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## **Abstract**

This research is a two-year ethnographic case study of a School-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) school leadership team, at an urban elementary school in central New York, during their first two years implementing SWPBS. SWPBS is a framework for implementing a school-wide behavior management system that focuses on proactive rather than reactive behavior interventions. SWPBS was recommended in No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as a positive alternative to punitive discipline policies and strategies and as a tool for reducing office discipline referrals and suspensions, as well as improving academic achievement.

Using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and policy analysis, I investigate the factors that influence an urban elementary school's ability to implement SWPBS, and how factors related to school-based reforms mandated by No Child Left Behind affect an underfunded urban school, serving mostly students of color, as it implements SWPBS. In addition I examine how schools, administrators and teachers negotiate expectations for fidelity of implementation, which is seen as central to successful SWPBS, given the local conditions and the day-to-day realities of one urban school. Although the focus of the study is the implementation of SWPBS in an urban school, the research is cut short when the school closes for poor academic performance and budgetary reasons. The study concludes with an analysis of the school closure due to neoliberal education reform.

Implementation of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports in the Neoliberal Context in an  
Urban Elementary School

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in *Special Education*.

Syracuse University

August 2015

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*For Liat and Olivia*

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

As a child I had a difficult time in school. I often found myself sitting in the hallway or outside of the principal's office. I have a learning disability and during my education in middle and high school, I found myself struggling more and more with the academic work. Not knowing how to get help I became increasingly frustrated at school. I began to avoid going to school by either pretending to be sick, skipping classes, or getting in trouble. I would rather spend time in detention than sit through an English class. I had been labeled as a slacker and a troubled kid, however I was someone who wanted to do well in school, to have teachers like me, and to have friends in school. I barely graduated from high school and it took me five years before I decided to try community college. Community college is where I realized I was smart and that I loved to learn. It is during my time in community college that I decided to become a teacher. I was accepted to the education program at the University of Texas at Austin and was on the Dean's list many times. I made it my goal to make sure that marginalized students would have at least one teacher that would build a relationship with them, help them realize what they could do, and advocate for them. I earned a dual certification in elementary and special education and began my career as a high school special education teacher, teaching students in a segregated setting who were labeled as emotionally disturbed.

It was during my second year teaching in a rural school district that I began advocating for my students to be educated in the regular education classes instead of being sent to my classroom. This did not make me very popular and I often ate lunch in my classroom with my students. I began to realize that my students were increasingly being sent to the office, as well as being suspended from school. It was only after I began to advocate for my students more

vigorously during nexus hearings (before a student is suspended from school a meeting is conducted to determine if the student's conduct is a manifestation of their disability) that I realized I was probably not going to get tenure. I had aligned myself with the students and tried to change a structure that allowed students with disabilities to be disproportionately disciplined for minor infractions based on what seemed to me to be the whim of the a few teachers. I resigned and took a position as a special education teacher at a residential (correctional) facility for boys in central New York.

The residential facility housed 25 residents (inmates) which were 20 African-Americans, two Whites, and three were Latino; all of them came from the New York City area. Most of the students were performing below grade level academically and more than half had individual education plans (IEPs). Although it was difficult to get academic records from the schools the students last attended, their school discipline records followed them everywhere.

The facility was located in a rural area of central New York making it difficult for families to visit their children. The odds of them being released from the facility were stacked against them mostly because of the criteria they had to meet to be released, one of which was to have consistently good behavior at the facility and another was to show they had strong relationships with their families. This criterion could be difficult because it meant that the resident's family would have to visit. The distance between the facility and New York City was far and most of the residents had families who cannot afford to travel or take time off of work. I learned how systemic racism created an (in)justice system where children of color were left in facilities six months to a year past their release date because they did not meet the criteria on an objective survey. By systemic racism, I am referring to the ways racism works structurally through institutions like education and not only on an individual level (by suggesting who is

racist or not in these systems) but throughout the very structures and systems in place.

Unfortunately, my input was of little value when it came to advocating for their release.

I then left my position at the facility and went back to teaching in public schools. I again worked with students labeled as emotionally disturbed as a teacher in a segregated classroom located in an adult vocational center. I also taught as a homebound instructor for students who had been suspended from school. In these positions, I continued to advocate for my students and worked to get students back in their home school. I also worked with parents to help them use their child's individualized education plans and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) as leverage to get their child back in school and to have access appropriate services. I was frustrated with a school system that would suspend a kindergartner for throwing a block or for pulling the principal's tie while being restrained by him. When the mother came to pick up her child, the child was in the office crying with his shirt ripped. I wanted to make a difference.

After years of fighting the system that disregarded what I said, as well as parents' involvement in their children's education, I decided to pursue a PhD in special education. I hoped that a PhD would allow me the opportunity to make changes in education policy in regards to the way marginalized students and their families are disenfranchised in schools. It is due to my educational history as a child and a teacher that I took a special interest in oppressive structures that affect discipline policies in schools, particularly with regard to special education and minority populations. My position in this research is informed and motivated by this location.

### **Coming to the Research Project**

The idea for my research project came from my interest in discipline policies and behavior management and how these two things affect students with disabilities and other

marginalized populations in our public schools. In addition, it came from my own experiences as a teacher dealing with punitive systems of behavior management and an unjust judicial system and as a student teacher supervisor observing behavior management styles across a variety of educational settings.

In an effort to find alternative ways of meeting students' behavioral needs in non-punitive ways, I took an interest in school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS). SWPBS is a framework for implementing a school-wide behavior management system that focuses on proactive rather than reactive behavior interventions. SWPBS was recommended in No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as a positive alternative to punitive discipline policies and strategies.

This research project came to fruition after I learned that school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) would be implemented at several of the elementary schools where I had observed student teachers. The behavior authoritarian management styles that I witnessed being used in schools were, in my perception, particularly harsh and humiliating to the students. It made me uncomfortable to watch the interactions between the teachers and the students in these classes, a majority of whom were African-American. As the supervisor of student teachers placed in these classrooms, I felt as though I could not offer suggestions to the host teachers about how to manage their classrooms, however I did conference with the student teachers I worked with about alternative ways to manage their classrooms and more appropriate strategies they could use than the ones they were seeing.

I knew the statistics for students of color in special education and as the recipients of harsh discipline policies (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010) and, as someone who worked in a correctional facility for boys, I want to put an end to exclusionary tactics that can push students

out of school. In research literature, SWPBS has been shown to be successful in the reducing office discipline referrals and suspensions, in addition to organizations, such as Dignity in Schools Campaign, who are fighting to end the school-to-prison pipeline are demanding that schools use SWPBS (Dignity in Schools Campaign, 2011). I was hopeful that the SWPBS framework would provide the necessary structure to create systemic change in the way teachers interacted with students, in particular, marginalized student populations.

I was interested in a particular school, Morgan<sup>1</sup> Elementary, which was located in an urban school district in New York State. I had observed student teachers in Morgan and I had already established a connection with teachers at the school. Before the school began the process of implementing SWPBS during the 2010 – 2011 school year, I had been given permission to do participant observations of the SWPBS school leadership team meetings, conduct interviews with teachers, staff, and administrators participating in the implementation process. The premise for this research is discussed further in Chapter Three.

### **My Research Questions**

The following research questions helped guide my investigation:

1. What are the factors that influence the implementation of SWPBS in an urban elementary school?
2. How do factors related to school-based reforms mandated by No Child Left Behind impact an underfunded urban school serving mostly students of color as it implements SWPBS?

---

<sup>1</sup> All names and places have been changed.



3. How do schools, administrators and teachers negotiate expectations for fidelity of implementation, which is seen as central to successful SWPBS, given the local conditions and the day-to-day realities of one urban school?

My research questions were based on the process of implementing SWPBS at Morgan Elementary and much of the groundwork for implementation took place during the first year I was at the school. Halfway through the first year of SWPBS implementation, the school district threatened to close Morgan Elementary due to budgetary issues. Although I continued to collect data around these research questions, the fact that Morgan was put on a list of schools that were going to close while I was in the midst of my data collection no doubt influenced the findings, as I discuss this further in Chapter 6. Thus, in addition to the above questions about implementation of SWPBS at Morgan, I was also interested in the ways school closure (or its threat), in particular, impacted the implementation of SWPBS.

### **Summary of Chapters**

In this introductory chapter I have provided a personal narrative that sets the background for my interest in this research topic. I chose to conduct an ethnographic case study of Morgan Elementary, which was implementing SWPBS during the 2010 – 2011 school year. I wanted to learn how SWPBS was implemented in schools and what strategies were employed that would turn around a school with high numbers of discipline referrals. In the rest of this chapter, I provide brief description of what is contained in each chapter.

In Chapter Two, I review literature on the history of segregation of African American students in regular and special education. I connect this history to school exclusion and the school to prison pipeline. In addition, I include a discussion of comprehensive school reform, scientifically-based research, and school-wide positive behavior supports.

In Chapter Three I describe my research methodology for this project, which is an ethnographic case study using qualitative methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, as well as documents in my data collection. I lay out the design of my research, which includes the background, setting, information on participants and how I collected data. In this chapter I also demonstrate how my analysis incorporated elements of institutional ethnography.

The data are presented in three chapters. In Chapter Four, *Lived Experiences with the Implementation of SWPBS*, I follow the SWPBS school leadership team as they began to implement the school-wide behavior management system. Through observations and interviews, I explored experience and training in school-wide positive behavior supports effected the implementation outcomes of SWPBS in Morgan Elementary. I also noted how positively stated behavioral objectives posted around the school did not lead to positive behavior outcomes when there was not a lot of teacher buy-in for another new initiative.

In Chapter Five, *Fidelity Vs Reality in A School Struggling to Stay Afloat*, I provide an analysis of what is called for in *PBIS Implementers Blueprint* to establish SWPBS with fidelity. I compared this “blueprint” to the realities of Morgan’s implementation phase.

In Chapter Six, *School Closure and Neoliberal Education Reforms*, I follow the events that took place as the community and teachers learned that Morgan Elementary was to close. I examined reactions from the teachers through interviews, as well as those of community members, which I gathered from online news organizations. In addition, I critique neoliberal education reforms, which negatively impacted many urban schools.

I conclude the study with Chapter Seven, which gives an overview of the study. In addition to an analysis of the findings, the conclusion provides the limitations of the study as well as its implications.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

The elementary school I have focused my research on is in an urban school district in a midsize city in Central New York. I provide more specific details and demographics in the next chapter, but not surprisingly, the students in this school, as well as in the district, were mostly students of color. At the time of the study, 10% of student population in the district was White and 79% was black, mostly from low-income families (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2012). At this particular school it was estimated that in the 2010-2011 school year, 81 to 90% of students were from families receiving public assistance, and 84% of the students received free lunch (NYSED, 2012). Because of the stark reality of over representation of minority children in this school, it is necessary to provide some background on the issue of historical racial segregation in general education and over-representation of students of color in special education, more specifically.

