

**POSITIVE INTERVENTION BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES IN RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

by

Brian Richardson

A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

West Texas A&M University

Canyon, TX

December 2023

Approved:

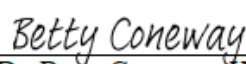
	11/01/2023
Dr. H. H. "Buddy" Hooper Jr.	Date
Associate Professor	
Chair, Scholarly Delivery Committee	

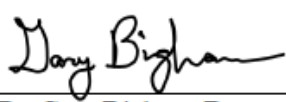
	11/3/2023
Dr. Gary Bigham	Date
Dean	
Member, Scholarly Delivery Committee	

	11/02/2023
Dr. Jerry Nix	Date
Assistant Professor	
Methodologist, Scholarly Delivery Committee*	

*The signatures of the methodologist indicates agreement only with the empirical scholarly article. This reflects a lack or absence of the methodologist's involvement with the case study article.

	11/6/2023
Dr. Eddie Henderson, EC-12 Director	Date
Department of Education	

	11/06/2023
Dr. Betty Coneway, Head	Date
Department of Education	

	11/3/2023
Dr. Gary Bigham, Dean	Date
College of Education and Social Sciences	

Dr. Angela Spaulding, Dean	Date
Graduate School	

Abstract

This final composite explores classroom behavior management and the use of positive intervention behavior management strategies (PIBMS) in rural middle schools. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study article that could be used for teaching doctoral or master's candidates in the field of educational leadership. The title of this article is "A Case Study on Classroom Behavior Management." This case explores how organizational communication and accountability can be used to impact and empower classroom behavior management strategies. The final scholarly deliverable is an empirical article titled "Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies in Rural Middle Schools." This empirical article focuses on the most difficult challenges rural middle school administrators face in implementing PIBMS successfully.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Letter of Approval**

June 15, 2023

Dr. Hooper:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2023.05.009 for your study titled, “**Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies in Rural Middle Schools**”, meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Use of Human Subjects in Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **June 15, 2024**.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include

the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ####/####/#### Expiration Date: ####/####/####.

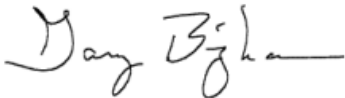
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bigham
Chair, WTAMU IRB



Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and Compliance

Acknowledgements

Although many people should be credited for the success of this study, the chair of my committee, Dr. H. H. (Buddy) Hooper Jr., should be the first. Dr. Hooper was full of wisdom, encouragement, and he helped me to keep my priorities in line with my goals. I am grateful for his weekly pep talks and his reminders to smile. Dr. Minseok Yang helped me begin my research as a methodologist and was pivotal in the early stages of this study. Dr. Irma Harper shared her wisdom and guidance in order to help this final product read with precise coherence. Dr. Jerry Vince Nix provided a perspective to this study that was as energizing and electric as his tastes in music. When I faltered, Dr. Nix was there to guide my steps and bridge the gaps I struggled to address on my own. I am grateful this study brought his perspective and his friendship into my life. If it were not for Dr. Gary Bigham serving as my committee member, not only would I not be completing my study, I would not have pursued this path of continued education. In every meaning of the word, Dr. Bigham is a man of great character. Dr. Bigham has taught me to walk slowly in large crowds and to treat others as what they can be, not what they are presently. In my time at West Texas A&M University, Dr. Bigham has served as a mentor, advisor, professor, and now a research committee member. One of the great joys of my upcoming graduation is the knowledge that I will soon simply refer to him as a friend. Dr. Darla N. Saxton is worthy of recognition as she was a wonderful classmate throughout this process. She was the peer I looked to for guidance when I needed inspiration. Thank you to my mother, Sabrina Richardson, for starting my education at a young age and for teaching me to seek wisdom. Momma is an amazing educator and has

taught me to live with compassion. Thank you to my father, Scott Richardson, for instilling in me an honest work ethic. Dad has always been a provider, and he has taught me that a father's love is always present and proud. Thank you to my brother, Brent Richardson, for teaching me to reach out into the world without fear of harm in order to help those who need it most. Thank you to my brother, Brandon Richardson, for teaching me to live with humility, honesty, and to the benefit and joy of others. Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank my beautiful bride and the mother of my children, Ashley Grace Richardson. My wife has shown resilience and grace in raising our children while I continued my academic pursuit. Ashley has sacrificed much time and effort in support of my dreams, yet she has continued to shine brilliantly with love and provision for our family. Ashley's patience, faithfulness, and devotion to an optimistic perspective have always served as my source of inspiration. I am grateful my daughter, Dani K Richardson, my son, Carter David Richardson, and any other future gift of God she blesses me with will bear witness to how she lives and how she loves.

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A Case Study on Classroom Behavior Management

Brian Richardson

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Department of Education

College of Education and Social Science

West Texas A&M University

Author Note

Brian Richardson, Doctoral Student, Department of Education, West Texas A&M University. He currently serves as the Principal of Orangefield Junior High School at Orangefield ISD. Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Brian Richardson, Department of Education, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, Texas. E-mail: bmrichardson1@buffs.wtamu.edu

Abstract

After the firing of his predecessor, assistant principal Carter is hired midyear as the sole disciplinarian of Weekend Middle School. For months, Weekend Middle School operated without direction in their behavior management program. Teachers began operating outside of campus disciplinary policy, which resulted in parent complaints. The public perception of Weekend Middle School was harmed due to miscommunication, and employee satisfaction decreased due to ineffective interventions offered by the administration. This case study is a narrative of an inexperienced assistant principal navigating administrative responsibilities, such as policy implementation, stakeholder communication, and employee accountability through the scope of classroom behavior management.

Keywords: educational leadership, classroom behavior management, stakeholder communication, employee accountability, policy implementation

A Case Study on Classroom Behavior Management

Weekend Middle School is a junior high school hosting the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades located in southeast Texas, serving the Weekend Independent School District. The school employs 20 sixth grade teachers, 22 seventh grade teachers, 20 eighth grade teachers, and 12 teachers who teach varying grade levels. The campus hosts a population that is comprised of 30% economically disadvantaged students in comparison to the state average of 60%. Additionally, the campus hosts a population that is comprised of 20% behavioral disability students, which is on par with the state average of 20.6%. Most students attending the school come from two-parent households, and parents are highly involved in the school and community. On average, most teachers have more than 11 years of teaching experience. Administrators have an average of 5 years of experience. The school is served by one principal and one assistant principal. The assistant principal serves as the sole campus disciplinarian.

Introduction of Characters

In 2019, Weekend Middle School began the school year without an assistant principal. The prior assistant principal had been fired at the beginning of the year by the head principal, Mr. Dean, for reasons undisclosed to the public. The school had started the school year without an assistant principal or campus disciplinarian. Many teachers on campus, including seventh grade science teacher Mrs. Dani, who had been teaching for 15 years, and seventh grade math teacher Mrs. Parker, who was newly hired in 2019, were required to serve as their own classroom disciplinarians. Sixth grade students new to the campus had no experience with an assistant principal to begin the year, and seventh

and eighth grade students who had relied on their past assistant principal were without that aid. After a drawn-out application and interviewing process, Mr. Dean hired a new assistant principal, Mr. Carter, in the middle of the Fall semester. Parents in the community, including Mrs. Graham, the PTA president, were frustrated with the amount of time it took to hire a campus disciplinarian, yet they were ultimately relieved to have Mr. Carter once he was eventually hired.

The Case

By the end of the 2019-2020 school year, Mr. Carter had navigated his new situation satisfactorily. Mr. Carter had become acquainted with the campus teachers, the students, and, to some degree, the parents of the community. In coming to know his new staff, Mr. Carter began to identify how some teachers struggled with classroom behavior management. Mr. Carter attributed this to multiple reasons: teachers were not being trained annually on classroom management, district policies had not been communicated effectively to teachers, and the implementation of district standards was not being applied evenly by all teachers. Over the summer, Mr. Carter organized voluntary training for teachers on classroom behavior, created systems to clearly and routinely communicate district behavior standards, and created bi-monthly meetings with teachers in order to check in on their understanding and implementation of district standards. Though Mr. Carter felt these voluntary trainings would be beneficial to most teachers, Mr. Carter did not wish to offend veteran teachers by forcing them to take the training. Mrs. Dani, one of the campus's longest tenured seventh grade teachers, did not attend the voluntary training, nor did she successfully schedule her bi-monthly meetings. Mrs. Dani was confident in her ability to manage her own classroom due to her years of experience.

Despite being mentored by Mrs. Dani, seventh grade teacher Mrs. Parker attended every voluntary training session and proactively planned out her yearly meetings with Mr. Carter. Mrs. Parker did so in order to help ensure she remained in good standing with her administration. Mrs. Parker also felt that some of the tactics taught to her by Mrs. Dani may be ineffective. Mrs. Parker was still unsure of her classroom management abilities and wanted to take advantage of the opportunities afforded her by Mr. Carter.

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, Mr. Carter was optimistic that the strides he had made over the summer would result in a more efficient campus behavior strategy. The eighth grade students began the year with few instances of reported misbehavior. The seventh grade students had slightly more cases of misbehavior reported. The sixth grade students, who had never had a campus disciplinarian, started the year with the most issues. By the end of the second month of the school year, Mr. Carter was happy to see the sixth grade instances of misbehavior had leveled out. The eighth grade continued with few instances of misbehavior. However, the seventh grade students continued to increase in reported instances of misbehavior. As Mr. Carter began his bi-monthly meetings, he quickly realized the bulk of his office referrals were coming from Mrs. Dani and Mrs. Parker in the seventh grade. Mr. Carter scheduled bi-monthly meetings with Mrs. Dani despite her failure to schedule the meetings herself. Mrs. Parker upheld the meetings with Mr. Carter she had previously scheduled. Through his meetings, Mr. Carter found that both Mrs. Dani and Mrs. Parker were implementing procedures inconsistent with the district policy. When questioned about the origin of these policies, Mrs. Dani stated, “I have been running my classroom this way for 15 years, and our past assistant principal was in complete support of my management style.

This has always worked for me and my classroom.” When Mr. Carter questioned Mrs. Parker on her management style, Mrs. Parker stated:

I greatly struggled with classroom management my first year of teaching, especially before you were hired. During that time, Mrs. Dani really took me under her wing and taught me how to manage my classroom. Though I tried to implement the strategies I learned from your voluntary training, I felt it might be more appropriate to run my classroom in line with other seventh grade teachers, such as Mrs. Dani. This is how I have been running my classroom since I struggled to successfully implement the strategies I learned in my training.

As the school year continued, the campus discipline report continued to show an increase in misbehavior in the seventh grade. Mr. Carter continued to communicate district expectations through the format he had decided upon prior to the beginning of the year. However, Mr. Carter began receiving feedback from teachers in the sixth and eighth grades stating that they felt they were doing everything that was asked of them. Teachers began making comments to Mr. Carter that they felt they were suffering due to issues with teachers in the seventh grade. Mr. Carter also began hearing murmurs that teachers in other grades were not being held accountable for their inability to manage their own classrooms. On multiple occasions, Mr. Carter was told he was showing favoritism to Mrs. Dani and Mrs. Parker by not addressing their classroom issues. Mr. Dean, the head principal, called Mr. Carter into his office one day to relay a message he had received from the parent of a student. According to Mr. Dean, Mrs. Graham, the PTA president, reported that her son was being treated unfairly by his seventh grade math teacher, Mrs. Parker. According to Mrs. Graham, her seventh grade son was being picked on by his

teacher and even being disciplined at a higher rate than she felt was necessary. Especially concerning to Mrs. Graham was the fact her son had never been in any trouble during his time in the sixth grade. Additionally, Mrs. Graham's other student in the eighth grade had been disciplined regularly in the seventh grade last year by his science teacher, Mrs. Dani, and her older son had received little to no discipline this year in the eighth grade. Mrs. Graham told Mr. Dean she felt that the seventh grade teachers were picking on her students. In addition, Mrs. Graham claimed that she had read the district code of conduct and these seventh grade teachers were enforcing policies that were nowhere to be found. Mr. Dean told Mr. Carter that this issue needed to be resolved.

