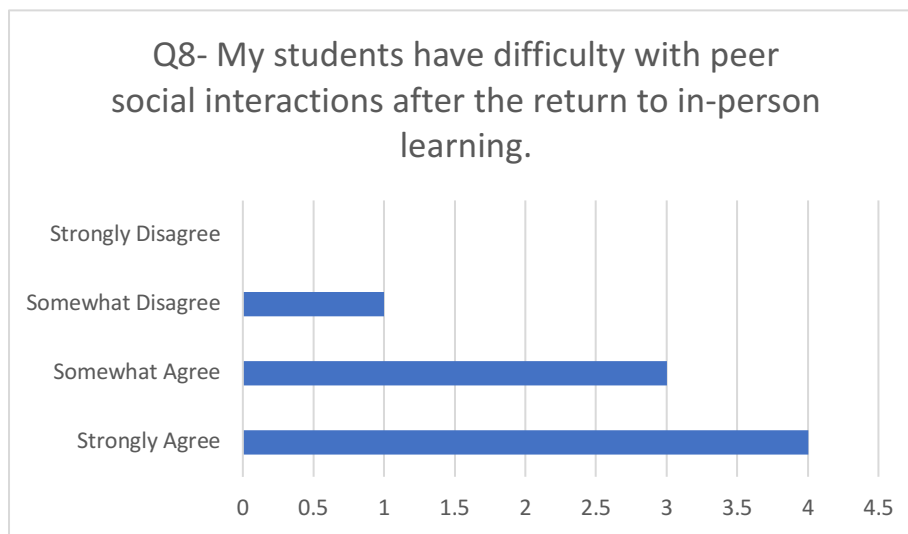
Figure 1



Next, participants were asked more specific questions regarding the nature of these behaviors. Fifty percent strongly agreed that their students had difficulty with peer social

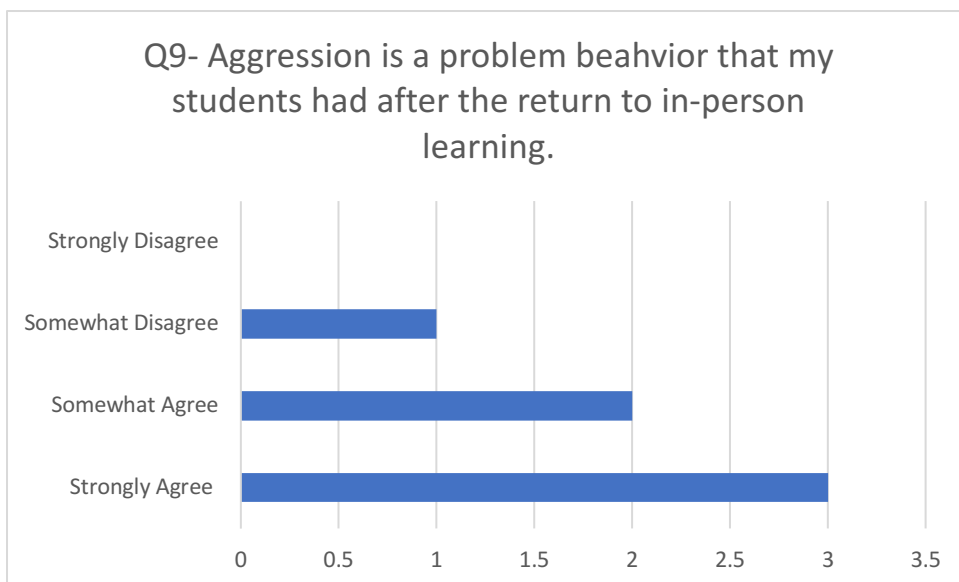
interactions after the return to in-person learning while about 37% somewhat agreed, and 12% somewhat disagreed. These results for Question 8 are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2



About 37% strongly agreed that aggression was a problem behavior that their students had after the return to in-person learning. Twenty-five percent somewhat agreed, about 12% somewhat disagreed, and another 25% strongly disagreed. The results for Question 9 are displayed in Figure 3.