This chapter provides a review of the literature regarding the use of special education as a tool for resegregating African American students in education, as well as litigation and legislation to end the over-representation of students of color in special education. In addition, a review of the literature is provided on the disproportionate numbers of students of color and students with disabilities being excluded from school through harsh discipline policies. This is followed by literature on comprehensive school reform, response to intervention, school-wide positive behavior supports, the use of token economies, cultural relevance, and disability studies in education.

### **Historical Segregation of Students of Color**

Harry and Klingner (2006) noted that before the civil rights movement, children with disabilities and minorities received an inadequate education or none at all. Practices based on eugenic ideologies, or beliefs about racial inferiority and the genetic basis of certain disabilities, particularly intellectual and/ or emotional disabilities, led to sorting children into specific educational settings, further justified by the use of intelligence testing. Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision should have ended racial segregation in schools, Whites found other ways to keep students of color segregated by providing “specialized” instruction for students of color classified as having learning or emotional deficits (Connor & Ferri, 2005).

The sorting of students through tracking systems was set up by school districts after *Brown v. Board*, supposedly to improve educational opportunities for African American students, many of whom were reportedly experiencing a high rate of academic achievement problems compared with White students. Connor and Ferri (2005) provided the example of school officials in Washington, DC, in 1955, placing over 24 percent of the African American student population in special education classrooms as opposed to 3 % of the White student population (p. 108). Ability tracking, based on standardized testing, resulted in the overrepresentation of African American students in the lower ability tracks (Reschly & Bersoff, 1999) and in special education classes that continues to this day.

### **Segregation through Special Education**

Segregating students of color through special education continued through the 1950s, and into the 1960s, when there was an increase “in both the number of students considered emotionally disturbed (ED) educated by public schools and the number of corresponding special education teachers for the students” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 26). When the Education for

All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was signed into law, the federal government estimated that 1.75 million children with disabilities were not being educated in public schools (Zettel & Ballard, 1979). In addition, a study conducted by the National Rural Research and Personal Preparation Research Project in 1980, after P.L. 94-142 was enacted, found there was a “478% increase in the number of students labeled Emotionally Disturbed (ED) in American public schools in less than 5 years” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 27). Students labeled as ED were, and are for the most part, educated in segregated classrooms or in separate schools within school districts. These segregated programs were a new addition to a well-established ability tracking system that maintained the separate and unequal educational structure within the school building (Danforth & Smith, 2005).

In terms of legal protections, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was supposed to make sure that “[n]o person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, [be] excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (42 U.S.C. § 2000(d)). In addition, in 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was established and Title I of the act addressed the specific educational needs of children from low-income families and targeted funding to schools with high concentrations of low-income families. This funding was used to create Head Start programs, as well as remedial math and reading programs in schools to improve the quality of education for poor children (Title I). In total, these civil rights acts and educational policies improved educational opportunities for poor and minority children; however, they did not succeed to the extent that could have been possible, due to the widespread mis/identification of minorities as intellectually deficient and emotionally disordered.

In the 1960s, researchers began to notice that African Americans were overrepresented in programs for students with labels of “mental retardation” and later “learning disabled (LD)”, and that these students were most often placed in segregated settings (Garda, 2005). As civil action and grassroots advocacy increased, the public and Congress became increasingly aware of the problem. The government established the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to monitor and enforce Title VI. It collected data on school enrollment and student placement and was later given authority to monitor and enforce Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997). The OCR was very successful in enforcing desegregation in southern schools with the percentage of African American students in segregated settings being reduced from 98% in 1964 to 8.7% in 1972. However OCR was not so successful in dealing with segregation taking place *within* schools (Glennon, 2002). In fact, the OCR was sued in 1970 by civil rights advocates for not enforcing Title VI in schools that were resistant to desegregation. As Harry and Klinger (2006) stated, “...sometime in the early 1970s, the special education movement and the desegregation movement officially collided. Those whom the society rejected, and excluded from its public schools, would meet in the special education setting” (p. 11).

#### Civil Rights and Disability Lawsuits in Education

Most of the lawsuits involving desegregation within schools in the 1970s were brought under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act as cases of racial discrimination in education. The use of Title VI began to decline as means to desegregate students within the schools, as disability laws, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, took effect and became more effective tools to increase the integration of students with disabilities, including those of color (Losen & Welner, 2002). Section 504, enacted in 1973, stated that “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States.... shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in,

be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance..." (29 U.S.C. 794 § 504). Section 504 should have aided OCR's efforts in addressing discrimination of minorities in school settings; however, overrepresentation of minorities in segregated programs continued (Garda, 2005).

U. S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) during a time when wrongful identification of minority students was thought to be "the major controversy in special education" (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997, p. 140). Between 1974 and 1978, OCR documented overrepresentation of African Americans in "educable mentally retarded" classes and in 1979, OCR established the Panel on Selection and Placement of Students in Programs for the Mentally Retarded. The panel concluded that the overrepresentation of students of color in special education could be attributed in part to bias in the tests used to measure students' academic and intellectual capabilities, although no single factor could be identified (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997, p. 140).

Congress did not fully acknowledge overrepresentation of African Americans in special education until the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized and amended in 1997. Garda (2005) stated that when Congress amended the IDEA they recognized that,

...Poor African-American children are 2.3 times more likely to be identified by their teacher as having mental retardation than their White counterpart[s]....

Although African-Americans represent sixteen percent of elementary and secondary enrollments, they constitute twenty-one percent of total enrollments in special education. (p. 1077)



Unfortunately, the reauthorization of IDEA had little effect and in a 2002 study, conducted by the National Research Council, researchers again verified that African Americans were overrepresented in special education programs (Garda, 2005, p. 1077).

In the 2004 reauthorization, IDEA was again amended and re-titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) to align with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. At the time, President Bush stated, “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 will help children learn better by promoting accountability for results, enhancing parent involvement, using proven practices and materials, providing more flexibility, and reducing paperwork burdens for teachers, states and local school districts” (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2011). The new IDEIA along with NCLB have provisions to specifically address overrepresentation of minorities in special education and to hold school districts accountable, not only for overrepresentation but for exclusionary practices, such as suspensions and expulsions that lead to high dropout rates (Losen, 2011). However, it appears that the only accountability measures that schools are actually held to are the one addressing academic progress. Thus, overrepresentation of students of color in special education has continued.

Congress mandated that the National Academy of Sciences conduct a study on the factors accounting for the overrepresentation of minorities in special education programs for the “mentally retarded.” As Garda (2005) described, “the resulting 1982 study by the National Research Council (NRC) concluded that African-Americans were represented in the mentally retarded category disproportionate to their numbers in general education” (Garda, 2005, p. 1076). There were no changes in the statistics between 1978 and 1992, and by 1992, “African-

Americans were twice as likely to be classified as mentally retarded as their White peers, and 1.46 times more likely to be classified as emotionally disturbed” (Garda, 2005, p. 1076).

As I discuss in more depth below, there is no one agreed upon definition of what gets to be categorized as “emotional disturbance.” Harry and Klingner (2006) discussed how the category of emotionally disturbed has been defined and assessed differently across states due to projective testing, which heavily rely on clinical judgment and interpretation, as well as subjective rating scales. The resulting lack of reliability and consistency makes it difficult to compare data across states. According to Tisdale (2003),

Emotional disturbance has been a technical term but has not been in the exclusive domain of special education. The term has been used by various disciplines including clinical psychology, psychiatry, social work, and the juvenile justice system. The use of the term by these different disciplines has contributed to the murky nature of its existence—to borrow a marketing idea, there has been brand confusion. (p. 87)

As a result, just like with the category of intellectual disability, students of color are overrepresented in the category of ED. According to the U.S Department of Education, 473,633 students were identified with ED and receiving special education services in the 2000-2001 school year. Moreover, this same report, stated that African-American students are 1.68 times more likely than White students to be identified with ED. According to the National Health Interview Survey, the ED label is applied disproportionately among low-income families, with public insurance or not insured, and those who are African-American or Latino.

As with any category under special education, there are detrimental consequences to labeling. Merrell and Walker (2004) documented that students with ED are more likely to be placed in restrictive settings; have a high dropout rate; and within three years of leaving school,

50% of students with ED have at least one arrest. The vast majority of research on overrepresentation does not address ED or analyze various disabilities as distinct categories, including at the district or federal level. These patterns led me to address below more broadly the relationship between education, special education and the forces of referral and suspensions that push out some students out of school (and not others).

### **Segregation Through School Discipline Policies**

There is a strong correlation between special education placement and school push-out and/or drop-out. Kim, Losen, and Hewitt (2010) wrote that,

Although only approximately 9 percent of students aged six to twenty-one have been identified as having disabilities that impact their ability to learn, a survey of correctional facilities found that nationally approximately 34 percent of youth in juvenile corrections had been previously identified as eligible for special education pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (p .51)

Losen and Gillespie (2012), from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, reported that during the 2009-2010 school year, even though every racial group was represented in the data on suspensions, none were as significant as the number of African American students, whereby one out of every six was suspended as opposed to White students whereby only one out of 20 were suspended. In addition, "... students with disabilities are suspended about twice as often as their non-disabled peers. The rates for all racial groups combined are 13% for students with disabilities and 7% for those without disabilities" (p. 14) and the risk for African American students with disabilities being suspended "is a full 16 percentage points higher than for White students with disabilities" (Losen & Gillispie, 2012, p. 16). The statistics indicate that even with the protections given to students with disabilities under IDEA, NCLB, and Section 504, districts

continue to push students with disabilities, especially those of color, out of school and deny them the right to a free and appropriate education.

When I worked as a special education teacher in a juvenile detention center in Central New York, more than half of the residents had been in special education and 98% were African American and Latino from New York City and surrounding areas. Many of the students I worked with were labeled as emotionally disturbed or learning disabled, although I did have a few students who were labeled as having cognitive disabilities. Their school records, when we were able to get them, came in thick binders showing repeated behavioral offenses, such as disrespect to authority figures, physical altercations, as well as skipping school, which led to multiple suspensions.

The students in this juvenile facility were a product of the school to prison pipeline, which “refers to the confluence of education policies in under resourced public schools and a predominantly punitive juvenile justice system that fails to provide education and mental health services for our most at-risk students and drastically increases the likelihood that these children will end up with a criminal record rather than a high school diploma” (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010, p.4). Repeated suspensions due to harsh discipline policies, such as zero-tolerance, create gaps in a student's education causing them to fall behind in their academics, and decreasing their chance of passing the high-stakes tests needed to graduate (Gregory, Skiba, & Nogueira, 2010). A lack of social and academic support within the school system and community often leads to frustration and anger, which manifests itself in behavior considered aberrant by those in authority, but which can be considered justified when looked at through a critical lens (Gregory, Skiba, & Nogueira, 2010). The pressure for schools to meet their annual yearly progress through high-stakes testing and new policies linking teacher performance to student success on state tests

has led to increase of some students being pushed out of schools, which is ironic under a policy whose name is NCLB.