In order to begin addressing this issue, Mr. Carter sent out two surveys to students and parents. The first survey requested the students to report on their ability to focus in class. Specifically, the survey asked students what kinds of behavior were most prevalent in their classrooms and which behaviors took the most away from their learning. Mr. Carter found the results of the survey were consistent from grade to grade. There were no increased feelings of misbehavior by the seventh grade students. The second survey focused on the climate of the classrooms. The parents and students were asked to identify how their classrooms made them feel. Mr. Carter found that students in the seventh grade felt that their classrooms were inherently negative. Parents of seventh grade students reported feeling as if their students were being targeted compared to parents of students in the other two grades. After these surveys were sent out, teachers began complaining to Mr. Carter. They felt their trust was violated, and these surveys showed he did not trust in their abilities to manage their own classrooms. In addition to the surveys, Mr. Carter ran discipline reports by grade level and by teacher. Mr. Carter found that when he broke the

discipline referrals down by grade, seventh grade teachers were the most likely to issue discipline for classroom misbehavior. However, teachers who taught all grade levels showed consistent discipline levels amongst all three grades. Finally, Mr. Carter issued a survey to his teachers, asking them to identify which areas of classroom management they felt they needed the most assistance with. Mr. Carter issued this survey to every teacher so that it was not obvious where his struggles were coming from. Though some teachers did request assistance, none of the teachers Mr. Carter was concerned with, in the seventh grade reported feelings of the inability to manage their classroom effectively. In fact, Mrs. Dani and Mrs. Parker scored themselves in the top 10% of classroom management ability among staff members.

Conclusion

The case presented focuses on the classroom management abilities of seventh grade teachers at Weekend Middle School as well as the associated problems resulting from inconsistent district policy implementation. As evidenced by this case, classroom management has many spiraling effects on many different parties. Administrators, in this case struggled with balancing staff accountability and staff climate. Administrators also struggled with the negative perception adopted by the public and students. Teachers in this case struggled with implementing district policies equally while still maintaining their own unique classroom management styles. Students, in this case struggled with following unknown policies. Parents, in this case struggled with the equality of their students' opportunities and the perceived effectiveness of a new administrator as a campus-wide disciplinarian.

Teaching Notes

Organizational Communication

Creating a developmentally responsive learning environment begins with schools that are organized to communicate effectively (Ellerbrock et al., 2018). With that being said, schools have often been found to be organizations of poor communication (Cooke & Valentine, 2021). With so many organizational peers and partners to consider, communication within a school and within a school's community can appear to be a daunting task. However, utilizing basic rules of communication can help simplify this dynamic problem. Sureka et al. (2018) present the "Seven C's of Effective Communication" in a manner that is easily implemented by schools. The authors speak on communicating with completeness in order to convey all necessary facts, as well as with conciseness in order to keep the information digestible. They also present the positive effects of speaking with consideration for all parties and only on concrete principles that are never changing. Finally, the authors suggest speaking with clarity, and correctness, utilizing comparisons that are relatable for your audience.

School administrators can use the "Seven C's of Communication" in their communications with teachers as well as community stakeholders. Effective communication within a school organization is important because studies have shown that strong communication within an organization can lead to greater employee engagement and positive behaviors (Kang & Sung, 2017). Employees are often the most important stakeholders for schools to consider, for depending on whether they feel valued or not, they can be a school's greatest supporters or most aggressive critics (Waters et al., 2013). One key component to increasing employee self-worth is proper communication.

Great internal communication has been shown to increase relationships as well as employee engagement (Kress, 2005; Lockwood, 2007). Communication with outside stakeholders, such as parents, students, and community members may prove to be just as important for a school. Studies show that in order to optimize student health and educational achievement, schools should partner with their community members, especially in ways that are based on clear communication of policies and educational concepts (Bassett-Gunter et al., 2016). Though further research is needed in the area of modern seventh grade campus administrators communicating in the rural setting, it is clear that in order to be effective, an administrator must be capable of communicating frequently and concisely with many stakeholders.

Organizational Accountability

Effective middle schools should be organized flexibly, allowing for varying teaching methods as well as assessment and implementation of policies that are conducive to a healthy learning environment (Ellerbrock et al., 2018). In order for campuses to be organized well, administrators must act as a measure of accountability. Though there are many areas their accountability systems must extend to, three important areas are campus policies, mentorships, and surveys.

Studies have shown that the implementation of ineffective policies may lead to a decrease in student retention once students reach a higher level of education (Swanson et al., 2021). There are two areas of school policies that most researchers study: policy creation and policy implementation. In order to create effective policies, researchers have pointed to the need for policies to be interrelated and independent of recognized contextual contingencies (Six & Sorge, 2008). As for effective implementation, Van

Meter and Van Horn (1975) present a framework for proper policy implementation that can be utilized by school leadership. Much research revolves around the question of effective policy creation and implementation, yet research is still needed in the policies of middle schools in rural areas.

Many schools utilize mentor teachers in order to supplement pre-service training and professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). These mentors are meant to act as a source of knowledge for new teachers as well as an added form of accountability for school administrators to rely on. Most often, mentors are assigned the dual responsibility of bringing a teacher along as well as reporting missteps to the administration. Though many schools rely on this form of accountability, research shows that many school mentorships are unguided and do not offer the benefits that are advertised, such as successful classroom management and higher-order thinking objectives (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). Additionally, it has been found that mentors may themselves be struggling in the classroom, meaning their tutelage may actually result in negative outcomes for their mentees (Clarke et al., 2014). Though mentorships offer many potential benefits, further research is needed in order to create programs that can be utilized across the board on middle school campuses.

Surveys are often used in the school setting in order to value the climate of the campus regarding various policies or procedures. These surveys may probe into areas of student discipline, classroom management, and student support in addition to many other areas (Huang & Cornell, 2016). Though surveys can be useful in accountability and the acquisition of data, there are also many barriers to effective creation and implementation. Clary et al. (2021) present these barriers as being time, participant opt-out, wording, and

honesty. Though surveys could be used with success, these surveys require an effective administrator in order to be conducive to the educational process.

Behavior Management

Studies have shown that positive social interactions as a result of effective classroom behavior management are beneficial to students' academic success (Wiedermann et al., 2020). Additionally, severe forms of punishment, such as out-of-school suspension have been shown to be associated with low school achievement (Loyola, 1985). Students who noted their teachers only utilize punitive strategies to manage their classroom also perceive their teachers to be ineffective (Rahimi & Karkami, 2015). Additionally, when students are exposed to socio-emotional intervention, they have been shown to benefit in academic achievement (Brock et al., 2008). Classroom management is such a vital component of student success. It is important for academic administrators to focus on helping teachers manage their classrooms. With that being said, teacher professional development has been shown to have an inconsistent relationship with teacher productivity (Harris & Sass, 2011). Research in the area of classroom behavior management has failed to identify a training program that can be utilized universally by teachers in the classroom, especially on middle school campuses.

Middle school students are some of the most difficult to manage in a classroom setting as the behaviors exhibited in middle school are extremely difficult to change (Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011). In fact, research has shown that more disrespectful behavior is prevalent at the middle school age than at any other grade level (Kaufman et al., 2010). The negative effects of classroom disruptions and misbehavior on the learning process of middle school students is an essential area of research. Magnetic resonance

imaging and other forms of investigation have shown that middle school age is a critical time for emotional development and learning (Giedd, 2008, 2015). Many teachers believe pre-service management training is ineffective, though some research has shown that didactic coursework and hands-on training are the most effective methods for increasing teacher preparedness (Christofferson & Sullivan, 2015).

A lack of research on universal classroom management training has contributed to the improper management of middle school behavior. Improper classroom management inhibits teaching and learning, though a stronger focus on effective management strategies is believed to be an answer to this issue (Rosas & West, 2009). Further research is needed in the development and implementation of effective classroom behavior management training that can be applied universally at the middle school level.

Discussion Questions

1. Mr. Carter has been depicted as an ineffective administrator in his ability to align his staff, students, and community members. How should campus leaders communicate shared concerns between different stakeholders without breaking the trust of other stakeholders?
2. Mrs. Graham identifies issues that are real on campus. How should administrators address these issues with parents while protecting their teachers?
3. Mr. Dean is presented as an administrator who is slow to act and insensitive to the conflicts facing his assistant principal. How can campus leaders avoid these negative perceptions?
4. Mrs. Parker fell under the tutelage of Mrs. Dani. Though mentorship is viewed as a positive aspect of teacher transitions, how has this relationship affected the campus negatively?
5. A constant struggle in this case study was the accountability of all teachers. How can administrators hold all teachers accountable in a transparent way without singling out those teachers who are most in need of intervention?
6. In this study, surveys have been shown to have a negative effect on teachers and administrators. How can leaders issue surveys in a way without negative connotations?
7. As evidenced in this case, many policies and procedures are drafted during the summer for implementation the following school year. How can campus leaders

help to make sure these policies and procedures are executed accurately at the beginning of a school year?

8. One underlying theme of this case study is the alignment of teaching practices that still allow the individuality of teachers to be expressed. How can an administrator ensure equal policy implementation while still allowing for the individuality of teachers?
9. Though training was offered to teachers in order to avoid inequitable policy implementation, the problems of inconsistency persisted. How can administrators better ensure that training is translated to the real-world classroom?
10. One struggle Mr. Carter encountered was combating the practices of his predecessor. How can the incoming administration build on the work of past administrators while still creating positive change?

Potential Answers to Discussion Questions

1. When communicating as a leader, transparency and collaboration are two of the most vital components of your leadership. One key to collaboration is keeping shared goals the priority. The hope of the administrator, teachers, and parents is to create a consistent implementation of policy on their campus. Though Mr. Carter was aware of the conflicting interests, the other stakeholders were often left in the dark. One strategy that may have been helpful would have been to create a committee consisting of all the stakeholders so that discussions could be held at length regarding these issues. This might aid in getting everyone on the same page.
2. Campus leaders must be willing to be transparent with all stakeholders. Had the campus administration shown they were aware of the issue, they could have started working alongside the parents and teachers in correcting it. Much time was spent surveying and collecting information, but that information was seemingly being hoarded by the administration instead of being shared and utilized.
3. Personnel changes may seem slow to the outside world, but the slow pace of the process is typically necessary in order to ensure a good decision. The process could have been communicated to the public, so the public knew the situation was being handled. Rather than expecting Mr. Carter to handle the issues between parents and teachers, Mr. Dean could have created an opportunity for the parent, teacher, and campus leaders to meet in addressing the varying needs.

4. Though mentorship can lead to positive change, it is still a position of leadership and must be held as such. The administration could aid teachers in mentorship by creating official mentor programs that focus on training teachers as mentors. Training could include what needs to be taught to incoming staff as well as accountability measures for all involved in the process.
5. Creating checkpoints with teachers ahead of time will help in this area. By addressing issues in meetings that were created preemptively, teachers are less likely to feel targeted by intervention. In addition, the administration should utilize open conversation as opposed to direct instruction to be sure teachers feel heard.
6. First, surveys need to be issued before there is a complaint. Waiting for complaints to arise and then sending out surveys makes it seem like administrators are behind. It also makes those affected feel as if they are being targeted. In addition to being proactive, surveys should include all perspectives, so every group feels as if they are being heard.
7. Policies and procedures should be communicated to staff as soon as they are drafted in the summer. In addition, these must be covered during teacher in-service and checked on periodically throughout the school year. Administrators must create a way for teachers to offer feedback at any point of the implementation process.
8. It is the duty of administrators to hold teachers accountable for their teaching practices. However, this should not consist of a strict checklist for teachers to follow. Instead, administrators should give guidelines for the teachers to work

within. This keeps teachers in compliance with district standards while still allowing them to build on their own unique professionalism.