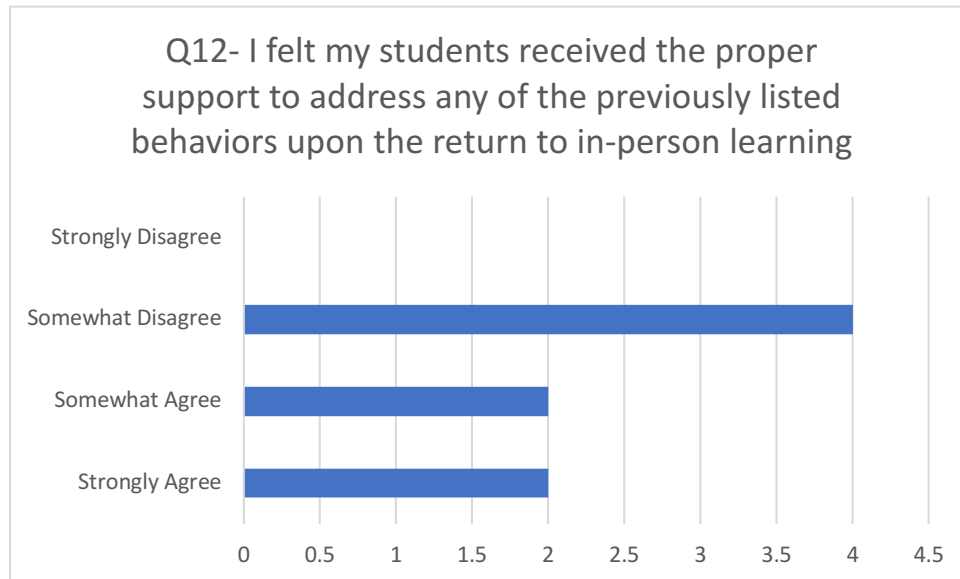
Figure 3



Seventy-five percent of participants strongly agreed that disruption was a problem behavior that their students had after the return to in-person learning and 25% somewhat agreed. Twenty-five percent strongly agreed that unresponsiveness was a problem behavior that their students had after the return to in-person learning and 75% somewhat agreed. While it is clear that some problems were not as prominent in some classrooms, all participants agreed that there was an overall behavior change in their students after the return to in-person learning.

Utilization of PBIS Framework

After obtaining information about their experiences with student behaviors and the transition to and from distance learning, participants were asked about their school's behavior expectations and their ability to clearly communicate them. Fifty percent of participants did not feel that their students received the proper support to address any of the previously listed behaviors upon the return to in-person learning. The other 50% of participants either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their students did receive the proper support. The results for Question 12 are displayed in Figure 4.



One hundred percent of participants strongly agreed that their school sets clear school-wide behavior expectations. About 88% of participants strongly agreed that they utilized language of the behavior expectations regularly with their students and about 12% somewhat agreed. Similarly, about 88% percent of participants strongly agreed that they clearly communicate behavior expectations with parents and about 12% somewhat agreed. Lastly, 100% of participants strongly agreed that they believe they teach and reteach behavior expectations frequently.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In 2020, the transition into online learning was an arduous experience for parents, children, and educators as they had to address current and new behavioral problems from their homes. Parents had additional stressors to manage during their child's online experience leading to increased negative parent-child interactions. Teachers also had to navigate supporting parent concerns and establish behavioral strategies that each family could understand and properly implement at home.

Students returning to in-person learning with behavioral problems was a new obstacle that educators faced. PBIS frameworks have resulted in higher student outcomes and lower truancy rates. Providing school educators with the proper training in these strategies may prove to be a successful way in which educators can combat these new behavioral problems. Creating a welcoming school environment for parents will also promote more engagement and result in more effective PBIS strategies that can be utilized both in school and at home.

The goal for this project was to obtain information on teacher experiences during the transition to distance learning and in-person learning. Eight teacher participants from a public elementary school completed a survey with quantitative measures. This survey contained 14 questions that addressed their experience with distance learning and new behaviors in their classrooms after the return to in-person learning. In addition, participants were asked more specific questions in regard to the nature of these behaviors along with their school's ability to communicate schoolwide expectations.

Conclusions

Results of the survey suggest that all participants felt comfortable communicating with parents and the staff had proper communication with parents. Parents also seemed to have prominent involvement in school meetings/activities. All teacher participants agreed that they witnessed a behavior change from their students during the transition to distance learning (Spring 2020- Spring 2021). Participants were asked a few specific questions regarding this behavior such as, social interaction, aggression, disruption, and unresponsiveness. All participants felt their students had difficulty with peer social interactions upon the return to in-person learning, but there were contrasting answers for the other specified behaviors. Nonetheless, all participants agreed that there was an overall behavior change in their students after the return to in-person learning. In addition, 50% of participants did not feel that their students received the proper support to address any of the previously listed behaviors upon the return to in-person learning.

Limitations

Participants were given two weeks to complete the online Qualtrics survey. A larger period of time to complete the survey could have resulted in more teacher participation. The survey consisted of a total of 14 questions to ensure that the survey was not time consuming for participants to complete. More questions could have been asked regarding what PBIS frameworks were utilized in their classrooms in order to better understand their possible influence on new behaviors.

Future Research

Future research should explore participants' perceptions regarding the lack of support for student behaviors listed in the responses. While this research project is in support of PBIS

frameworks, future research should focus on what aspects of the framework are being implemented in their school/classrooms (e.g., Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3). Focus group participant interviews may also provide additional information on the types of challenging behaviors students are exhibiting and what strategies are being utilized within the classroom to alleviate them.

Future Directions

The following four recommendations are suggested for future research /directions.

1. Surveying and interviewing parents to learn more about their experiences during online learning and the transition to in-person learning. Families all around the world were impacted by the unexpected transition to online learning and parents had to assist their children while working from home. This was a stressful task for a lot of families and it would be beneficial to understand their experiences with these new behaviors and their ability to implement PBIS frameworks from home.
2. Future researchers can consider surveying a variety of elementary schools to get more representative results. A larger sample size would also help identify some common behaviors that are occurring within elementary classrooms.
3. In addition, researchers can look at surveying middle school and high school teachers to learn about their experiences and how they might compare to elementary-aged students.

4. Lastly, compare schools that implement PBIS frameworks and non-PBIS schools to understand the effectiveness of PBIS strategies in addressing any new behaviors that were due to the transitions to and from online learning.

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