Overrepresentation of minorities in special education has been an issue for four decades. It was hoped that with the passage of NCLB and IDEIA school districts would be able to reduce the achievement gap between students of color and White students and stop the bias in special education placement. According to Blanchett, Klinger, and Harry (2009),

African American children with disabilities have not received schooling opportunities comparable to those of their White peers. Segregation on the basis of race, poverty, disability/perceived disability and poverty, and the intersection of race and poverty is still pervasive in our American education system as a whole and in special education programs in particular. (p. 378)

Urban schools are subjected to the actions of those in power, which are based on White middle class values and perceptions of people of color, culture, poverty, and family dynamics. The actions or inactions of those with political power have led to schools that are under-funded, resulting in “a high turnover of teaching and instructional staff, a high number uncertified or provisionally licensed teachers, limited access to technology, few educational specialists” (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005, p.72) and the results have a devastating effect on the academic achievement of students and overall performance of schools. Through NCLB’s Comprehensive School Reform Program, under-performing schools are labeled as “failing schools” because the students have not met standardized benchmarks set by the state for academic subjects and behavioral expectations. Schools can be punished by a loss of funding, school restructuring, or school closure. In the following section I discuss neoliberal school reform policies that rely on quantitative data to measure the success of students, teachers, and

schools. I explain the meaning comprehensive school reform and how response to intervention and school-wide positive behavior supports are intervention strategies that are promoted as a way to improve academic achievement.

### **Scientifically Based Research in Education**

There continues to be a debate in education about what constitutes scientifically-based research (SBR), since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Eisenhart & Town, 2003; Slavin, 2002; Riehl, 2006). Bush's major education policy initiative, NCLB, mentioned scientifically-based research 110 times, defining it as "rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge." Specifically, SBR was defined as research that "is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental design" (U.S. Congress, 2001). Although findings based on experimental design is a valued form of research, policies that stipulate that there is only one method for valid research is limiting. Articulations of SBR elevated the randomized control study as the gold standard for educational research, which has had far-reaching effects in terms of federal funding for research and programs in education.

Slavin (2002) argued that, "At the dawn of the 21st century, educational research is finally entering the 20th century. The use of randomized experiments that transformed medicine, agriculture, and technology in the 20th century is now beginning to affect educational policy." He further surmised that, "Education is on the brink of a scientific revolution that has the potential to profoundly transform policy, practice, and research" (p. 15). Slavin's (2002) article, however, was written prior to the adoption of Education Science Reform Act (ESRA) in 2002 and his hopes for strong language regarding scientifically-based research were not realized. ESRA (2002) was put up for public review and the definition of what constituted scientifically-based research that could be federally funded was broadened. The ESRA no longer promoted

quantitative research as the only scientifically-based research method; it also removed the requirement that “studies always test hypotheses” (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003, p. 34). Even so, quantitative methods are still viewed, by traditional education scholars, as the favored method for showing scientific evidence of success in educational programming and it is for this reason that comprehensive school reform requires that all schools use intervention methods that have been proven successful through scientifically based research.

NCLB and IDEIA have both promoted the use of Response to Intervention (discussed below) and SWPBS to provide a structure for identifying students “at-risk” of failing and providing supports for students. SWPBS has been recommended by organizations who are fighting to change discipline policies that push-out students are promoting SWPBS as an alternative. For example, Dignity in Schools Campaign, a national organization, put up a fact sheet on their website displaying the success of PBS as well as other alternatives such as restorative justice.

Losen (2011) also supports SWPBS and cites that, “Several prominent civil rights organizations have been seeking greater federal support for PBIS [PBS], and several child advocacy groups point to successful PBIS-based interventions” (p. 14). The hope is that these supports and programs would reduce the number of students identified for special education and reduce suspension and expulsion rates, therefore keeping students in school and reducing the achievement gap. This is one of the reasons why it is crucial to examine these programs on the ground and see whether their implementation in an urban setting with an over-representation of students of color does what the policy aims for, especially decreasing the number of students of color in special education. I will discuss response to intervention, an evidence based reform strategy, and how it intersects with SWPBS.

## **Response to Intervention and Its Connection to School-wide Positive Behavior Supports**

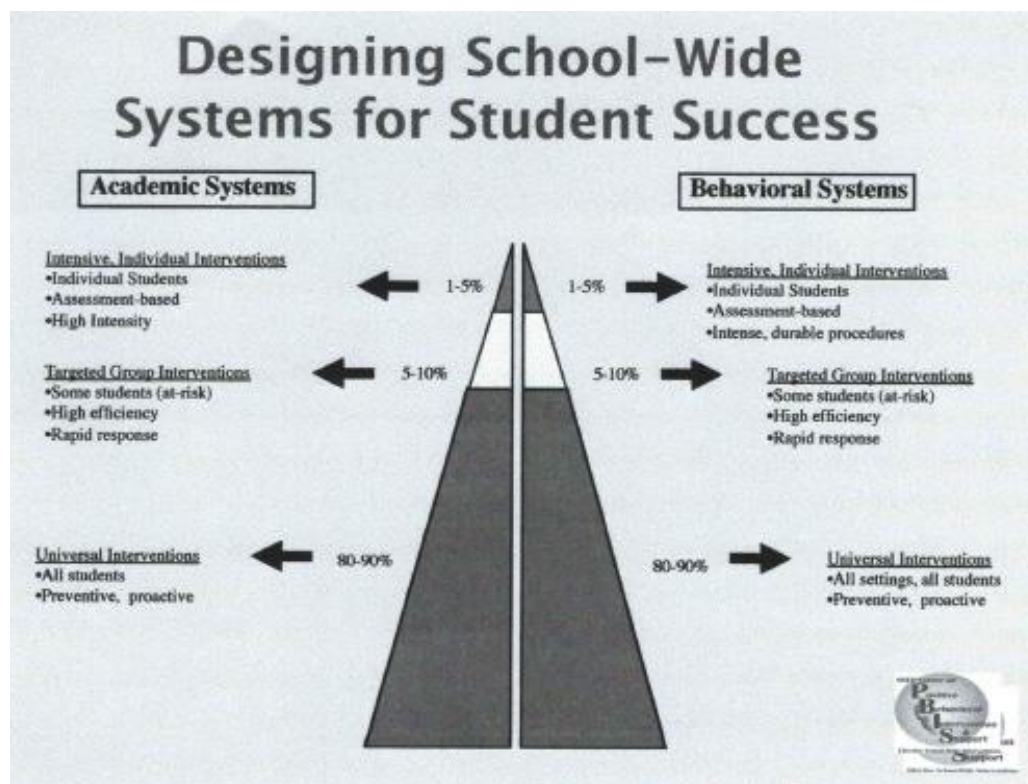
The response to intervention (RTI) model has been promoted in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004 (IDEIA, 2004) for use in reducing the over identification of students as learning disabled and has shown to be successful in many schools using this model (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumman, 2008). Response to intervention (RTI) is defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche, L., Elliot, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovalski, J. F., Prasse, D., et al., 2005). It is a multi-tiered approach that provides academic interventions and supports on a continuum. Teachers identify students who are struggling academically, most often in the areas of reading and math, or behavior. The student’s progress is closely monitored and adjustments are made in instructional methods and interventions are adjusted accordingly.

The first tier signifies the standard curriculum taught by a general education teacher in a regular education setting. This tier should meet the academic needs of at least 80% of the student body; however, if a student is struggling in this setting they will be placed in Tier 2 and given more intensive instruction, often in small group settings. Tier 2 should meet the needs of the approximately 10 to 15% of the students who require more support than is typically provided in Tier 1. Additional supports in Tier 2 of RTI often take the form of a standardized intervention system. Thus, interventions are evidence-based: “packaged and...delivered systematically, often using scripts, to a group of students” (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumman, 2008, p. 214). It is this standardization of methods and intense data collection that creates the criteria for implementation with fidelity.



Students who continue to struggle despite extra supports at Tier 2, qualify for Tier 3 interventions, where they receive individualized, intensive interventions. Tier 3 interventions are often provided one-on-one or with another student. The intervention targets specific skills that are needed, such as letter sound recognition. In some iterations of RTI, this level is a special education placement; other models use four tiers and typically place special education on the last tier. If a student is not successful at the last tier and the teacher can show that the intervention was done with fidelity, then the model positions the student and not the intervention as deficient (Orosco and Klingner, 2010). RTI is also viewed as a way to provide a continuum of support for students exhibiting behaviors that interrupt the learning environment or their own learning. The connection was made between academic success and behavior. School-wide positive behavior supports was introduced as the behavioral equivalent to RTI in that they are both based on a three tiered system that provides increasing levels of support for students struggling to meet the school's expectations both academically and behaviorally (See figure 2.1 for a graphic comparison of the models). If a student struggles academically then they may become frustrated and exhibit behaviors that reflect that frustration. RTI, like SWPBIS (discussed below), is meant to provide the interventions to help students learn new skills that will reduce behaviors that often lead to disciplinary actions, such as removal from class, which hinders academic performance. It is for this reason that both systems are promoted by education agencies as ways to increase performance on standardized tests and lower suspension rates.

**Figure 2.1. Designing School-Wide Systems for Student Success.**



*Figure 2.1.* A pyramid diagram comparing the three tiered intervention models for academic and behavior systems. Retrieved from [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

### **What is School-wide Positive Behavior Supports?**

In the 1990s positive behavior supports (PBS) gained recognition as an alternative to punitive methods of behavior modification being used in schools, group homes, and institutions. PBS is an applied behavioral approach for children and adults who have impeding behaviors that significantly impacted their ability to participate in school, work, and social activities. (Turnball, H.R., et al., 2000). PBS teaches desired behaviors, such as not touching people without permission, through modeling of behavior and tangible reinforcements. PBS has been supported

by groups such as TASH, an international advocacy organization for the rights of people with significant disabilities, as well as the Alliance to Prevent Restraint, Aversive Interventions and Seclusion (APRAIS). This approach is designed to circumvent the use of seclusion, restraints, and aversives, such as the use of unpleasant taste, smells, sound or painful stimuli (electric shock) to modify behavior.

In 1997, with the re-authorization of the IDEA, Congress saw the need for a successful approach to managing behaviors of students with disabilities in a positive and supportive way that would keep students in schools and allow for the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. Positive behavior interventions and Supports (PBIS) was recommended as a method for schools to use (Turnball, H.R., et al., 2000). In addition, Congress encouraged implementation of PBIS in IDEA by authorizing states to use professional development funds for training in PBIS methods (20 U.S.C. §1454(a)(3)(B)(iii)(I)), as well as competitive grant funds that could be used for training.

Funding is important to the success of all school reform measures and without it schools can have difficulty sustaining intervention programs; “Professional development is key to proper implementation of PBIS and the improved behavioral outcomes that PBIS can foster. After all, for an IEP team to truly "consider" the use of PBIS requires knowledge of PBIS, discussion of its use, and the capacity to implement PBIS to improve outcomes and address behavior” (Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support).

School-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) applies the framework of PBS to the entire school. SWPBS is not a method of behavior management but a "decision-making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for

all students" (Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (CPBS), 2004). SWPBS is about changing schools systemically in order to address issues related not only to the area of discipline, but also to the academic, social, and emotional needs of students in the school.