9. Campus leaders must focus on how their training is being administered as well as how it is being translated to the real world. Creating situations for educators to practice their newly acquired skills is vital to the training process. Real-world situations and opportunities have to be created and worked on.
10. Surveys issued to stakeholders at the resignation or firing of an administrator can be very telling as to what stakeholders expect from the administration. This feedback can even be utilized in the search for a replacement. Upon acceptance of the position, new campus leaders should reference these surveys in guiding their decisions. They can build on areas of strength and attempt to turn the tide in areas of weakness.

Classroom Activities

1. One issue showcased in this case study is the utilization of appropriate training by administration and staff. Choosing appropriate training is only half the battle as training must be implemented afterward. Put yourself in the shoes of a teacher training coordinator. Create a list of the qualities that effective training must have. Now, script a training session. Be sure to detail the main objectives, activities to be completed, real-world application opportunities, and any other processes you believe are necessary.
2. This case study features four prominent stakeholders whose opinions varied throughout the study. Divide your group into four stakeholder groups: teachers, students, administration, and parents. Each group will address the issues presented from their perspective. For every issue, each group should create an ideal solution that serves their individual group's interests. Now, open the floor for discussion amongst stakeholder groups. Identify where your ideal situation may require compromise or even alteration due to the ideal situations presented by the other stakeholders.
3. Imagine you are a new administrator responsible for creating a disciplinary process and procedure. Your first choice is to create a committee to help ensure policies are communicated effectively and procedures are followed. Discuss who you would include in your committee. What topics must be addressed by this committee? How would you communicate your plan to all stakeholders? What forms of accountability would you have in place for all parties?

4. Research a controversial policy within your district. How was this policy created? Analyze how this policy is currently being implemented. Based on what you perceive to be the intention of this policy, are any changes needed in order to ensure this policy is being carried out correctly? Note any discrepancies you find between intention and implementation, and detail areas of the policy left open for interpretation. Finally, discuss if the reason for controversy is due to a lack of clarity in the policy itself or if the policy is inherently controversial.
5. Identify five main sources of conflict within this study. These may include poor communication between parties, lack of support amongst stakeholders, etc. Now, divide your group into five different camps. Each camp will be responsible for solving one main source of conflict with no regard to the other sources of conflict. Compare your response to the other four responses and note what additional conflicts may arise. Is there an answer to one conflict that does not hinder the resolution of another?

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Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies in Rural Middle Schools

Brian Richardson

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Department of Education

College of Education and Social Science

West Texas A&M University

Dr. H. H. (Buddy) Hooper Jr. - Chair

Dr. Gary Bigham - Content Expert

Dr. Jerry Vince Nix – Methodologist

Author Note

Brian Richardson, Doctoral Student, Department of Education, West Texas A&M University. He currently serves as the Principal of Orangefield Junior High School at Orangefield ISD. Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Brian Richardson, Department of Education, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, Texas. E-mail: bmrichardson1@buffs.wtamu.edu

Abstract

The use of solely punitive measures to correct misbehavior within schools does not adequately alter students' behavior patterns. Research exemplifies the beneficial effects of implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies (PIBMS).

However, little research has been conducted in rural Texas middle schools where resources are limited, training is less accessible, and students are generally seen as more difficult to manage behaviorally. This quantitative survey study employed mixed data from rural middle school leaders. The survey data were quantitatively analyzed statistically, while qualitative coding was used to identify salient themes across challenges that rural middle schools encountered when administering PIBMS. The challenges identified in this study include the misunderstanding that middle school students have of what constitutes appropriate behavior, a general lack of student self-efficacy, a misunderstanding by faculty of how to manage middle school-aged students, and an overall lack of resources for schools to utilize for PIBMS.

Keywords: rural, middle school, positive intervention behavior management strategies (PIBMS)

Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies in Rural Middle Schools

Many campuses employ punitive measures, such as corporal punishment, detentions, and suspensions as their primary means of discipline (Loyola, 1985; Rahimi & Karkami, 2015). Though these forms of behavior correction have merit, research has documented many negative effects associated with punitive forms of discipline (Kennedy et al., 2017). Alternatively, many school campuses have employed the use of preemptive measures that involve the use of positive interventions to dissuade students from engaging in negative, distracting behaviors (Scott et al., 2008). These programs allow opportunities for students to refresh their attention span and refocus their thinking on their goals and priorities, resulting in campus-wide behavioral improvement (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Hawken et al., 2015; Korb, 2006). Though numerous campuses have experienced the benefit of positive interventions, others continue to offer only punitive discipline (Potter et al., 2017). This issue is more complex in rural middle schools where students, teachers, and administrators face obstacles unique to their own grade levels and district type (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011).

The use of positive reinforcement has long been a focus of scientific research (Skinner, 1948). Skinner (1948) was the first to introduce the law of effect where it was shown that positively reinforced behavior tends to be repeated, whereas behaviors that are not reinforced are more likely to diminish over time. Not only has research shown that positive reinforcement is a powerful motivator, but research has also revealed severe forms of punishment, such as suspension from school settings are specifically associated

with low overall school achievement (Loyola, 1985). However, this is not to imply that negative punishments have no place in schools altogether. Kannappan et al. (2012) showed that, at times, there may be little difference in the perceived potency of positive versus negative feedback. Regardless, with such a heavy reliance on the use of punishments in the current school system, it is worthwhile to explore an increased use of positive behavior interventions (Loyola, 1985; Rahimi & Karkami, 2015). Semeraro et al. (2020) suggested that students are more likely to achieve greater learning from teachers when they have a high-quality, positive relationship. Semeraro et al. (2020) also found that positive interventions aimed at increasing the quality of student to teacher relationships helped in preventing math anxiety as well as promoting overall mathematics learning.

Positive interventions can also be found in the form of multiple motivational strategies (Ames & Ames, 1984). Brock et al. (2008) investigated the role of socio-emotional motivation and found that this type of motivation benefited academic achievement of classroom students. Addressing both anxiety and the socio-emotional needs of rural middle school students may prove especially important as rural students on average are already dealing with issues, such as limited resources and poverty (Royce, 2019). Additionally, Vallaire-Thomas et al. (2011) noted that middle school students' behavior patterns are some of the most difficult to alter, thus they may benefit from positive interventions more than other age groups of students.

The Problem Statement

Classroom behavior management and student misbehavior detracts from the educational process in many capacities (Maguire et al., 2010). In most environments,

improper management of a classroom can lead to poor teaching and learning outcomes (Rosas & West, 2009). In particular, the middle school age is a critical time for emotional development and learning as findings have shown that disrespectful misbehavior is more prevalent in middle school students than any other age level (Giedd, 2008, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2010). Despite the middle school age being a vital time for growth, little research has investigated the implementation of behavior management strategies in middle schools (Nelemans et al., 2018).

In addition to rural students being subject to greater instances of classroom misbehavior, they are also more likely to be dealing with supplemental demands, such as food insecurities and strains on personal time (Smarsh, 2018; Tickamyer et al., 2017). Rural schools face challenges that are unique to each individual setting, but research suggests the use of positive reinforcement is beneficial in varying educational settings and with varying children (Hardy & McLeod, 2020; Lewis & Boswell, 2020). McKay and Macomber (2021) found that positive relationships and interventions lead to higher student achievement across varying landscapes.

Positive interventions, such as building productive relationships allow educators to increase self-efficacy of students, resulting in increased student resilience, achievement, and perseverance of effort (Karaman et al., 2020). Alternatively, when teachers do not engage in relationships with their students and only use punitive measures, they are more likely to be perceived as ineffective educators (Rahimi & Karkami, 2015). Further complicating this matter is the tendency of rural middle school students to lack comprehension of what appropriate school behavior looks like (Malmgren et al., 2005). The reality is that many schools struggle with misbehavior, but

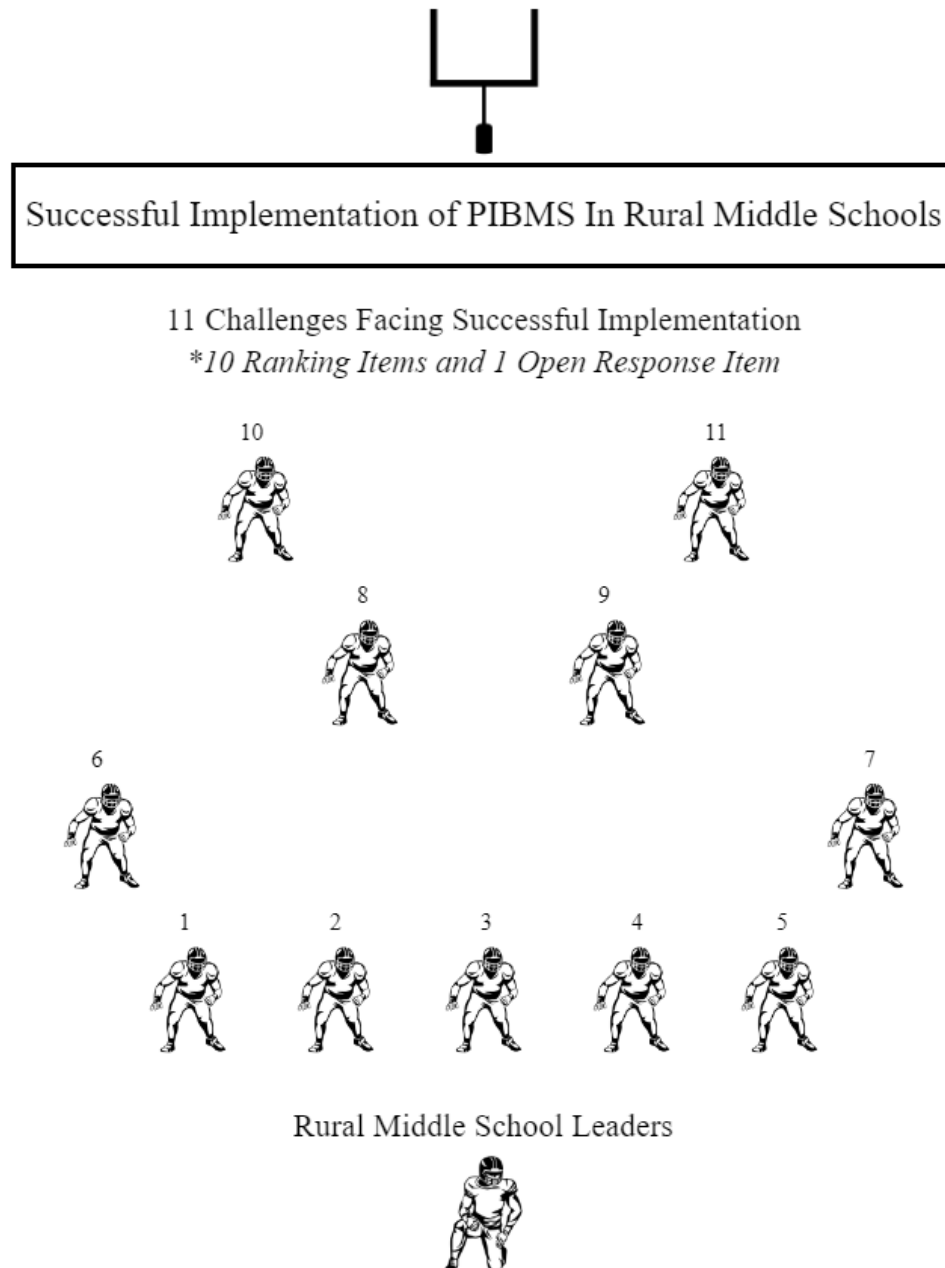
each age range is unique in its effective motivation strategies; middle school students in particular are some of the most difficult students to motivate, and rural schools require individualized, school-based policies to effectively create behavioral change (Bong, 2001; Maringe et al., 2015; Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011). Despite the unique needs of rural middle school students, there is a gap in the literature of what challenges are most detrimental to the successful implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies on rural middle school campuses (Malmgren et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2017).