An important part of the SWPBS model is its continuum of supports, which are aligned with the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. SWPBS is a tiered system, based on normative goals set by the school and/or the district. In SWPBS the primary level (Tier 1) is characterized as the "norm" and approximately 80 to 85% of the population are expected to follow the behavioral norms set by the school. The remaining 15-20% of the population may exhibit specific behaviors that fall outside this norm. These students are evaluated through observations, discipline data, and interviews with faculty and staff. The interventions at the second level (Tier 2) are not specific to the individual, they are designed to be implemented as small group instruction aimed at remediating and rehabilitating the students, enabling them to move back to the Tier 1 level. It is estimated that only three to five percent of the student population will exhibit behaviors that are considered so significant that they need intensive services beyond Tier 2.

The intensive services for students at the Tier 3 level are based on a functional behavior assessment (FBA). A FBA aims to determine the antecedent, define the behavior, and document the consequence. Although it is supposed to consider environmental factors that are affecting students' behavior, the FBA, is still focused on the specific student and what the specific behavior is doing for the student. The purpose ultimately is to use this data to develop a proactive plan to support this student in exhibiting appropriate behaviors as determined by the school community.

### **Importance of Data Collection in SWPBS**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, scientifically based research (SBR) methods are important in establishing legitimacy, maintaining recognition at the federal level, and for securing funding. Although there has been much debate over what types of research constitutes SBR, large-scale quantitative studies with random assignment have been touted as the method of choice (Slavin, 2002). The developers of the SWPBS framework have been able to use a large-scale quantitative database, called the School-Wide Information System (SWIS), to validate the success and validity of SWPBS in schools nationwide.

The University of Oregon, in collaboration with the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (TAPBIS), developed SWIS, “a web-based information system designed to help school personnel to use office referral data to design school-wide and individual student interventions” ([www.swis.org](http://www.swis.org)). The SWIS includes all the criteria previously outlined in the *School-wide Positive Behavior Support Implementers’ Blueprint and Self-Assessment (Blueprint)*. Schools using SWPBS can use SWIS if they pay a yearly fee of \$250 per an academic year.

This system is marketed to schools based on its ease of use and because it consumes very little staff time to do the required data entry after they are trained by a facilitator in how to collect and input data in to the system. The aim of SWIS and systems like it is to establish the validity of the data collected and to facilitate the implementation of research-based interventions by schools with a SWPBS (OSEP CPBS, 2004).

Data collection is not only important for researchers, it is important for schools implementing SWPBS. SWPBS is focused on four elements that are designed to work together: “data for decision-making; measurable outcomes supported and evaluated by data; practices with

evidence that these outcomes are achievable; and, systems that efficiently and effectively support implementation of these practices” (OSEP CPBS, 2004). SWPBS must include all four of these elements in order to demonstrate that a school is implementing it with fidelity and that the interventions put in place are successful as evidenced by data.

Under this model, schools must collect discipline data on each student who is having behavioral issues. This data is taken from the discipline referrals that teachers write when a student is not following school expectations. Data is also collected on teachers through their referrals. This information can be valuable in determining the actors that influence a teacher’s decision to write a referral, such as which students are being sent out of the room and the number of overall referrals being written. This data can reveal patterns of teacher behavior that is having a negative impact on the students. The teacher may be the one in need of intervention services, but since the data is garnered from student referrals, it is the student’s behavior that is the main focus for interventions. The level of interventions a student gets is based on the quantity of office referrals and the severity of the behavioral infraction. The data is analyzed by a student support team to determine if an intervention is working.

Collecting and analyzing data on student behavior is necessary because programs supported by the government must be data-driven and research-based. What this means is that schools must collect this data and track whether interventions that they've given improve the students’ behavior or not. Therefore, based on students’ behavior, students are placed either at the primary tier, which means their behavior is perceived to be in line with school norms, or if they continue to experience difficulties that cannot be addressed at the primary tier, they are placed at the secondary tier. If the student continues to have difficulty following norms after behavioral remediation and supports provided in the second tier, they are then moved to the third

or intensive tier. Students moved to the third tier have behavior that is considered so significant and far from the norm that they need more intensive, one-on-one intervention specifically geared for that individual student. At each stage of the process, however, decisions must be based on data.

### **The use of Token Reinforcement in SWPBS**

The primary motivating force used in SWPBS is a school-wide token economy that uses tokens, in most cases slips of paper, as a reward for meeting behavioral expectations in the school or classroom. The tokens are exchanged for tangible items or activities, such as time on the computer. In token economies, the tokens have a specific value and the students must decide the cost and benefits of the items or activities that the token will be exchanged for (Maggins, Chafouleas, Goddard, & Johnson, 2011).

The idea of token economies as a management tool in schools has been around since the 1800s, when Joseph Lancaster and James Perry used tokens as a reward for students meeting the teacher's academic and social expectations (Stilitz, 2009), so there is no argument about its use as an evidence-based classroom management practice. Behavioral token-based management systems have been studied for decades in small experimental settings, but it was not until the 70s that they began to be used on a wider scale.

Kadzin (1982) reviewed the expansion of the use of token economies on a larger scale, such as in institutions and schools. One of the largest programs was the "Behavioral Analysis Follow Through program for disadvantaged elementary children," (p. 431) which was set up as an extension of Head Start and was also used with Native American children (McLaughlin, Williams, Cady, & Bement, 1982). The descriptions of the token systems used are very similar to

SWPBS in that the goal was to improve behavior and academic performance and a school-wide token system was put in place as a motivator.

Kadzin (1982) writes that some of the barriers to the success of token economies can be the result of the program itself and not the clients (students) who do not respond to the intervention. Token economies are not successful when students do not buy in to them because either the rewards do not appeal to them or there is not an opportunity to exchange tokens for desired rewards.. Staff training through ongoing professional development was mentioned as one of the major factors necessary to maintaining a token economy. It is important that everyone is consistent with procedures for administering tokens and there must be follow through. In addition Kadzin reported that when there was not an administrator evaluating the program and supporting staff that often the integrity of the program fell apart.

Maggins, Chafouleas, Goddard, & Johnson (2011) contend, after their review of research literature on the use of token economies in schools, that there is currently insufficient empirical support to label token economies as an evidence-based practice, due to lack of fidelity in the way the token systems have been implement. In addition, they state that, “school personnel need to develop explicit rules and procedures to guide the implementation of the token economy system and without this explicit protocol of the behavioral expectations and contingencies, educators will probably not see a significant benefit from the use of token economy...programs” (p. 550). Their observations raise questions about how token economies can continue to be used in schools and institutions when there is little research that shows this system is effective, especially on a school wide basis.

Kohn (1998) warns that “a doing to approach involves the imposition of the adult will on the child” (p. 7) and, along with coercion and punishment, reward (token) systems are



categorized by Kohn as in the category of “doing things to” approach when working with children. In a critique of behaviorist methods of management, Kohn likens rewards, whether tangible or verbal (praise), to rewarding pets for good behavior. A child will perform the behavior the adult wants when there is a chance they will be rewarded, however they do not learn problem solving or empathy. These systems do not help teachers to build trusting relationships with students. Token systems are about compliance and control in the classroom and the results are often quite short lived. Moreover, token economies, like all behavioral interventions tend to focus on low-level behaviors because they are observable. These may not actually lead to more higher ordered behaviors that have a greater impact on student achievement and later success.

Schools that implement SWPBS use tokens and praise as a way to coerce students into following the behavioral expectations set by the school. Students are taught the behaviors that adults expect them to perform and their performance is rewarded with tokens that can be exchanged for activities or goods. The unfortunate consequence of token systems, as I learned during my research, is that the token reinforcement was not consistent and tokens end up being used as bribes to get students to behave.

Schools in urban settings and with diverse populations also need to consider how to make sure school expectations and behavior systems are culturally relevant to the community where the school is located. If there is a mismatch in the intervention methods being used for behavior management and the way the students learn, then the reward system put in place will have little effect in reinforcing the schools expectations. SWPBS stresses the importance of cultural relevance in its implementation, but there is little research or guidance about how to do this.

### **Culturally Relevant Behavior Management and SWPBS**

On paper, SWPBS seems like a promising approach that will promote inclusivity and community caring. It begins with a school-wide system which uses a team approach to problem solve discipline issues in schools. It emphasizes teaching behavioral expectations so that students understand what is expected of them and then provides recognition for positive behaviors that students exhibit. The approach stresses that the whole school and the larger community should be involved in the development of the SWPBS plan, and intensive interventions are supposed to include the family, the student, school personnel, and outside community resources that can help both the family and the student. According to the *School-wide Positive Behavior Support Implementers' Blueprint and Self-Assessment (Blueprint)*, school-wide behavior systems need to incorporate the community when developing the system and it is supposed to be culturally relevant. As the *Blueprint* states, "Implementation of effective practices at the local level will require modification of procedures to 'fit' the culture, structure, and needs of the local setting: the same practices will look slightly different in different schools and settings" (OSEP CPBIS, 2004, p. 13).

Fallon, O'Keeffe, and Sugai (2012) write that over the past 15 years SWPBS has been very successful and, as student outcomes improve, there has been an increased interest in the role and meaning of culture, "especially, in the context of unique student, teacher, family, and community characteristics" (p 209). Because of the authors' increased (and I would argue recent) interest in socially relevant practice, they conducted a review of literature "that emphasizes the subject of culture in the context of behavior and classroom management, as well as school-wide discipline and climate" (p. 209) to enhance implementation of SWPBS. Fallon et al., reviewed 21 qualitative studies and seven quantitative studies and in discussing these studies they state, "in

general and not surprisingly, we found that relatively little empirical research has been conducted with this focus on culture and behavior management” (p. 215). After reviewing a quantitative article by Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) that reviewed office referral data for disruptive behavior and concluded that racial and gender differences remain when controlling for socioeconomic status and that African Americans were most often referred for more subjective reasons, Fallon et al., remarked that “no study to date has successfully explained this pattern” (p. 215). Yet, there have been many studies that explain the patterns that Skiba et al. found in their study, however, these are studies that include a qualitative component to them. The researchers connected to SWPBS (i.e. Sugai and Horner) place a higher value on quantitative data collected from large databases as the only way to show scientific evidence. After reviewing the research, Fallon et al., “suggest that educators define, describe, justify, interpret, and teach what they do and see from the perspective of their own culture or learning history, and in the context of the learning histories of the individuals and groups with whom they interact and are responsible” (p. 217). Thus, it could be that Fallon et al., too, interpret these studies from their own lens and see them as less persuasive.