Preliminary Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study utilized a model based on American football as can be seen in Figure 1. In this model, rural middle school administrators are symbolized by an offensive quarterback. This quarterback is taking a knee and contemplating their options on how to achieve a touchdown. Within this model, the goal line symbolizes successful implementation of PIBMS in rural middle schools. However, to achieve this goal, the quarterback must first navigate 11 defensive players who have an advantageous position between him and the goal line. These 11 defensive players symbolize the 10 ranking items, and the one free response item presented in the survey. To best navigate the playing field and ultimately achieve a touchdown, the quarterback must rely on the results of his scouting report. The scouting report in this scenario would be the research. The research presented demonstrates which of these defenders is the most challenging as well as which of them are least challenging. To successfully score a touchdown, the quarterback should utilize the scouting report to attack the area of least resistance. Once the weaker defenders have been addressed and no longer exist between the quarterback and the goal line, the quarterback may then begin addressing the more challenging defenders that still remain. By utilizing the scouting report, the quarterback knows which points of the field are weakest. By attacking the weak points first, the quarterback will increase his likelihood of scoring a touchdown. This framework utilizes the background of the researchers as both administrators and coaches. By the end of this research, researchers should be able to identify the initial points of attack to target when executing PIBMS in rural middle schools to best allow for successful implementation.

Figure 1

Navigating the Challenges of PIBMS Implementation in Rural Middle Schools



Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the most difficult obstacles facing implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies on rural middle

school campuses. A salient gap in research was identified vis-à-vis a thorough literature review. Though there is much research supporting the use of positive intervention systems, there is little research dealing specifically with rural middle schools (Malmgren et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2017). Schneider et al. (2021) conceded that very little is currently known of how middle school students perceive praise in schools, and Reynolds (2017) acknowledged that few critical issues in rural education have been researched. This study addressed the existing gap in research in reference to rural middle schools by identifying and ranking the challenges these schools faced in implementing PIBMS.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question pertaining to effective implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies:

Research Question– What are the most difficult challenges rural middle school leaders face in implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies successfully?

Review of Literature

According to Paramita et al. (2020), teachers are willing and able to employ proactive classroom behavior management strategies to help maintain a functional learning environment. Hardy and McLeod (2020) demonstrated that positive reinforcement in particular supports learning in children. Though positive interventions have proven effective when used in school, rural middle schools face unique challenges when compared to their counterparts (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011). In this literature review, special consideration was given to

current positive intervention behavior management strategies and unique challenges to implementing them in rural Texas middle schools.

Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies

Currently, many campuses offer a solely negative behavior intervention system which is problematic due to the lack of positive results these systems offer (Kennedy et al., 2017). Severe forms of punishment, such as out of school suspension have been shown to be associated with low school achievement (Loyola, 1985). Tobin et al. (1996) illustrated how suspensions used as punishment have actually been shown to act as a reinforcer to negative behavior, creating an adverse effect on classroom behavior. Kannappan et al. (2012) denoted the use of negative feedback leads to deterioration in relationships between students and teachers. Furthermore, Rahimi and Karkami (2015) indicated that students are significantly less motivated to work in classrooms where only punitive measures are utilized.

Maag (2001) explained that the best teachers can utilize reinforcement and punishment together as these two concepts occur naturally in conjunction. Multiple studies have exemplified how praise and positive feedback are evidence-based practices that increase positive behavioral outcomes for students and can be used for both young and old students (Hardy & McLeod, 2020; Haydon et al., 2020; Skinner, 1948). Hershfeldt et al. (2012) described how Positive Behavior Intervention Systems can be utilized to promote district wide positive culture change. Schneider et al. (2021) demonstrated that for middle school students, praise is a critical component to a classroom management system.

When studying highly successful schools, Stone-Johnson (2014) noted that most institutions emphasize the interpersonal aspects of their organizations, and that organizations must be willing to invest in building relationships as well as increasing leadership amongst their stakeholders. In fact, Liou (2016) contended that there is an inherent need for educators to bridge the gap between those who are seeking advice and those who are pursuing advice. Multiple studies point to forging greater relationships to help students learn and achieve greater levels of motivation (McKay & Macomber, 2021; Semeraro et al., 2020). Sterrett (2012) explained that stronger relationships reduce student anxiety while simultaneously promoting student learning.

Positive intervention behavior management strategies rely on a balance of punitive measures, positive interventions, and positive relationships to increase academic performance and positive behavior (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Hawken et al., 2015; King Lund et al., 2021). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is one of many PIBMS that have shown the positives of handling discipline systematically and with clear definition though most studies have been conducted at the elementary and secondary level (McIntosh et al., 2009; Sherrod et al., 2009). Response to Intervention is a proactive, three-tiered approach utilizing screening and support systems that has been heavily studied at the elementary level (Bayat et al., 2010; Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2013; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Jimerson et al., 2016). Behavior Education Program (BEP) is a tier two level intervention that emphasizes the need for fidelity and positive reinforcement when creating interventions for students (Crone et al., 2010; Hawken et al., 2015; Lane et al., 2012). Check In/ Check Out (CICO) is another tier two level intervention that relies on positive adult relationships, requires great structure, and has

been studied regularly in urban school settings (Myers & Briere, 2010; Simonsen et al., 2011). Restorative Justice Practices (RJP) is a program that relies on adult relationships and restorative practices that are used to mend the harm caused by misbehavior (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020). School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPB) is a widely used, three-tiered program used to reduce problematic behavior by means of reinforcement and consequences (Burke et al., 2014; Fallon et al., 2014; Feuerborn et al., 2016; Medley et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2008).

Challenges Facing Middle Schools

Shell et al. (2014) stated middle school is a difficult time for all stakeholders involved because students are exposed to new peers and new stresses they have not experienced before. Bullock et al. (2022) described the move from elementary age to middle school age as a transition on account of the contextual changes students are faced with as their relationships and social hierarchy evolve. Nelemans et al. (2018) found that the transitional stage of middle school has the potential to alter developmental trajectories of anxiety within students until much later in their life. However, anxiety, stress, and the transitional nature of middle school are not the only aspects of middle schools that are unique for students, as the behavior of middle school students in itself is also very unique (Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011).

According to Vallaire-Thomas et al. (2011), middle school students are some of the most difficult students to manage in a classroom setting as they are more persistent with their behavior and more resistant to change than other grade levels. Malmgren et al. (2005) presented one reason for this is that adolescents do not understand what constitutes appropriate behavior; therefore, adolescents are often unable to alter their

behavior greatly. Not only are their behaviors more difficult to alter, Kaufman et al. (2010) found that more disrespectful behavior is prevalent at the middle school age than at any other grade level.

Misbehavior has been shown to detract from the learning process and enact misbehavior from peers (Buhs et al., 2006; Lopes et al., 2017; Powers et al., 2013). This is especially detrimental at the middle school age, as magnetic resonance imaging and other forms of investigation have shown that middle school age is a critical time for emotional development and learning (Giedd, 2008, 2015). Bong (2001) found that academic motivation is less differentiated at the middle school level, and each age level tends to respond to motivation differently. Karaman et al. (2020) added that self-efficacy is one of the most important factors of motivation. This differs from other age levels as the self-efficacy of middle school students impacts their resilience, achievement, and perseverance.

Most classroom interventions have been developed, studied, and implemented at the elementary and secondary level (Malmgren et al., 2005; Närhi et al., 2017). Because of this, Närhi et al. (2017) concluded that significant improvements could be made in the behavioral climate of middle schools with easily implemented interventions. Malmgren et al. (2005) joined in the call for further research in the middle school realm, stating that more attention to middle school misbehavior will yield many benefits. These potential benefits include a decrease in multiple areas: unnecessary classroom problems, overall student difficulties with social behavior, and the attrition of teachers due to student misbehavior. Research in the area of classroom behavior management has failed to identify strategies fit to handle the unique challenges that students and teachers are facing

in middle schools, specifically those pertaining to positive intervention behavior management strategies.

Challenges Facing Rural Schools

Reynolds (2017) noted that although many works have been published on critical urban education issues, very few rural issues have been covered in the realm of education. Lewis and Boswell (2020) noted that the individuality of rural communities and schools is seemingly endless with each rural area having cultural norms and characteristics that are unique and dynamic. Chalker (2002) explained how this uniqueness can only be addressed by leaders who embrace the distinctive features of a community and respond with a leadership style that is reflective of that individuality. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) found that only half of the United States provide strategies that are rural specific. This has led to rural leaders who lack state support systems that could lend structure and resources. Maringe et al. (2015) found individual, school-based initiatives and policies to be more successful than broad-brush policies as a result of their ability to recognize the contextualized challenges faced in different rural schools.

Rural schools often face fiscal limitations, limited access to educational programs, limited technology, and limited infrastructure when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts, yet these schools are measured by the same accountability system (Hollman et al., 2021; Preston et al., 2013). Rural school administrators are also often expected to play a high-profile role within their community as well as many other multifaceted roles that other administrators may not encounter (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Wenger et al. (2012) demonstrated that educators within a rural community also face

unique obstacles including inadequate teaching resources, budget constraints, and fewer opportunities for meaningful professional development as a result of their location.

Smarsh (2018) explained that rural individuals do not have the time needed to allocate to a solid education as most rural individuals are required to travel a large distance to and from work or school all while maintaining everyday tasks, such as tending family farms and land. In addition, Gringeri (2001) found that 66% of rural individuals hold more than one job and only survive by working every moment they are awake. Royce (2019) explained the issues of time management are compounded by poverty and food insecurity, noting that in many rural areas, poverty is nearly impossible to avoid. Tickamyer et al. (2017) added food insecurity rates are highest in rural communities and have only worsened over time. Gringeri (2001) reported that although 20% of the United States population resides in rural areas, these regions are home to one-third of the United States impoverished community.

Rural communities are diverse and often face obstacles that are unique to their communities; these obstacles require unique interventions and leadership tactics to be overcome (Chalker, 2002). Maringe et al. (2015) suggested large spread change is often less effective than individual, school-based policies and procedures, and more school specific improvement initiatives should be implemented. Despite this, almost no critical educational issues including the implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies in middle schools have been studied in a rural, educational context (Reynolds, 2017).

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative method survey design methodology with a purposive, maximum variation sample of administrators volunteering to participate (Etikan et al., 2016; Mertler, 2021). The researcher took a pragmatic ontological approach; therefore, the questionnaire also collected qualitative data using an open-ended item; this allowed the mixing of data for triangulation purposes. This pragmatic approach also influenced the sampling method; I recognized that administrators of smaller rural districts may have been concerned with anonymity. Subsequently I sampled with the intent of maximum variation within participants. This research followed a quantitative exploratory approach which included participant-rankings and an additional open-ended response item on the questionnaire (Allen, 2017; Gerdes & Conn, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Saldaña, 2009; Smyth et al., 2018). The survey questionnaire utilized in this study was initially sent out to 586 administrators identified in rural middle schools. Of the administrators targeted, only 30 administrators completed the questionnaire. This resulted in a margin of error of $\pm 14.39\%$. Due to this margin of error, researchers are at most 90% sure that roughly 71% of rural middle school administrators would agree with the study's findings.