In response to the lack of cultural relevance in SWPBS, Bal, Thorius, and Kozleski, (2012) discuss the importance of making positive behavior supports truly culturally responsive and have developed a framework for culturally responsive school wide positive behavior interventions and supports (CRPIBS) in schools. Bal et al., write that, “much of the original research and development of PBIS was done in suburban, dominant culture schools where assumptions about how and who should be involved in the development of school-wide discipline systems were closely tied to specific cultural views of behavior and development that most often coincided with the dominant cultural norms.” (p. 5). In addition, the authors explain that

SWPBS implementation has had an overall impact on decreasing suspension rates, much of the success has been with White students; African American students are still overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices (Bal et al.,). Bal et al. define CRPBIS'

as a process-oriented framework aimed at restructuring school cultures through understanding and influencing interacting educational and socio-political processes reproducing the behavioral outcome disparities, the racialization of school discipline, and exclusion and marginalization of non-dominant students and families.. (p. 9)

The CRPBIS framework is truly focused toward systemic change that can only be done by examining the historical and structural bases of oppression.

### **Research about and Critiques of SWPBS**

SWPBS has been praised by researchers and education departments for its alignment with RTI's three tiered model of intervention, its systematic data collection, and its insistence on using evidence-based interventions in implementing school-wide behavior systems. However, the majority of research currently available has been written by the developers of the model and those associated with them. Much of the research on PBS, PBIS and SWPBS is published in the *Journal of Positive Behaviors Supports*, whose editorial team includes the authors of the PBS blueprint or their colleagues. When running a citation index in the *Web of Science* it further appears that Horner and Sugai (who wrote the PIBS blueprint) and McIntosh (who collaborates with many of their publications) have authored or co-authored about a third of the published articles on SWPBS. It is, in fact, incredibly hard to find studies that were conducted independently from the original PBS team or not published by them.

Moreover, the preponderance of research is based on quantitative analysis of statistical data collected by schools, rather than in depth studies of how schools actually implement these

systems. In other words, we know very little about how school administrators or teachers make meaning of these systems or what kinds of things they struggle with in incorporating this model. Because of the mechanisms to collect data on PBS in the school (which were also developed by the team), there is an inherent quantitative leaning to studies of SWPBS, which my study seeks to ameliorate.

In terms of known difficulties with SWPBS, the *Blueprint* states that it takes approximately three years for elementary and middle schools to see school-wide results from instituting SWPBS. It takes even longer, approximately eight to 10 years, to see school-wide changes in high schools. With this amount of commitment, the schools need access to funding to pay for training and reward systems as well as for additional staff, which may be needed for more intensive interventions. With the Federal and State budget crises, funding for additional teaching staff or behavioral programs that may require three years or more until widespread changes are noticeable is hard to justify.

In addition to the stresses that educators and administrators experience regarding whether students will meet state standards for NCLB, behavior management is a significant concern for those working in the field of education. Legislation has been written that strongly recommends the use of Response to Intervention, as well as Positive Behavior Supports in meeting the needs of students who are struggling both academically and behaviorally. In addition, SWPBS and RTI have been touted as models for reducing the over-identification of students for special education and keeping students with disabilities in the classroom. However, in practice, the three-tiered model that is a hallmark of both models can also go against the tenets and practices of inclusion, because students are often pulled out for intensive interventions, further stigmatizing them (Ferri,

2011). Therefore, more research is needed, which is rooted in the tenets of disability studies in education or inclusion, to see how these models and systems work for students with disabilities.

### **Disability Studies in Education**

In contrast to many studies in special education with remedial and therapeutic understandings in mind, this study is firmly situated in the understanding of disability through the lens of Disability Studies. Disability under this framework is explored and understood through what has been called the social model of disability. Thus, disability is understood as constructed through history and culture, providing a direct challenge to medical models of disability that label and limit what people with disabilities are able to do and be. According to Linton (1998), "Disability studies takes for its subject matter not simply the variations that exist in human behavior, appearance, functioning, sensory acuity, and cognitive processing but, more crucially, the meaning we make of those variations" (p. 2). The meanings given to disability are socially constructed by people's thoughts, words, and interactions (Danforth, 2001) and become ways of defining human experiences that take on cultural and historical significance that are adopted by professionals, as well as society.

Many labels, or meanings, such as mental retardation and emotional disturbance, come from a medicalized interpretation of disability, a medical model. The emphasis of the medical model,

is on the physical abnormality or deficiency that is held to be central to actions, experiences, and social identity of the individual. Within this model, the underlying physical or biological defect is considered the primary causal source of an individual's enduring state of limitation in thinking and acting within the social world. (Danforth, 2001, p. 352)

As discussed above, there is no singular definition across all states and all professions as to what constitutes emotional disturbance (ED). The discrepancy in definitions of ED across states shows how the category is socially constructed. Each state has different criteria for determining whether a child is emotionally disturbed. It is also considered a “soft” or subjective category, relying on rating scales, interviews, psychological, and social emotional testing. Many times these are just checklists that are left open to interpretations of school officials, parents, and others. Harry and Klingner (2006) state:

....the variability in patterns of disability designation over time and place simply underscores ... that the categories do not necessarily reflect real disabilities within children. Rather, their differential usage supports the perspective that the categories are reliant on definition and interpretation, which are influenced by social and political agendas of various states, groups, and individuals. (p. 6-7)

The knowledge base of special education was crafted from the language of medicine, thereby borrowing the scientific authority of medical science. This medical model of dis/ability locates the abnormality within the individual and therefore ignores systemic, social, and economic factors and allows for disruptive and defiant behavior to be diagnosed as psychological or as flaws in the moral character of specific students (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 29).

It is this view of disability that permeates applied fields such as psychology, social work, rehabilitation, as well as education. According to Linton (1998), "The medical model of disability gets in the way understanding disability in its social and political contexts" (p. 136). Thus, the study of disability is not disability studies (Linton, 1998). It is for these reasons that scholars in disability studies who were also from the field of education began to critique

schooling practices, in particular, special education, and in doing so formed disability studies in education.

Disability studies in education helps us challenge the assumption that service professionals know better than persons with disabilities and family members what is the best for an individual. It also challenges the belief that diagnosed or labeled students should be separated from their peers for individual educational programs. Education scholars have criticized segregated special education for offering an inferior quality of education to that which is offered in general education classes. They have also argued that segregated settings are harmful both socially and emotionally to students who are placed there. According to Ferri (2008), because special education is,

steeped in medical and deficit models of disability, special education positions disabled students as objects of a clinical and diagnostic gaze that leaves little room for alternative ways of knowing about disability experience. Because students are positioned as objects of study—as problems to correct or remediate—their voices and perspectives remain silenced and devalued just as their bodies remained segregated and marginalized. (p. 420)

Special Education is thus largely a deficit model, where experts see education as prescriptive for students with disabilities. Conversely, DSE scholars question the traditional assumption that segregation from the normal or general education system is rational and necessary for better treatment for students with disabilities, and, instead, view it as a form of discriminatory exclusion.

Tests given to students in schools to measure their academic performance, intelligence, and behavior have been written by physicians, psychologists, and educational experts. The results from these tests are analyzed and compared to a normed sample of the population and are



then used to label individuals for educational services. These labels can and often do carry stigma. Labels assigned to people with disabilities in order to classify them for eligibility for special education supports and services are based on individual deficits. In school, children are judged by their labels. If a student is labeled cognitively impaired, a teacher may only consider what the student cannot do and, as a result, the teacher will have low expectations for that student. Ferri (2008) points out,

In this decontextualized view of disability, it is only the student, not the system or larger educational context, which is deemed deficient and in need of intervention. In other words, when traditional models of instruction fail students, it is the student who is seen as deficient rather than the instructional model. (p. 418)

The continuum of services in special education is based on a cure or care model. Students identified as having a disability are given an individualized education plan (IEP), which is a prescriptive plan with goals and objectives that will help that student succeed in the Least Restrictive Environment, which in most cases is the general education classroom. Typically, special education services consist of remedial services that target the student's deficient area; it could be an academic area or a social, emotional, or behavioral concern. When a student with a disability fails to respond to basic interventions, then care becomes the objective, which usually results in a segregated setting. Once a student has been placed in a segregated classroom that is where they will likely remain; rarely is the progression from more restrictive to less restrictive placement, both due to low expectations and because of loss of access to the general education curriculum. Labeling students as deficient places the focus on the student and away from the educational practices within the system that are in need of remediation (Ferri, 2008).

Inclusive education is the educational model that is most closely connected to disability studies, because it is the total involvement of a child in the general education program with supports provided within the classroom setting. It calls for the collaboration and even melding of special and general education structures. Inclusion also has the potential to change the way instruction is given in the general education class and is a way to enhance academic opportunities for all students.

Kluth, Biklen, and Strauss (2003) define inclusive education as “something that supports, impacts, and benefits all learners.... as a revolution, a social action, and a critical political movement. .... as a way to boost academic opportunities and success for all students in public schools” ( p. 3). All students must be seen as capable and given the opportunities to be successful in the regular education setting.

Inclusion means examining the way we teach and making modifications that fit the way our students learn and for this to happen the needs to be a "shift in the object of remediation requires that we honor different ways of reading, writing, perceiving, and moving through space as equally valid” (Ferri, 2008, p. 427). We must not focus on a label that a student is given, but have a “presumption of competence,” challenging all students with meaningful curriculum and having high expectations. Inclusive education happens when educational supports are "embedded and integrated into the general education classroom" (Ferri, 2008, p. 427) and can benefit all students. Inclusive pedagogy is universally designed and differentiated, creating access to the curriculum for the most students possible. Ferri (2008) writes that "Honoring diversity requires that we view students with disabilities as valued members of our schools and classrooms—not because we are charitable, but because students with disabilities, like all students, have a lot to offer" (p. 427).

Scholars in the field of disability studies in education continue to struggle with creating change in general and special education practices. A key strategy is to incorporate disability studies into teacher education programs, to challenge the medical model of disability, and to teach students about the historical, political, and cultural structures that have oppressed not only people with disabilities, but those of different races, classes, gender and sexuality. Educating teachers before they get into the classroom can give them the tools needed to bring about change. Bringing Disability Studies into the field of education has the potential of not only ensuring that students with disabilities are included in schools but that schooling becomes more inclusive and accessible for ALL students.

### **Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit)**

Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013), use the term, DisCrit to bring disability studies and critical race studies together to examine how “race and ability are socially constructed interdependent” (p. 5) and examines “the process in which students are simultaneously raced and dis/abled” (p. 5). As discussed earlier in the chapter, race and disability are connected through eugenics and scientifically- based racism that labeled people of color as biologically and intellectually inferior to Whites. The dis/abling of African American, Latino/a, Native American students is evident in the over-representation in special education in the categories of mental retardation and emotionally disturbed. In this way, “racism and ableism often work in ways that are unspoken, yet racism validates and reinforces ableism, and ableism validates and reinforces racism” (Annamma, et al., 2013, p. 6). In the literature on discipline disparities, the majority of students suspended and arrested at school are African American and students with disabilities. The odds of being suspended and arrested are most pronounced for African American males with disabilities.

Annamma, et al. (2013) propose seven tenants of DisCrit theory which can be used in education to interrogate “the ways in which, race, racism, dis/ ability, and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education” (p. 7) and is evident in school reform policies that target schools in high poverty areas that serve predominately students of color. The tenants for DisCrit are:

1. DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy;
2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on;
3. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms;
4. DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research;
5. DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens;
6. DisCrit recognizes whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens;
7. DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Annamma, et al., 2013, p. 11).

The three tenants of DisCrit that most influenced my work were tenants one, three, and five. In the following paragraph I explain how DisCrit connects to my work.

In my work SWPBS was used to coerce students into conforming to social norms that are based on the middle-class white teachers that work there. In SWPBS the community is supposed to be a part of the creation of the behavioral expectations set for the students but they were not asked to join in. Students who were not able to meet the expectations were identified as needing interventions, they are pathologized, as well as labeled ‘offenders,’ ‘frequent flyers,’ and naughty. Race and disability or not talked about but the language is coded – invisible. These mutually constitutive processes are enacted through normalizing practices such as labeling a student ‘at-risk’ for simply being a person of color, thereby reinforcing the unmarked norms of whiteness, and signaling to many that the student is not capable in body and mind (Annamma, et al., 2013, p. 11).

The third tenet of DisCrit looks at the social construction of both race and ability without discrediting the material reality of being raced and disabled in particular ways. This especially applies to the connection between the students unable to comply with behavioral interventions as raced through the language used by the teachers, such as blaming their behavior on what they term as “their culture” and stating that it is because of their culture and the neighborhoods and families – the students are in crisis, naughty, and unresponsive to interventions.

Lastly, DisCrit looks at the legal and historical trajectories of race and disability. As I show in the rest of this document, Comprehensive School Reform targets poor Black neighborhoods. Instead of money going to support struggling schools with teachers, social workers, and nurses. The schools are forced to buy into expensive prepackaged programs that are part of initiatives such as Response to Intervention to remediate instead of educate. CRS uses the

narrative of social justice and the right to a good education to promote school choice. School choice means the dismantling of neighborhood schools and the opening of charter schools. This takes control out of parents' hands and into private sector.

### **Comprehensive School Reform**

As will be discussed further in chapter 6, the school in which I conducted research on its implementation of SWPBS eventually closed. Many factors led to the closure, but most of them can be traced to (neoliberal) comprehensive school reform. According to the United States Department of Education, comprehensive school reform (CSR) was developed based on research focusing on what made an effective school. Although the literature did not “prescribe any particular reform effort, it does describe certain components of school reform that appear to lead to improved student academic achievement” (Comprehensive School Reform [CSR], para. 1). What stands out is that the Department of Education states that the research literature did not find a “particular reform effort” that worked, but particular components that “appear” to improve schools. They claim, therefore, that, “these components form the empirical foundation for the comprehensive school reform movement” (CSR, para. 2). The 11 key “empirical components” (CSR, para. 3) of CSR are:

- **Research-based methods.** Proven strategies and methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are founded on scientifically based research and effective practices and that have been replicated successfully in schools.
- **Comprehensive design.** School-wide reform plans that include instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management in a comprehensive approach to addressing the specific needs of the school and enabling all students to meet challenging state standards.

- **Focus on student achievement.** Measurable goals for student academic achievement and benchmarks for meeting these goals.
- **Buy-in.** Support from teachers, principals, administrators, school staff, and other professional staff.
- **Professional development.** High-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development.
- **Support for school staff.** Support for teachers, principals, administrators, and other school staff.
- **Partnerships with parents and communities.** Meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities.
- **External support.** High-quality external technical support and assistance from an entity that has experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement.
- **Evaluation planning.** A plan for the annual evaluation of the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved.
- **Combining resources.** Identification and coordination of other resources, including federal, state, local, and private resources to support and sustain the comprehensive school reform effort.
- **Evidence of effectiveness.** Programs that have been found through scientifically based research to significantly improve the academic achievement of participating children or have strong evidence that they will achieve this result.

The problem schools encounter with CSR is that it is a mandate, not a choice, for schools that are struggling to meet annual yearly progress on the academic criteria, which are based on high

stakes testing that federal and state education departments have set as indicators of success. CSR is linked to Title I funds with additional “financial assistance to schools so that they can implement whole school reforms that reflect the research literature on effective practices in order to help students meet state academic standards” (CSR, para. 2). Financial assistance is not just given to schools that are in need of money, which most schools labeled as “in need of improvement” are. Instead, the school districts must compete for the money. If the district is approved, each school that is “identified for Title I school improvement” receive \$50,000 to implement a district-developed CSR plan. An important part of this application is that the school district must show an additional two-year commitment to the school’s improvement (CSR, para. 4).

As stated, schools that get CSR funds must “implement scientifically proven reform strategies.” In the area of behavior management, proven strategies include frameworks, such as response to intervention (RTI) and school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS). States must collect data on CSR schools to show that “increasing numbers of students in CSR schools are meeting state academic standards” (CSR, para. 8). States must also show that there is a “decline in the number of CSR schools identified as low-performing” (CSR, para. 9). CSR and other initiative, which ultimately led to the closure of my research site, are a part of a much larger framework of neoliberal educational reform, which I now turn to outlining.

### **Neoliberal Education Reforms**

Neoliberalism comes from an ideology that the privatization of services (i.e. prisons, education, and healthcare) will create free-market competition which will result in a more efficient and cost effective solution to systems that are considered a drag on economic growth (Steger & Roy, 2010; Tienken, 2013). Neoliberalism in education opens public education up to



the private sector under the guise that free-market competition will provide more efficiently run schools offering higher quality education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created school reform policies that promoted school choice to families whose children were in low performing schools. Charter schools, for example, are a result of these neoliberal education policies that use public funds (vouchers) to fund privately run schools (Apple 2011; Ball, 2012, Tienken, 2013).

Neoliberal reform policies use standardized testing to evaluate the academic achievement of students. If students in a school do not meet the standards than they are labeled as low-performing and must use evidence based practices to improve or face closure (I discuss this further in Chapter Six). These closures usually take place in low-income areas, with high populations of African American and Latino/a families. When public schools close, educational entrepreneurs seize the opportunity by creating charter schools to take their place (Ball, 2012; Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Tienken, 2013).

Neoliberal educational policies take advantage of the “poverty-suffused areas of cities, the school closure process too often appears to alienate and effectively punish urban African American and Latino community members by denigrating and eliminating what may be the sole functioning, stable, and trustworthy social service institution they can access reliably, even when academic results are low” (Peck & Reitzug, 2014, p. 19). Charter schools can be interpreted as a form of, what Naomi Kline (2007) has defined as “disaster capitalism,” in the way they profit from the collective trauma of a community subjected to a history of institutional racism.

Disaster capitalism is the “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (p. 6). Kathleen Collins’ (2014) work on the restructuring of public education in New Orleans, after hurricane Katrina, is evidence of for disaster capitalism in education. The state’s Board of

Elementary and Secondary Education began to dismantle New Orleans public schools by firing all 7500 school employees and replacing the teaching staff with Teach for America recruits, as well as turning the schools over to state run charter schools called Recovery School District.

Collins (2014) writes,

The public and political discourse surrounding and shaping post-Katrina school reform efforts in New Orleans clearly emphasized “competition” and “choice,” explicitly drawing on business discourse to construct a narrative whereby the former school system was positioned as “failing” and the new corporate-model of education was introduced as a savior. In this story, Katrina was a strategic opportunity for private business interests to take over and save the “failing” school system. This dominant narrative and its reliance on business rhetoric positioned children and their families as “consumers” and promised that “school choice” would give parents and children the opportunity to find a school that would best fit their needs. (p. 8)

The policies in NCLB and IDEA were written to reduce the achievement gap between White students and students of color, reduce over-representation of students of color in special education (through the use of RTI), and reduce the disproportionate number of students of color suspended from school (through the use of SWPBS), however they have seem to be most significant in reducing the number of public schools in urban areas. As I discuss in Chapter 6 in more detail, this is exactly what happened to school in this research study

### **Conclusion**

This literature review provides a snapshot of the most relevant and pertinent literature related to SWPBS. The literature on the over-representation of students of color in special education and its connection to discipline is important because it has been an impetus for school-

wide positive behavior supports. The literature regarding school-wide positive behavior supports is important to the study of its implementation, as well as the analysis of the outcomes. Disability critical race studies is an important theoretical framework to examine how race and dis/ability intersect throughout educational discourse. In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the methods employed in this study, including specifics on the participants, location, and methods of analysis of my data.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This study is an ethnographic case study of Morgan, an urban elementary school, and its process of implementing school-wide positive behavior supports program (SWPBS). As discussed in chapter two, as I began to look at the research literature on SWPBS, I came to the realization that the people who developed SWPBS or their affiliates conducted a majority of the studies. In addition, the research was mostly quantitative. I therefore wanted to expand on current literature on PBS and SWPBS by conducting a qualitative research study to investigate the implementation of SWPBS over the course of an entire school year. I also wanted to focus on the perspectives and voices of those implementing the policy (teachers and administrators at Morgan), as most studies are conducted by researchers affiliated with the developers of SWPBS.

My initial research questions focused entirely on the implementation of SWPBS, but in an unexpected turn of events, the school district decided to close the school where I was conducting my research and the focus of my research changed. The interviews and my observations continued to focus on the topic of SWPBS, but also included the impact of school reform and closure on the implementation of SWPBS. I also extended my data collection to include the following school year. My research thus became a story of the lived experiences of my participants as they began to implement a new initiative, SWPBS, which the district mandated as a result of the school's poor performance on criteria set by the State.

I begin this chapter by discussing what led me to this research project, why I felt it was important and opportune time to undertake such a project, as well as describe my self-location as an insider/outsider researcher in this study. In addition, in this chapter, I discuss my research methods and the specific procedures I followed in conducting this research. Specifically, I will

describe my research design, the setting and demographics, ethics and any risk to participants, approach to analysis, and contributions and limitations of this study.

## **Background**

This study centers on a school-wide behavior system called school-wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBS). School-wide positive behavior support has been promoted as an effective evidence-based framework for developing positive behavioral outcomes of students, but it is up to each school system to use the guidelines to develop its own program. I investigated how policy and procedures established by the Positive Behavior Support Team at Morgan [pseudonym] Elementary School, an urban elementary school in central New York, were developed and implemented, as well as how the program was supported by administration and staff in the school.

I became interested in SWPBS while supervising student teachers in an urban elementary school, which later became my research site. Some teachers at the school were complaining about the behaviors exhibited by the students. During my time at this school, I had not seen any particular behaviors that warranted what I perceived to be belittling and aggressive behavior management techniques that were being used in the classrooms. Office referrals and suspension rates were high, while overall academic performance was low, placing the school on the Schools in Need of Improvement list.<sup>2</sup> This list designated schools that had not met student achievement targets, or “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP), which are benchmarks that are set for every school.