Rationale for Research Design

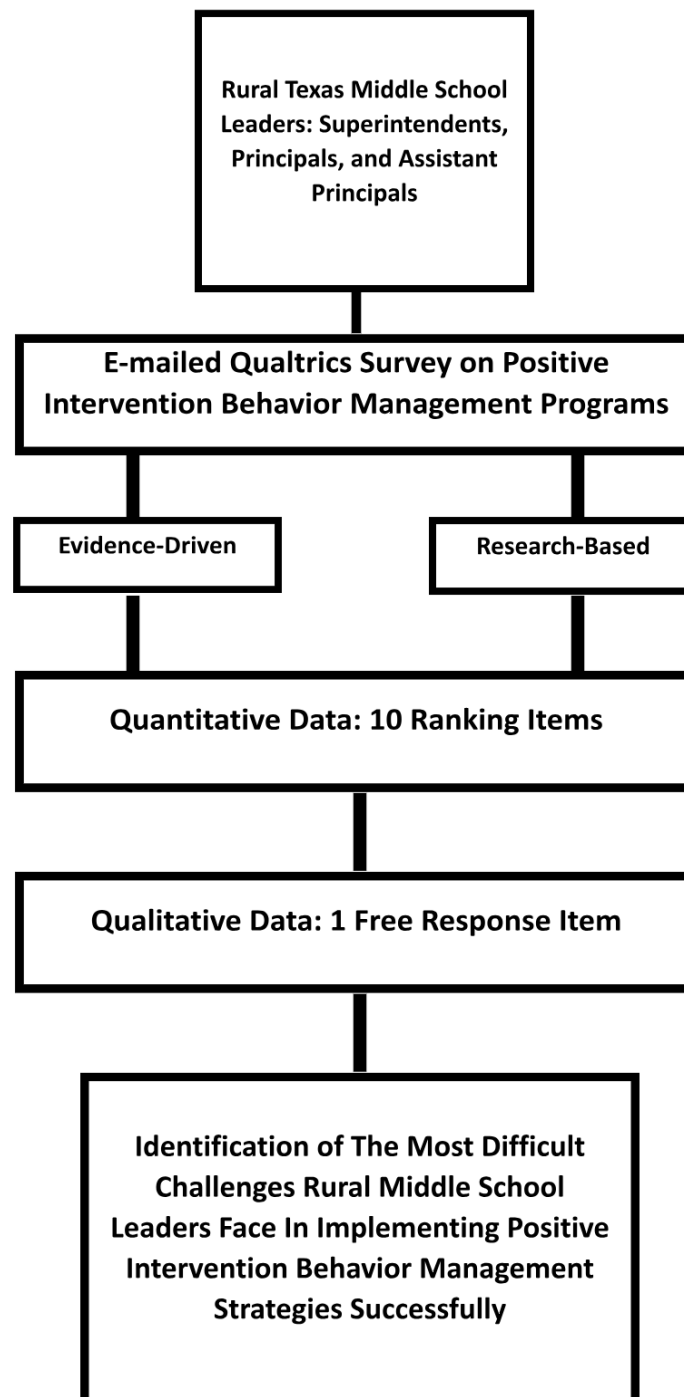
This quantitative survey investigated rural middle school leaders' perspectives as to what challenges rural middle schools experience in implementing PIBMS. A quantitative design was appropriate for this research question due to the goal of

examining the effect characteristics of rural middle schools had on the implementation of PIBMS (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed in an attempt to answer the research question comprehensively (Creswell, 2003; Toomela, 2011).

The ranking survey approach allowed participants to provide quantitative rankings that elicited how respondents related and experienced specific challenges compared to others and allowed for correlational, descriptive analyses. (Fowler & Cosenza, 2009; Smyth et al., 2018). This was crucial in identifying how leaders perceived non-manipulable variables pertaining to the research question and educational research as a whole (Johnson, 2001). The free-response question approach allowed for a qualitative, somewhat holistic perspective on the research question while allowing for greater data diversity (Allen, 2017). By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, the research presents a fairly comprehensive view of what the most difficult challenges rural middle school leaders face in implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies successfully. This is evidenced by the logic flow chart of the research presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Logic Flow Chart of Research



Participants

Inclusion/Exclusion

Only rural middle school leaders of Texas were invited to participate. To qualify as a rural district in Texas, districts must have had an enrollment of less 300 students or an enrollment of between 300 and the median district enrollment for the state with an enrollment growth rate over the past 5 years of less than 20% (Texas Education Agency, 2023). To be classified as a middle school, the school had to serve the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade level (19 Tex. Admin. Code § 74.3; 2023).

Participant Characteristics

Participants of the study consisted of 30 school leaders with roles in campus behavior management operating on rural school campuses in the state of Texas who served middle-school aged students. The leaders who completed the online questionnaire consisted of principals, vice principals, and superintendents. Leaders in these roles were knowledgeable in many capacities, understood unique circumstances of their local culture, and had great influence over campuses making them relevant sources of knowledge for a study on PIBMS (Chalker, 2002; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Preston & Barnes, 2017). The participants in this study were volunteers recruited through direct emails and then snowball sampling techniques (Walliman, 2021). This approach utilized an initial focused sample of participants to subsequently recruit other participants and was vital in recruiting more participants.

Overall, participants varied greatly amongst most of the factors recorded. 56% of participants were under the age of 47, with roughly 69% of participants falling in the 36-53 years old range. About 54% of participants had 20 years or more of experience in

education with 21-25 years being the most common experience level at 31%. However, as is the case when doing rural research, racial and ethnic diversity was lower than other demographic characteristics; the majority of participants were white (91%) and male (62%).

Population and Sample

A purposive, maximum variation population of rural middle school leaders was targeted for this study to analyze how the rural middle schools' features impacted the implementation of PIBMS (Etikan et al., 2016). Etikan et al. (2016) explained that purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants based upon specific qualities. In this case, the qualities the population held in common were their roles within their district and the fact that they all worked in rural settings with a working connection to a middle school. Etikan et al. (2016) also explained that maximum variation sampling allows researchers to study a subject from various viewpoints. This study solicited volunteers in various roles of different genders, ethnicities, and ages to compare how viewpoints differ. The final sample consisted of 30 of the leaders targeted who elected to participate in the study. Of those 30 leaders, roughly 59% were principals, 22% were assistant principals, and 19% were superintendents.

Data Collection

Data Collection Procedures

As leaders volunteered to participate in the study, they were emailed a link to an online questionnaire hosted by the West Texas A&M Qualtrics platform. An online survey was chosen primarily to ensure anonymity of participants, and due to the ease with which questionnaires can be administered with (Harlow, 2010). Responses were

compiled by Qualtrics where they were kept anonymous and protected. Data were then downloaded in the comma separated value (CSV) format and then imported into the Minitab (2023) statistical program.

Instrumentation

A Qualtrics-hosted questionnaire asked participants to rank 10 items quantitatively and also included one free response question. Through a comprehensive literature review, the researchers had already identified various challenges facing rural schools. As such, a question asking participants to rank the challenges typically facing rural schools directly addressed the research question of whether those challenges also held true in middle-school settings. The ranking question method was beneficial as it was a method most participants were familiar with, and the relative importance of challenges were able to be directly measured (Smyth et al., 2018). The purpose of this study was to identify challenges rural middle school leaders faced in implementing PIBMS. To wit, an open-ended question was added to glean perceptions of middle schools' administrators, and in essence, determine if there was something they saw as more critical than the list of items they had just ranked. Therefore, the free response question directly addressed the purpose of the study by allowing leaders to openly and comprehensively identify challenges that previous research may not have already adequately addressed (Allen, 2017). The questionnaire allowed for standardization and consistency in questions, and produced valid quantitative data (Spickard, 2016). It was estimated through testing that this questionnaire could have been completed in 5 minutes or less; this was intentional to increase the willingness of volunteers to participate as a shorter stated length has been

shown to evoke greater rates of participation in online surveys (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009).

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the questionnaire by rural middle school leaders, the data collected were analyzed using Minitab (2023) statistical software. The ranking survey item was analyzed through descriptive statistics and correlational tests (Mertler, 2021; Smyth et al., 2018). Nonparametric statistics were used in the form of median ranks and pairwise ranking comparisons (Alvo & Philip, 2014; Wu et al., 2017). Minitab's General Linear Model (GLM) was used to indicate areas with potential for deeper investigation through variable differentiation. Independent variables (middle school features and rural school features) compared to leader factors, such as age, gender, race, years of experience, current roles, and district enrollment (Mertler, 2021; Schober et al., 2018) were analyzed in appropriate parametric or nonparametric follow up statistical procedures. Most data in the analyses were ordinal in nature and are presented in the tables and figures below (Alvo & Philip, 2014; Gogtay & Thatte, 2017; Marshall & Jonker, 2010; Schober et al., 2018). Furthermore, the distributions of interval data were in some cases nonparametric.

Results

Challenges Facing Rural Middle School Leaders Implementing PIBMS

The research question guiding this study was, “What are the most difficult challenges rural middle school leaders face in implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies successfully?” The survey aimed to answer this question through two types of questions. A ranking survey question was used to assess how rural middle school leaders perceived currently known and expected challenges opposing the implementation of PIBMS. A free response survey question was used to identify further challenges that literature may not already reflect.

Ranking Survey Item

Upon analyzing the ranking survey question data collected, it became clear that I was working with a non-normal distribution. None of the measured outcome variables were normal. This was important as a non-normal distribution called for the use of nonparametric statistics in analyzing the data. Nonparametric statistics are best utilized when little to nothing is known about the distribution of the data (Wu et al., 2017) other than those being widely distributed.

Table 1*Rural Middle School Leader's Ranking of Variables Challenging PIBMS Implementation*

Variable	Total Count	N*	Q1	Median	Q3	IQR	Mode	N for Mode
Misunderstanding by faculty how to manage middle school aged students.	32	2	2.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	1, 3, 4	6
Misunderstanding by middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior.	32	2	2.0	3.0	5.2	3.25	2	7
A lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies.	32	2	2.0	3.5	7.0	5.0	2	7
Limited finances that can be used to implement strategies.	32	2	4.0	6.5	8.0	4.0	4, 7	5
Limited educational resources for the teachers implementing strategies.	32	2	4.0	5.5	8.0	4.0	4, 5	6
Limited infrastructure to support the implementation of strategies.	32	2	5.0	6.5	8.0	3.0	7	7
Limited time allotted to implement strategies.	32	2	2.0	5.0	6.0	4.0	5	6
A lack of strategies that address our school's unique needs.	32	2	3.75	6.5	9.0	5.25	9	7
School's geographical isolation.	32	2	6.0	9.0	10.0	4.0	10	10
Student and faculty poverty.	32	2	3.75	8.0	10.0	6.25	10	8

Note: N* represents the number of respondents that did not answer a given question.

Respondents were asked to rank the above variables based on how much they inhibit the effective implementation of PIBMS. In this ranking system, a low median would mean a variable was more likely to be a prominent challenge for rural middle

schools and a high median would mean a variable was less likely to be a challenge for schools. As consensus research has shown, an interquartile range (IQR) of zero indicates complete consensus (Lee & Nix, 2022). Based on the distribution of data in this study, researchers determined that an IQR lower than 2.0 indicated firm agreement, while an IQR lower than 5.0 (but greater than 2.0) indicated agreement. Any IQR greater than 5.0 was interpreted as relative disagreement, with greater disagreement indicated by an IQR of increasing values. As shown in Table 1, the most pressing challenge facing rural middle schools according to leaders was the misunderstanding by middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior (median = 3.0) and this was agreed upon strongly by respondents (IQR = 3.25). This was followed by a lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies (median = 3.5) and a misunderstanding by faculty how to manage middle school aged students (median = 4.0), both of which showed moderate agreement amongst respondents (IQR = 5 and 4 respectively).