Although the school district in question had several schools that had already been implementing SWPBS for at least five years, many of the other schools were relatively unaware

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<sup>2</sup> The Schools in Need of Improvement list is required by the regulations specified in No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

of this approach. In 2003, the district office announced that it was moving toward district-wide implementation of SWPBS as a way of decreasing the high suspension rates and increasing the number of students completing high school. The objective of the program was to keep students in school so they would have access to the core curriculum and pass required high stakes tests. I determined, therefore, that this was the opportune time to conduct research on this school and its implementation of SWPBS.

### **Research Questions**

In school districts nation-wide, the pressure to improve state test scores, increase graduation rates, and lower the number of students being suspended or expelled from school has led to the implementation of the educational program known as school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS). The questions I was particularly interested in and guided my research are:

1. What are the factors influence the implementation of SWPBS at an urban elementary school?
2. How do factors related to school-based reforms mandated by No Child Left Behind, affect an underfunded urban school serving mostly students of color, as it implements SWPBS?
3. How do schools, administrators and teachers negotiate expectations for fidelity of implementation, which is seen as central to successful SWPBS, given the local conditions and the day-to-day realities of one urban school?

### **Research Design: Ethnographic Case Study**

My research is an ethnographic case study influenced by institutional ethnography and as such, my research design evolved as I gathered my data. In the following two sections of this

chapter I provide an overview of qualitative methodology and how it is applied in this research. In addition, I explain what institutional ethnography is and how it influenced my research.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) refer to qualitative research "as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics" (p. 2). The authors refer to five characteristics or features when defining qualitative research, however a research project does not have to have all five. These characteristics include studies that are naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with process, inductive, and aimed at constructing meaning.

Qualitative research must take place in real and authentic settings to be considered naturalistic. If the research is about teachers, then the setting should be the school because "...action is best understood when it is observed in the setting which it occurs" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 5). The data gathered must be rich, descriptive, and may include interview transcripts, photographs, memos, personal documents, videotapes, and field notes. Descriptive data are considered rich when nothing is overlooked, whether that be detailed descriptions about the setting, the clothing worn, or the activities carried out. When data are analyzed, they are not reduced to numerical values but are analyzed "...with all of the richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 5). In other words, qualitative studies tend to remain close to the actual data rather than abstracting from it.

Qualitative research is concerned with the process of how things develop in the research, not necessarily only the outcome. The evidence that is gathered is not used to prove or disprove a hypothesis on an outcome, but rather is used to develop a theory grounded in the data that are gathered (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998) Qualitative researchers aim to explore "how different people make sense of their lives" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, P.7) and thus researchers must continuously ask open-ended questions, be open to an exchange or interplay between themselves

and their participants, (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, P.7) and establish a relationship that is less formal.

Qualitative research guided how I proceeded in my research. I conducted an ethnographic case study in an elementary school that was implementing SW-PBS. In particular, I focused on a team of teachers who had volunteered to be the decision-making or leadership team in implementing SW-PBS in the building. I did participant observations of team and whole school meetings in regards to the development of the system, as well as the school-wide implementation and training. My participant observations helped me to explore the connections between what the team achieved as a group and the effects it had on the school at-large. I looked at the process of change that occurred within the school over the course of the school year. I also conducted informal semi-structured interviews with the various team members, which gave me a better understanding of the role they played on the team as well as their perceptions of SW-PBS. Documents were analyzed to support data collected in the field.

**Institutional ethnography.** Although I did not conduct an institutional ethnography per se, its feminist theoretical basis influenced how I conducted the study and analyzed my data. Dorothy Smith (2004) refers to institutional ethnography (IE) as a ‘sociology of the social’ where the social is not something that can be separated from the people or their activities (2004, p. 6). Institutional ethnography provides a way to start with everyday experience in order to show "how power is exercised, in what official or unofficial activities, by whom and for what purposes" (Campbell, 1998, p. 96). According to Smith (2004), IE looks at how peoples’ activities are coordinated (p. 6) through “socially organized powers” (p.8). These socially organized powers or ruling relations are made up of government, professionals, administrators, managers and so on. These ruling powers often utilize texts in order to organize or govern our



social actions. In turn, our actions contribute to how these texts continue to dictate our social relations.

The authors of the texts take the experiences of people and objectify them through texts, whereby these objectified experiences are turned into knowledge. Textual knowledge is considered factual and therefore subjugates the knowledge of those affected by the text, such as the teachers and students, so that their experiential understandings of the social are lost to the constructed reality of the text. According to Smith (1990), “these textual realities are the ground of our contemporary consciousness of the world beyond the immediately known. As such they are integral to the coordination of activities among different levels of organization, within organizations, and the society at large” (p. 83).

Thus, a disjuncture is often created between the text and what is actually happening in the lives of the people. For instance, policies like NCLB, created by policy makers on the federal level, create a particular reality for the students and teachers who are subjected to the policies. Each of those individuals then have a particular understanding of the reality that is enforced by the school district, administrators, teachers, and more who further reveal and reproduce specific ruling relations.

Institutional ethnographers look at processes or how things happen. They explore what is happening through investigating the social organization that impacts the actions of a group of people in a certain location. DeVault (1999) clarifies Smith’s notions of the sociological fieldwork in institutional ethnography as taking the “point of view in a marginal location...from the margins inward--...searching to explicate the contingencies of ruling that shape local contexts” (1999, p. 48). Institutional ethnography, thus, provides a way to start with everyday

experience in order to show "how power is exercised, in what official or unofficial activities, by whom and for what purposes" (Campbell, 1998, p. 96).

In my own research I used my participant observations and interviews to map out the ruling relations that affect the outcomes of school-wide behavioral interventions. In this research I was a semi-participant on a SWPBS Team. I was an outsider because of my affiliation with the university, yet I have already established some insider status, because of my previous experience as a teacher working with students with "emotional" and "behavioral" disorders. The team is made up of teachers who decided to take on the project. Administrators were not a major part of what happened in these particular meetings, but they gave their final stamp of approval.

I examined the process that the team went through to implement SWPBS in the school. I looked at the work that the teachers did and I listened to what they said to find my problematic. The researcher in an IE must deliberately take the standpoint of the people, from their location, to get their perspective on how their relations are organized and how this organization comes from greater outside forces. I am, therefore, in this study, taking the standpoint of the teachers who are charged with implementing this policy.

Smith (2005) writes, "As an ethnographic practice, assembling the various work knowledges of participants to expose how they are coordinated textually discovers, or begins to discover, the institutional regime that they are part of and produce" (p. 173). The texts that were produced by the team were used by everyone in the school as they were implementing SWPBS. These texts coordinated teachers' actions in disciplining and rewarding students' behavior and, depending on the behavior, a student might have to fill out a behavioral referral form or put their name on a coupon for a reward. Although it seemed initially that the team of teachers came up with these texts, I have seen these same forms on official SWPBS websites. Thus, it is not

difficult to find examples of ruling relations that have “the power to coordinate and concert – to hold people to acting in particular ways” (Campbell and Gregor, 2004, p.41). To me this example of particular ruling relations is evident in the way the texts dictate how and when to reward and punish students, which in turn enforces particular ways of being in school.

Institutional ethnography as a research tool in education enabled me, as a researcher, to explore questions about what is happening in education at a more intimate level, connecting with the people who are directly involved in the everyday processes of educating students.

DeVault suggests that a way to use statistical or numerical measures is to examine how “they are constructed and used in particular organizational ways” (DeVault; 1999; p. 35). DeVault refers to Smith’s (1990a) suggestion that statistics should be “examined as textual parts of a ‘ruling apparatus’ that coordinates social relations” (DeVault; 1999; p. 36). In my own research, I used office discipline data collected at the school to examine how the process of disciplining students followed the guidelines set up by the SWPBS Team. I used statistical data along with the other texts that are being produced by the team to examine how the implementation of SWPBS was done or not done with fidelity.

As a qualitative researcher who was inspired by institutional ethnography, I moved with my participants through this process of implementing SWPBS, as well as in coming to terms and understanding the plans to close the school. These events further shaped participants’ understanding of and commitments to the policy of SWPBS. It also shaped the implementation of this policy in what was unavoidably a difficult year. In what follows, Chapters Four and Five focus on data about SWPBS, and Chapter Six provides the story of the closure. The story of closure is analyzed from a critical standpoint that examines neoliberal politics on education

reform. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I detail the setting, participants, and research methods used during a two-year study of Morgan elementary.

### **My Position/ Self-location**

I come to this study as both an insider and outsider. The site for my study was in an elementary school where I had observed student teachers in the past. During those observations I noticed that some teachers used behavior management strategies that were authoritative and reactive, such as removing students from the classroom, segregating students during group activities, yelling at students, and using language that could be interpreted as shaming as a form of coercion.

During one of my observations I learned from a host teacher that the school would be implementing school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) the following year. As someone interested in the ways schools and teachers use punitive discipline methods as a way of dealing with disruptive behaviors that often lead to office discipline referrals, school suspensions, as well as placing students in alternative settings, I wanted to know more about SWPBS and was interested in how they would implement it at the school.

In addition to getting Institutional Review Board approval for the research, I was given permission from the principal of Morgan to attend the SWPBS school leadership team meetings, school activities related to SWPBS. I was also given permission to interview teachers and staff and to have access to documents related to SWPBS. The eight participants I interviewed were all women. Five were white teachers, one was a white principal, one was an African-American school counselor, and one was an African-American staff member who monitored in school suspensions and proactive intervention referrals.

I am a white, abled bodied woman with master's degree in education. I am an outsider because of my affiliation with the university, yet I had already established some insider status because of my previous experience as a teacher working with students with "emotional" and "behavioral" disorders. My status as a White teacher and teacher educator helped to create a relationship with the teachers that made them feel comfortable speaking with me about their frustrations regarding student discipline, school expectations of them as teachers, as well as their thoughts about the implementation of SWPBS. Although my interactions with the principal were limited, I believe that my status as a White teacher and teacher educator also had a positive impact on our conversations. Through my conversations with the African American counselor and school discipline monitor, based on my experiences teaching African American boys in a correctional facility, my interest in school discipline, and being the mother of an African American child, I was able to develop a level of trust and rapport so that the interviews were rich and somewhat informal.

### **Internal Review Board and Ethical Considerations**

Internal review boards (IRB) are set up to regulate the research conducted by university faculty and students. IRBs make sure the research is conducted in an ethical manner, protecting the participants from harm, as well as the university (Biklen & Casella, 2007). I applied for an expedited review of my research and my application was approved due to the fact that it presented little risk to the participants.

The interviews and observations I conducted were with adults consenting to participate (the teachers and administrators), with minimal interference to the everyday life of the school. The biggest contacts with the students were in minimal observations that took place in hallways, in between classes and in the cafeteria during lunch. I did not interact with any of the students,

record identifying information or descriptions of specific students. I also did not conceal my identity as an observer. Although I did not foresee any significant risk for participants, I acknowledged that participants who might speak out about local or state educational policies that they do not agree with might experience some degree of vulnerability. I explained that all responses were optional and that participants could refrain from answering any questions that they felt uncomfortable or unwilling to answer. In addition they could opt out of the research altogether if they felt inclined to do so at any point in the research. All interviews and observations were kept confidential along with identifiable information.