The highest median scores equated to the challenges that rural middle school leaders felt did not impede effective implementation of PIBMS. The least pressing challenge according to rural middle school leaders was the geographical location of a school district (median = 9.0) with a moderate level of agreement amongst respondents (IQR = 4.0). This challenge was followed closely by the challenge of student and faculty poverty (median = 8.0) although there was little to no agreement on this ranking by school leaders (IQR = 6.25). All other challenges were ranked within 1.5 median points of one another between 5 and 6.5 with strong to moderate agreement amongst respondents (IQR = 3 - 5.25).

After completion of initial analysis, I utilized all 10 dependent variables as ordinal data and utilized GLM as a data snooping technique. This GLM procedure included an analysis of variance technique to identify which independent variables significantly impacted the ranking of each dependent variable and what percent of the variance shown was accounted for by the independent variables I utilized. As demonstrated by the combined average of all 10 r-squared values, roughly 68.4% of the variance observed was explained by the independent variables that were chosen for this study. Despite this, only a handful of independent variables made a significant impact on how leaders ranked the 10 challenges. Each of these independent variables is listed in Table 2 along with the dependent variable they impacted and the p-value calculated from Minitab's GLM procedure.

Table 2*Independent Variables with a Significant Impact on the Ranking of Their Challenge*

Challenge	Independent Variable	P-Value
Misunderstanding by middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior.	Age Range	0.181
	Gender	0.171
	Ethnicity	0.147
A lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies.	Gender	0.188
	Ethnicity	0.047
Limited finances that can be used to implement strategies.	Role	0.158
Limited educational resources for the teachers implementing strategies.	Experience	0.145
	Ethnicity	0.139
Limited infrastructure to support the implementation of strategies.	Age Range	0.127
Limited time allotted to implement strategies.	Ethnicity	0.063
A lack of strategies that address our school's unique needs.	Gender	0.189
School's geographical isolation.	Gender	0.010
	Ethnicity	0.135

Note: To be classified as significant for further variable differentiation in this study researchers agreed that the general linear model must have returned a p-value of less than or equal to 0.2.

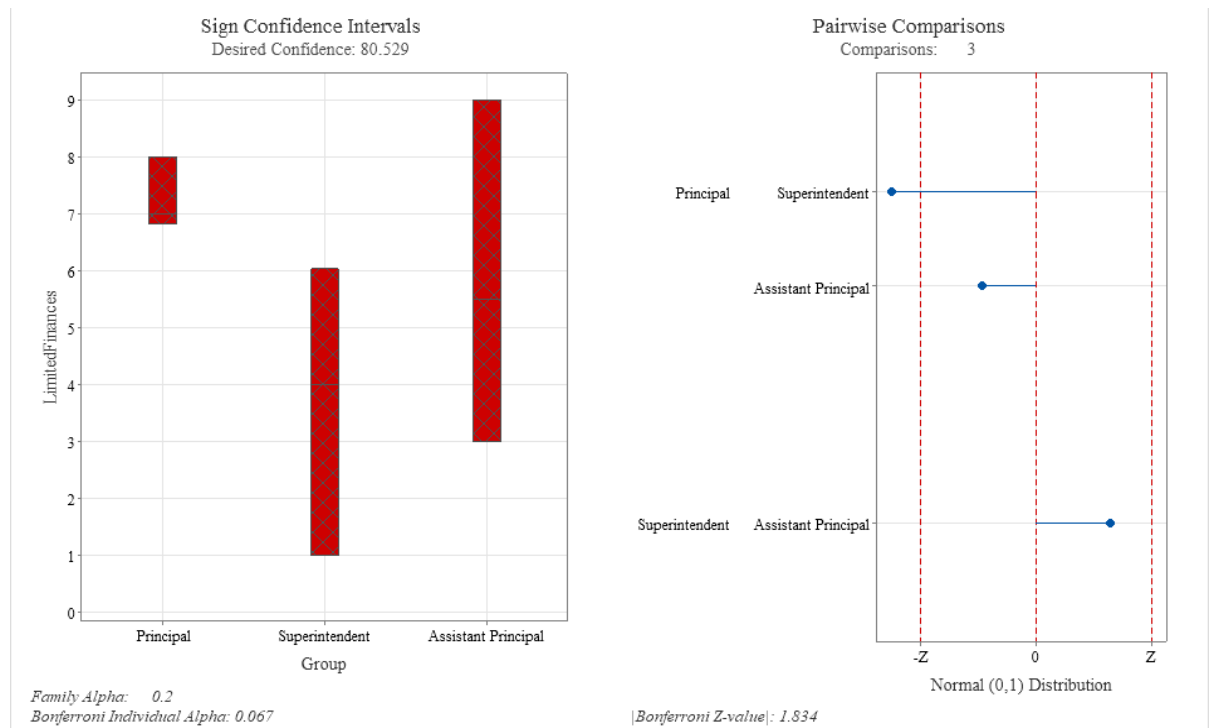
A Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted for each of the above relationships with p-values of .20 or less. Prior to this and to identify whether or not age range or experience would account for a greater difference if adjusted, these independent variables were re-coded to larger ranges and re-analyzed. Re-coding the ranges did not alter most results in regards to years of experience. However, according to the Kruskal-Wallis Test on the misunderstanding by middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior challenge, altering the age ranges did have an effect; school leaders who were older tended to rank this challenge as more prominent in the implementation of PIBMS, $H(1, N = 30) = 5.19, p = .023, \eta^2 = .15$, a moderate effect size. Another Kruskal-Wallis analysis was conducted on, "A lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies," versus ethnicity. This test revealed significance, $H(3, N = 30) = 7.54, p = .056, \eta^2 = .175$,

white manager from the sample ranked “student efficacy” as a more critical issue than a person of color from the sample did. Future qualitative studies might want to explain this interesting result.

As a result of the Kruskal-Wallis analysis on, “limited finances that can be used to implement strategies,” I could see that principals perceived a lower magnitude of impact from limited finances than did superintendents from this sample population, $H(2, N = 30) = 5.31, p = .070, \eta^2 = .123$, a moderate effect size. A post-hoc Mann-Whitney U. with Bonferroni correction verified that the two groups held statistically significant, $p = .02$, different perceptions as shown in Figure 4. This result also may be worth exploring more deeply in a future qualitative study.

Figure 4

Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U. Pairwise Comparisons: Different Roles Ranking of Limited Finances



As a result of the Kruskal-Wallis analysis on, “school’s geographical isolation,” we can see that women found this challenge to be more prominent than men from this sample population, $H(1, N = 30) = 4.56, p = .033, \eta^2 = .127$, with a moderate effect size.

Free Response Survey Question

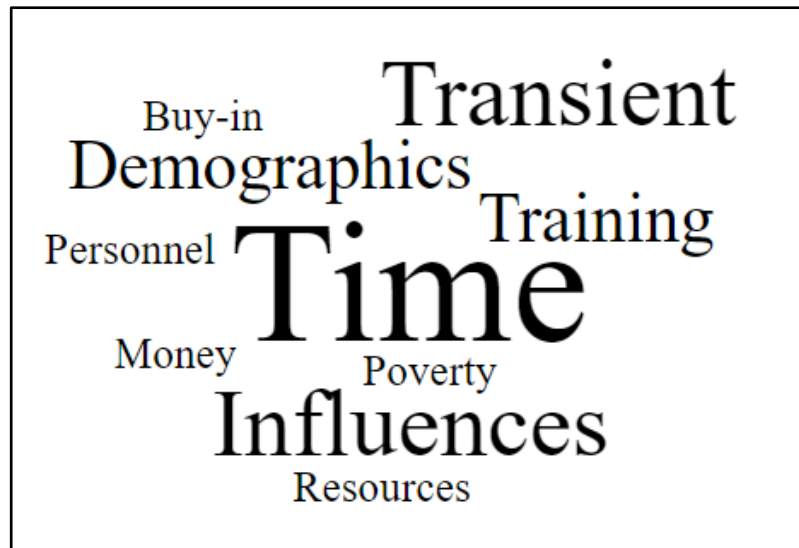
The free response survey question allowed for a relatively holistic, multiple perspective collection of data that allowed participants to fill in the gaps left by the ranking survey items (Allen, 2017). The researcher used content analysis to identify themes and repetitive terms (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Content analysis consisted of coding the free response answers to identify terms that were repeated by leaders as well as to identify categories of similar responses (Saldaña, 2009). A word cloud was used to visualize the terms and themes that were identified; word clouds are concise and easily interpreted by most viewers (Cui et al., 2010).

After participants were given 10 challenges to rank, they were then extended the opportunity to list any challenges that inhibited their district from implementing PIBMS which were not already covered in the rank-order items. Once these challenges were submitted, all answers were compiled into a spreadsheet for coding. A reflexive approach was used in this coding exercise. Morgan (2022) demonstrated that the reflexive approach perceives researcher subjectivity and a lack of predetermined themes as advantageous. Through the reflexive approach, inductive reasoning is utilized to identify themes without preconceived or hypothesized ideas as to what themes should present themselves. Three code words emerged as prominent due to being listed four to seven times. These were “time, transient populations, and outside influences.” Seven more code

words were listed after being listed two or three times each as evidenced by the word cloud in Figure

Figure 5

Word Cloud of Code Words



These words were used to organize three themes. The first theme consisted of resources, such as time, money, space, personnel, and training. The second them consisted of demographic variables, such as transience, demographics, poverty levels, and uniqueness of the individual. The third theme consisted of cultural influences, such as home life, societal pressures, beliefs, and cultures. These three themes were used to re-code the responses thematically. The word cloud in Figure 6 demonstrates the result with resources being mentioned the most (16 times), demographics second (10 times), and cultural influences the least (seven times).

Figure 6

Word Cloud of Themes



Data Triangulation

Results from the questionnaire's ranking items pointed to student and personnel factors as the most pressing challenges facing rural middle school leaders in implementing PIBMS. School leaders tended to believe that students struggle to understand what appropriate behavior looks like and that they lack the self-efficacy required to fix their behavior. They also believed that faculty do not understand how to effectively manage middle school students. However, the free response survey question pointed to a lack of resources being the most prominent challenge facing rural middle schools. Through free response, school leaders stated that resources, such as time, money, space, and personnel are the most pressing issues. The two question types lead to differing answer themes making the data divergent. However, the free response question did ask respondents to only give answers that had not already been given. This was definitely a causal mechanism for data divergence. Although the data were divergent in nature, there are still instances where the identified themes reinforced the rankings. After the top three ranked items, each of the next five items pertain directly to resources. These

resources included time, educational resources, finances, infrastructure, and strategies. If these resources were grouped into one, all-encompassing item, it could be argued that resources would have been ranked higher, leading to a greater convergence of data.

Discussion

Summary

This study contributed to the current literature on implementing positive intervention behavior management strategy in rural schools by eliciting feedback from middle school leaders on what challenges opposing PIBMS are most prominent. Middle school research represented a salient gap in the literature before the researchers conducted this study. This is a critical area of study as misbehavior of students is a major detractor from the educational process and very little was known as to what obstacles impeded PIBMS implementation in rural middle schools. Through this study, rural middle school leaders identified the challenges they felt were most prominent and identified further challenges that have not been addressed in prior studies.

Conclusion

This study revealed the four most difficult challenges rural middle school leaders face in implementing PIBMS, as well as a handful of other challenges that may warrant consideration. These challenges include the misunderstanding of middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior, a lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies, the misunderstanding of faculty of how to manage middle school aged students, and an overall lack of resources for schools to utilize for PIBMS implementation.

Misunderstanding of Middle School Students of What Constitutes Appropriate Behavior

Of the challenges available for respondents to choose, the misunderstanding of middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior was chosen by rural middle school leaders to be the most prominent challenge facing implementation of PIBMS. This high ranking also showed one of the highest degrees of agreement by respondents. Ranking this challenge number one overall is understandable as this finding builds on prior research. Malmgren et al. (2005) explained that oftentimes adolescents do not understand what constitutes appropriate behavior as it is never explicitly explained by supervising adults. When responding to the free response question, one participant stated the main challenge facing PIBMS was, “training for students.” According to this study, it appears that administrators agree that before PIBMS can be implemented effectively, correct behavior must be explained explicitly to the students involved. Parent et al. (2016) discussed how many students have become accustomed to seesaw discipline in which they are subject to both harsh and lax discipline standards and measures between their parents and their educators in schools. Gregory et al. (2021) discussed that clarification of expectations and everyday practices is crucial to successful restorative practices. As such, this study agrees that students could benefit from exposure to education on what appropriate behavior looks like and what consequences should accompany misbehavior. This also concurs with Schneider et al. (2021) who demonstrated that students prefer and benefit from praise of socially accepted behaviors. Both past studies and the present study demonstrate that middle school students can benefit from education on what constitutes appropriate academic behavior, and this study

suggests that rural middle school leaders also view this as an important challenge to address in implementing PIBMS. Future research may consider effective strategies for exemplifying appropriate behavior to rural middle school students in support of PIBMS implementation.

A Lack of Student Self-efficacy In Middle School Strategies

On average, participants ranked a lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies as being one of the top two most difficult challenges faced by rural middle school leaders. This challenge had a moderate amount of agreement by respondents on its ranking. This finding is also supported by prior research in the area. For instance, Karaman et al. (2020) found that self-efficacy in middle school students is an important factor in outcomes on achievement, perseverance, and resilience. Ames and Ames (1984) touched on this when describing that a student's motivation is individualistic and Gregory et al. (2021) found that student leadership and student voice were some of the top 12 most important indicators for successful restorative practices. When responding to the free response item, one school leader wrote, "one of the biggest obstacles to implementing PIBMS is, battling the culture of apathy that many of our students bring to campus." Another participant wrote, "It is hard for most of them (students) to buy in to a system of beliefs when they have differing beliefs/experiences." Regardless of the exact reason, research and this study note that students often lack the willingness to adjust their behaviors, and this appears to be true in rural middle schools as well. Future research may be able to delve into how to address this. A lack of student self-efficacy may be addressed in a way that benefits PIBMS implementation.

Misunderstanding of Faculty How to Manage Middle School Aged Students

The final of the top three challenges identified by rural middle school leaders was a misunderstanding of faculty of how to manage middle school aged students. There was moderate consensus by rural middle school leaders on how this particular challenge was ranked. Respondents gave varying reasons as to why faculty do not understand how to manage middle school students. One participant stated, “I think it’s a lack of understanding how easy they can be implemented.” One participant noted, “Our teachers are willing and try,” yet they noted teachers are ill equipped to do so, while another participant agreed stating more training is necessary for teachers. Yet another respondent wrote, “Our teachers are well versed in dealing with students like ours. When we get students with ‘other’ issues, there is a learning curve in picking up on strategies best for the student as well as the rest of the student body.” Much prior research has already been presented stating that middle school is one of the most difficult levels to manage misbehavior in and that more disrespectful behavior is present at this age range (Kaufman et al., 2010; Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011). Research has also shown that middle school behavior management is important due to the fact that it is a crucial time for emotional development, it is a stressful time of life for most, and that alterations to a student’s behavior may affect a student’s entire trajectory (Giedd, 2008, 2015; Nelemans et al., 2018; Shell et al., 2014). This study agrees that understanding how to manage middle school aged students is a salient challenge that should be researched and addressed when implementing PIBMS in rural middle schools.

A Lack of Resources

The free response survey question asked respondents to identify any challenges that had not already been covered by the ranking question. The initial intent of including this question was to identify any missing challenges that had not already been identified in the literature. However, after being analyzed for themes, this free response question alluded to the prevalence of a fourth challenge that rural middle school leaders encounter in implementing PIBMS: a lack of resources. Within the 30 free response submissions gathered, a lack of resources was discussed 16 times. These resources included time, money, space, and personnel to mention a few. One middle school reader wrote, “lack of training, lack of time to train, too many preps for teachers,” as being the main challenges. Another respondent noted:

In general, I would say a lack of cohesive and aligned resources that are readily available. In addition, we are a very small school and do not have behavior specialists or assistant principals. So, I would say a lack of personnel available to oversee the implementation of PIBMS.

Two other leaders simply noted, “Time is my biggest concern,” and, “BUDGET!” Altogether, time was mentioned seven times, lack of training was mentioned three times, personnel was mentioned two times, money was mentioned two times, and resources were mentioned two times. This question asked specifically what challenges had not already been addressed by the previous ranking question. However, the ranking question had already alluded to a lack of resources as being a significant challenge facing rural middle school leaders. This is due to the existence of much research in agreement with this study. Royce (2019) discussed how resources vary significantly in rural communities

and how poverty is very prevalent. Research also detailed how time is a limited resource for many students and educators in rural communities (Gringeri, 2001; Smarsh, 2018). Both Preston et al. (2013) and Wenger et al. (2012) demonstrated how money, educational resources, and limited infrastructure are all resources lacking in rural schools. Prior research and this study agree that a lack of resources is a significant challenge for rural middle school leaders to overcome in implementing PIBMS. Future research may be used to identify unique ways rural middle schools are able to address limitations in resources.

Further Consideration May Be Warranted

Three challenges were touched on in the free response questionnaire item that had not been explicitly alluded to in the ranking section. The most prevalent of these challenges in the responses of rural middle school leaders was the transient nature of a given population. On four separate occasions, rural middle school leaders spoke about their transient population and how this complicates the process of implementing a PIBMS. One respondent wrote, “This is a very transient district. Often, we have students who move in and will only be here for a few months before they move on. That situation makes it difficult to form connections.” Another participant wrote, “Most of our students are transfer students... Establishing a strong culture is often a challenge due to staff turnover and student turnover.” It appears, rural middle school leaders believe that a transient population is more difficult to initiate change across in the realm of PIBMS.

Although the ranking section discussed the uniqueness of middle school students and rural schools as a whole, specific, individualized demographics were not referenced. Multiple times in the free response survey, participants spoke about the individual culture

or beliefs of students. One participant wrote, “Understanding how the changes in society and the change in our district's demographics requires a new approach to discipline and how it relates to the PBIS model.” The research identified prior to this study did not make mention of this challenge. For this reason, it may be worth further consideration in future research.

Finally, one challenge that was not considered prior to this study was “buy-in.” Two times, student and teacher buy-in was referenced in responses with one participant stating, “It is hard for most of them to buy-in to a system of beliefs when they have differing beliefs/experiences.” This is a unique challenge to consider in future research as no prior research was identified on this challenge during the formation of this study. With that being said, seeing as this study has suggested student and personal beliefs have an impact on PIBMS implementation, it would stand to reason that buy-in may be an important challenge that should be addressed by rural middle school leaders.

Each of the above challenges could benefit from further research. According to this study, the transient nature of rural middle schools is increasing and becoming more of an obstacle to address. As such, future research could be utilized to identify strategies that accommodate students that are transient in nature. The individualism of students warrants further research into how programs can accommodate students that may have varying beliefs. Finally, further research may consider studying how student and teacher buy-in affects the successful implementation of PIBMS in rural middle schools.

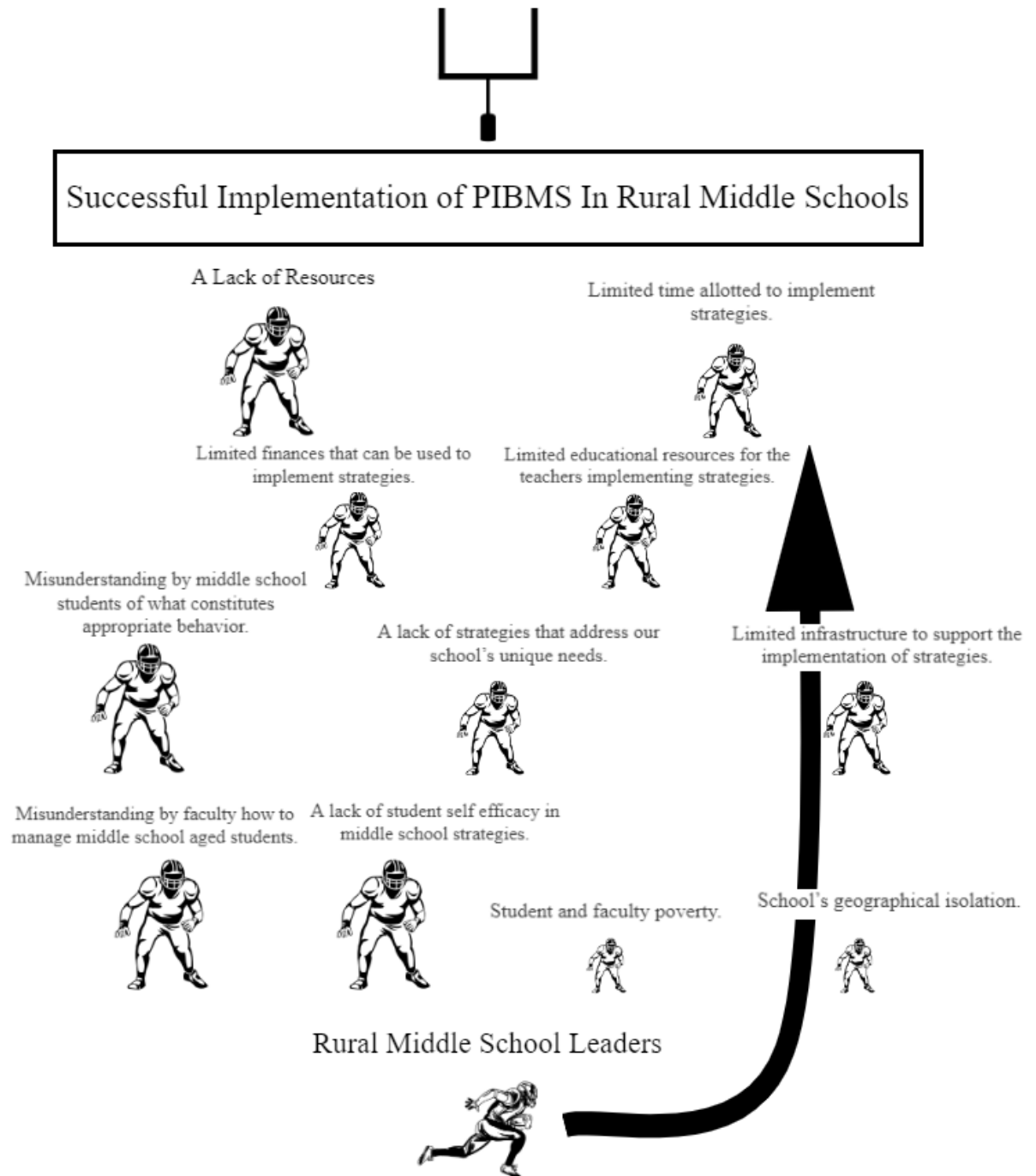
Updated Conceptual Model

Based upon the research conducted, an updated conceptual model is presented in Figure 7. The updated model utilized the research as a scouting report for the

quarterback. Based upon this scouting report, the quarterback is now able to identify the weakest defenders as well as the gaps that exist in the defense. The weaker defenders can be recognized by their smaller stature. Likewise, as the size of the defender increases, the challenge they represent becomes more difficult to traverse. By utilizing this scouting report, the quarterback can better navigate the defense, attacking the least resistant challenges on their way to scoring a touchdown. In parallel, by first addressing the challenges that were ranked least challenging, rural middle school leaders can secure small victories on the way to greater implementation of PIBMS. Once administrators have made small strides in implementing PIBMS, they may then begin to address the more difficult challenges that still remain. These would be the challenges ranked lowest by participants in this survey as well as the challenge identified in the free response item.

Figure 7

Hurdling the Challenges of PIBMS Implementation in Rural Middle Schools



Significance of Research

The study presented is relevant for myriad reasons, not the least of which is that all students can benefit from positive interventions that boost relationships and motivation (Haydon et al., 2020). When considering the highest achieving institutions they studied, Stone-Johnson (2014) showed all the highest achievers focused on building positive relationships. In fact, positive relationships are not only important at the teacher to students' level, but they are also important between all advice seekers and providers of advice (Liou, 2016). Middle school students are not the only ones who will benefit from this research as effective motivational constructs are different at each level of school and further research can only help in identifying those which are most effective (Bong, 2001). All stakeholders within the school system could be affected by the outcome of this study as Maag (2001) reported that there are roles to be played by students, administrators, and teachers alike in effective, positive reinforcement programs.

In a traditional, Texas school system, there are 12 grades of schooling ranging from first to twelfth grade with middle schools serving grades six through eight (19 Tex. Admin. Code § 74.3). As such, this study directly pertains to 25% of the student population at any one time. However, almost all students will experience middle school at some point in their academic career, meaning this research is relevant to nearly every student. Rural students make up 20% of the total United States population, and rural areas hold one-third of the nation's people living in poverty (Gringeri, 2001). Though intervention is needed to address impoverished, rural communities, Maringe et al. (2015) noted broad-brush policy adaptations generally fail to recognize contextualized challenges faced in specific schools. Maringe et al. (2015) made a call for greater

attention to school-based improvement initiatives that are more specific to niche school situations, such as those experienced by rural school goers. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) echoed this call for specificity when they concluded that great variation existed amongst state plans and policies and that only half of the United States provided rural specific strategies within their plans leading to an increase in difficulties for rural leaders. This study is important due to its ability to address the needs of rural middle school students and students of all kinds in the area of positive intervention behavior management strategies.

Assumptions

This study carried with it a handful of assumptions. First of all, it was assumed the 30 administrators that responded to the survey offered enough insight to extract takeaways that are both actionable and that prompt further research. It was assumed that most leaders questioned had a working knowledge of their campus or district's behavior management programs and had at least some knowledge of existing PIBMS in existence. It was assumed that respondents took their time to answer truthfully and accurately in respect to their campus. It was assumed that leaders offered insight that was specific to their own experiences. It was assumed that data collected by the Texas Education Agency in identifying rural districts remains accurate today despite being collected in a prior year.

Limitations

The impact of the conclusions and implications of this study are not without their limitations. This research was inherently limited by the lack of resources pertaining to rural middle schools and their use of PIBMS. There was zero identified research pertaining to this specific niche, meaning the literature guiding this study was based on

research that may not be generalizable. To rectify this, further research should be conducted into rural middle schools and current research should be reevaluated within this scope. To give a more encompassing view of current literature, more PIBMS programs should be referenced. In searching for literature for this study, key words, such as “middle school” and “rural” were used to narrow down foundational literature.

This study accepted certain features of PIBMS as foundational. These aspects included the use of relationships and motivation as well as peer positivity and teacher training. By identifying these features at the outset, the research may have gravitated to responses that exemplified this. There is always a risk of bias when it comes to research. The author’s bias may be present in the literature that was chosen to support this study. Additionally, the author’s goal of identifying a literature gap may have alluded to an overemphatic focus on the gap in literature. Proper vetting of the serving committee members and content experts was intended to alleviate author bias.

Sample size was another inherent limitation of this study. The field of rural education is an under-researched field. As such, sample sizes in the studies collected may not have been significant enough to generalize findings. This was compounded by the research stating that each rural community is unique and may have varied too greatly from the average school population (Chalker, 2002). To garner as many responses as possible, 586 administrators were issued the survey through email and encouraged to share with any other administrator within their district dealing with middle school student discipline. Unfortunately, this only elicited 30 responses from qualifying administrators. This could be rectified by further research into rural schools utilizing larger populations and sample sizes as well as by utilizing stronger relationships to gather more participants.

This study could be considered limited due to its focus on a population that tends to have a strong regional focus and that may be considered too small to make an impact. Rural schools make up only 20% of the population, meaning research conducted in this field may not have as large of an impact as in an urban or suburban setting (Gringeri, 2001). However, because of the great need identified within rural communities, it could be argued that interventions and research in rural settings could have a greater impact as a result of a greater need (Reynolds, 2017). Future research may be able to clarify this matter further. Another limitation of this study is the tendency of ranking questions to give skewed data. It is human nature to leave a ranking item where it lies if one is unsure how they feel about it. In this study, the ranking items that started at the bottom tended to stay there. Those items originating in the top and the middle tended to be ranked in that area as well. This could be rectified in future studies by randomizing ranking item location with each survey.

Although numerous limitations have been identified for this study, each of these limitations also signifies an area where future research may be able to have additional impact. Many of these limitations are a consequence of a focus on an area where research is seemingly nonexistent. For this reason, further research is needed in the area of positive intervention behavior management strategies in rural middle schools to address these limitations and to fill the gap in literature that has been identified throughout this study.

Implications

The findings of this study may serve as a valuable resource for rural middle school leaders implementing PIBMS. Understanding what challenges one can anticipate

facing may prove to be the difference between success and failure in implementing a successful program. The findings of this survey suggested the misunderstanding of middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior, a lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies, the misunderstanding of faculty of how to manage middle school aged students, and an overall lack of resources for schools to utilize for PIBMS implementation were the most pressing challenges facing rural middle school leaders. There is a current need in education to address these needs in an effort to support PIBMS that can dramatically impact student learning outcomes. Additionally, rural middle schools should begin deliberating possibilities to address the identified challenges.

It may prove beneficial for rural middle school leaders to begin implementing behavior education programs for their students that focus on appropriate behavior. These programs will help demonstrate what constitutes appropriate behavior as well as allow leaders to delineate what consequences should be expected for those who choose to misbehave. This study also suggests that leaders might consider implementing programming designed to increase student self-efficacy. Leaders have identified this as a challenge for handling students. As such, forward thinking leaders may consider creating programs that value and teach student led behavior management. This study, and many prior to it, point at a lack of faculty understanding of how to manage middle school students as a challenge to be overcome. Ultimately, it seems as if rural middle school leaders may need to begin with research backed guidance based on instructing their work force how middle school students differ from their younger and older counterparts. Middle school students are unique and require a unique approach that may need to be

addressed with educators. This study identified a lack of resources as a significant challenge for implementing effective PIBMS. This challenge is one that may need to be addressed initially at the state level, but ultimately, rural middle school leaders will need to adapt their policies and procedures to the limited resources they have at their fingertips.

This study supports much of the research that had already been conducted in the area of PIBMS implementation. This study builds on prior research by identifying and confirming to some degree those challenges that are unique to rural middle schools. The data in this study points to the middle school classification as being the most challenging factor of rural middle schools. Although rural schools face unique challenges, each of the three highest ranked challenges identified by school leaders were related directly to middle school aged students. This would lead one to believe that school leaders may want to focus on the unique needs of middle school students before considering the rural aspect. With that being said, the largest theme in the coded responses pertained to a lack of resources. The lack of resources is typically associated with rural schools, although many schools in varying locations do allude to a lack of resources as problematic.

Although this study worked from a base of prior knowledge, new themes emerged in responses from participating rural middle school leaders. Leaders were fearful of the effects a transient population may have on implementing PIBMS. It seems that leaders believed it is more difficult to create long lasting change in a population that is constantly changing. This topic would be a good avenue to explore for future researchers interested in the topic. Individual student demographics also emerged as a theme when coding leaders' responses. In the scope of this study, leaders believed that student demographics

can present a challenge to PIBMS implementation. This was specifically spoken of in reference to cultural beliefs. Approaching the implementation of PIBMS based upon demographics may prove to be a novel field of research. Student buy-in is also presented as a new area that may be worth studying. According to this study, student buy-in may be one of the remaining challenges to implementing PIBMS effectively that have not yet been considered for study.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Positive Intervention Behavior Management Strategies Survey

This survey is designed to assess the key challenges pertaining to the implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies in rural middle schools. Please answer each question honestly based on your experience.

Please note your age, gender, ethnicity, years of experience, current role within your district and the enrollment of your district from the dropdown menus below:

Please rank the following challenges inhibiting your rural middle schools from implementing PIBMS from 1-10. One should represent the most difficult challenge faced by your campus in implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies and fourteen should represent the least concerning challenge you face.

- ___ Misunderstanding by faculty how to manage middle school age students.
- ___ Misunderstanding by middle school students of what constitutes appropriate behavior.
- ___ A lack of student self-efficacy in middle school strategies.
- ___ Limited finances that can be used to implement strategies.
- ___ Limited educational resources for the teachers implementing strategies.
- ___ Limited infrastructure to support the implementation of strategies.
- ___ Limited time allotted to implement strategies.
- ___ A lack of strategies that address our school's unique needs.
- ___ School's geographical isolation.
- ___ Student and faculty poverty.

In your own words, what challenges inhibit your campus from implementing positive intervention behavior management strategies? List any challenges not addressed in the previous question.

Appendix B

Email Invitation

Dear rural middle school leader,

I believe growing up in a small town is what allowed me to dream big, and I want to help other rural students do the same. I am conducting research on rural middle schools and their use of positive intervention behavior management strategies. I am requesting five minutes of your time to help your current students as well as every future generation of rural Texas students. Although rural America is large, the research conducted in rural school districts is nearly obsolete. This is in part due to researchers almost exclusively conducting research in higher density areas, such as large cities. This research is then used to guide the decisions of the state agencies that govern our schools. But this research does not tell the whole story. My goal is to tell my story, your story, and the story of every student within your district that knows that big change can come from small towns. If you want to be a part of that change, please read below.

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the unique challenges facing implementation of positive intervention behavior management strategies in rural middle schools. If you opt to participate in this study, you will complete a three-section survey that will take approximately five minutes to complete. All survey responses and identities of respondents will be kept confidential, and password protected. The results will be stored securely on a West Texas A&M OneDrive account and will be deleted after 3years. This study will help to gain a better insight into the unique needs of rural middle schools/ campuses, such as yours. Participation in this research study is voluntary

and you may revoke your consent to participate at any time. If you have any questions or want to receive more information about this study, please contact me at:

bmrichardson1@buffs.wtamu.edu

Below you will find the link to the 5-minute (or less) Qualtrics Survey:

https://wtamuuw.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0HWAuFcbyCsyvY

Please help my study by forwarding this link to any leader (formal or informal) within your district that works in any capacity with the behavior of your middle school students.

Sincerely,

Brian Richardson

Ed.D. Candidate 2023| Department of Education| West Texas A&M University

Appendix C

Non-Respondent Follow Up Email

Dear school leader,

I understand your schedule is full and you have little time to spare. Please consider sharing your perspective in five minutes or less of your time to help every future rural student in the state of Texas. Below you will find the link to the Qualtrics Survey:

https://wtamuwv.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0HWAuFcbtyCsyvY

Please help my study by forwarding this link to any leader (formal or informal) within your district that works in any capacity with the behavior of your middle school students. If you choose not to participate after this follow up email, please rest assured I will not reach out again. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Brian Richardson

Ed.D. Candidate 2023 | Department of Education | West Texas A&M University