I believe participants appreciated the opportunity to have their perspectives validated and documented in this research. As I explained to each participant, they may benefit from having their experience as administrators and teachers documented and get a better understanding of how school policies and institutional structures affect the way SWPBS is implemented. No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act recommend SWPBS to reduce discipline referrals and suspension rates so that students are able to remain in the classroom and achieve more academically, reducing dropout rates. It seemed important to investigate whether or not implementing PBS school wide at Morgan would indeed have the desired effect of reducing suspensions and decrease dropout rates. Therefore, the benefit to the population being researched (teachers and administrators at the school) seemed to outweigh any potential risks, especially when taking all the safeguards required by IRB.

### **Setting**

The research was conducted in an urban school district in Central New York. There are approximately 19,961 K-12 students in the district. The racial breakdown is 53% Black, 28% White, 19% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 1% Native American. Of these students, 84% receive free

or reduced lunch, 21% are in special education and 12% speak English as their second language. I focused on one of 14 elementary schools in the district. In the 2009 to 2010 school year, Morgan Elementary School (a pseudonym) had 387 students enrolled. The demographics of the student population were 83% Black, 11% White, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. Of the total population 84% of the students were eligible for free lunch and 5% were eligible for a reduced price.

### **Participants**

Because I was interested in producing one of the few qualitatively-rich studies about implementation of SWPBS (not conducted by the designers of PBS), I focused on the lived experiences of professionals at the school and what they had to say about policy and the SWPBS framework. Participants were all members of the SWPBS School Leadership Team at Morgan. At the end of the first team meeting, I introduced myself and explained my research project to the team. I let them know that I would like to interview members of the Team several times during the implementation of SWPBS at their school. I gave team members consent forms (see Appendix A) to sign if they were willing to participate in the research. Not all of the team members agreed to be interviewed. Out of the total of 12 team members, the participants listed in table 3.1 are the ones who provided signed consent forms. The members who did not return a signed consent form did not say why they did not want to participate in the study.

**Table 3.1 Participant Demographics**

Participant (Pseudonym)	Race	Role at School	Length of time at school
Wendy	White	Principal	1 year
Jessica	White	SWPBS Team Leader; Sp. Ed. Consultant Teacher	12 years
Sally	White	Second Grade Teacher	26 years
Robin	White	Physical education Teacher	18 years
Hannah	White	Fifth Grade Special Education Teacher	7 years
Kate	White	Third Grade Special Education/ Inclusion Teacher	8 years
Andrea	Black	School Councilor	2 years
Tanisha	Black	School In School Suspension/ Proactive Intervention Referral monitor	14 years

### **Data Collection**

In order to create a rich ethnographic study on the process of implementation of SWPBS at Morgan (and later reactions and connections with the anticipated closure of the school), I conducted participant observations at the school as well as interviews with team members. I also examined a variety of documents (at the local, state, and national level) in order to triangulate the



data and connect what was happening at Morgan to a larger picture of both SWPBS and school reform in the U.S.

The participant observations helped me to find the connections between what the team achieved as a group and the outcomes for the school at large. I looked at the process of change that occurred within the school over the course of the school year. The interviews I conducted with the various team members gave me a better understanding of the role they played on the team as well as their perceptions of the SWPBS. Documents were used to support data collected in the field. I describe all three data collection procedures in detail in what follows.

### **Interviews**

In semi-structured interviews the interviewer uses predetermined questions as a guide. Although, the questions are somewhat standardized there is freedom for the interviewer to digress, probe further, and elicit additional information from the interviewee (Berg, 2004; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants at the school where they worked (See Appendix B). Each participant requested a specific location within the school for each interview, so that interviews generally took place in classrooms, offices, and a conference room.

The length of the interviews was dependent on the times that the participants were available, but ranged from half an hour to over an hour per interview. Each interviewee was interviewed twice (on two separate occasions), in order to see how the implementation process developed over time. The team leader, however, was interviewed four separate times to provide a deeper understanding of the activities at Morgan (related to SWPBS and later the closure announcement). Overall, I had taped and transcribed 14 hours of interview data from the team leaders at Morgan. Interviews were audiotaped with a digital recorder and sent to a professional

transcriber. I later checked each interview transcript for accuracy. They were transcribed verbatim, however when I used the data in my chapters I often used brackets for fillers in order to make sentences grammatically correct, as well as for clarification of topics being discussed. Interviews were analyzed for developing themes that emerged, as described below.

### **Observations**

Participant observations were conducted during SWPBS meetings at Morgan, implementation roll out training, and SWPBS celebration days. I attended 26 out of 30 SWPBS Team meetings, the three initial implementation roll out trainings for school personnel and students, and three out of six SWPBS celebration days. I collected observational notes focusing on what was taking place in these meetings with minimal participation (by myself) in the meetings themselves. These observations took place over a two-year period and the number of observations depended on the schedule set by the team and administration. Overall, I had notes from 32 participant observations, which I then transcribed and later analyzed.

Field notes are important to qualitative research, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state, “the successful outcome of a participant observation study in particular, but other forms of qualitative research as well, relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive field notes” (108). Field notes of what was discussed at the meetings, along with side conversations, were hand written during the meetings. In addition, detailed field notes were hand written during observations of SWPBS related activities. I did not actively participate in the activities; instead I sat to the side so as to not interfere with what was happening.

### **Documents**

I examined texts produced by the SWPBS team, which were in the form of official policies, forms for data collection, and memos in order to document the ways SWPBS was

understood by various teachers and administrators. I also looked at these documents to see how fidelity was measured and how the policy was implemented at Morgan in comparison with what the *School-wide Positive Behavior Support Implementers' Blueprint and Self-Assessment (Blueprint)* recommends for implementation. As discussed below, I ground my research in people's understandings of policy that is seen as objective and given to them through a top down process, but I am interested in the connection between these texts and people's lived experiences with these texts on the ground. Specifically, I examined federal, state, and local policies that informed the SWPBS team, such as No Child Left Behind, Individuals with Disabilities Act, New York State regulations concerning discipline, local school district policies, as well as those of the school itself, on how to proceed with the implementation of SWPBS.

### **Data Analysis**

Following qualitative research traditions, I continuously analyzed my data throughout the process of collect it. My initial analysis of my interview data, memos, and field notes written during observations in team meetings and school events at Morgan helped direct the focus of my research. After gathering all the data, I used open coding, looking at the data closely for themes that I was able to identify in the interview data, observation notes and other documents.

I initially read for themes based on my research questions. For instance, to examine my first research question (What are the factors that influenced Morgan's ability to implement SWPBS, I searched for themes that emerged in discussions of budgetary restraints, social and cultural makeup of the students, and school politics (administrator turn around, background on the school, implementation of previous policies etc.). Since one of my questions focused on fidelity as central to the implementation of SWPBS, I searched for instances in my notes and interviews in which fidelity or buy in from teachers and administrators came up.

The data was then hand coded, with themes and sub-themes being written in the margins of the transcriptions as well as the typed observation field notes and other documents. Lastly, I organized the coded themes into larger categories, which became the 'data chapters' for the study. Although I obviously couldn't use every note and interview on each specific theme, I tried to make sure that all the major themes I identified were represented in the final write up and whenever possible I used the words of my interviewees to demonstrate their own point of view.

### **Trustworthiness and Reliability**

Qualitative research has often been criticized for its trustworthiness by traditional positivist researchers because validity and reliability are not addressed in the same way as traditional quantitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; DuVaul, 2007; Shenton, 2004). Andrew K. Shenton (2004) reviews literature on establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research and sums up several strategies that qualitative researchers can use to address positivist criteria for reliability and credibility. I demonstrate below how I account for trustworthiness in my research.

**Triangulation and trustworthiness.** I used multiple sources to analyze the implementation of SWPBS at Morgan to triangulate the data. These sources were: multiple participant observations at team meetings and school events; repeated interviews with all team members; and, analysis of documents related to the policy of PBS. It was also important for me to interview each member at least twice and observe the happenings at Morgan for a sustained period of time. After following the team and the implementation process at Morgan for 2 years, I believe I have achieved data saturation, as themes were becoming repetitive rather than revealing. In addition, I believe that the richness of the data I collected, the depth and number of my field notes, the length of my time in the field, the repeated nature and depth of the interviews;

and the triangulation of multiple sources of data (observations, interviews and policy documents) further demonstrates trustworthiness of the study.

### **Conclusion**

Qualitative methods provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening with the people in the school and especially the SWPBS Team. Participant observations and interviews provided insights into the process the team was going through and their perceptions in implementing SWPBS. Institutional ethnography as method provided me with the tools to start with the teachers on the team, from where they were located, and trace the social organization or relations that impact their actions and affect how they implemented SWPBS in their school, as well as the eventual closure of the school.

In the following three chapters I present the data that was collected during my research. Chapter Four follows the SWPBS Team as they go through the process of implementing SWPBS, Chapter Five examines the criteria that need to be in place, according to the *School-wide Positive Behavior Supports Implementer's Blueprint*, in order for SWPBS to be implemented with fidelity, and Chapter Six focuses on the neoliberal politics that led to the eventual closure of the school.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Lived experiences with the implementation of SWPBS**

In this chapter I report findings from the data collected during observations of team meetings, school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) related activities, as well as interviews to flesh out the experiences of members of the Morgan Elementary SWPBS Leadership Team. I present the data in a chronological sequence to highlight important elements in the implementation process of SWPBS, as well as the experiences of the Team as they worked on its implementation. I have organized the analysis of the data in the following sections around several broad themes: previous experiences of the participants; training of the Team, staff, and students; and, implementation of interventions.

#### **Previous Experience with SWPBS**

In this first section I examine participants' experiences or knowledge of SWPBS prior to it being introduced to it at Morgan. The school district had been using SWPBS in other schools for several years prior to its introduction at Morgan and I wanted to investigate how prior knowledge or experiences might have influenced the implementation process at Morgan.

Wendy, the new principal at Morgan Elementary, had been an administrator in the district in a variety of roles since 2000. She had been a principal at three different schools, including Morgan, since 2010. In 2003, Wendy was vice principal at Wayne<sup>3</sup> middle school, a school that was put on a list of "persistently dangerous schools" by the New York State Department of Education. Schools are designated as "persistently dangerous" if they have two successive years of serious incidents that meet or exceed criteria established by the Department. Serious incidents include homicide, forcible and other sexual offenses, robbery, assault resulting in physical injury, arson, kidnapping, reckless endangerment, and possession, use or threatened use of a weapon.

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym

According to Wendy “if there was a list [Wayne] was on it.” She and the other administrators at Wayne were upset by the designation. Wendy summarized these feelings:

We were angry about that because we felt like yeah, when we came in in 2000, it was very, very bad....But, we had – we did a really good job with ending gang stuff, like the fights in school. The big thing that we saw is violence, like bringing weapons into school and, you know, big gang kind of fights. So, actually, we felt like from what we did from 2002 to 2003 was huge. We got the gangs and the drugs and the weapons out of the school. And, the kind of referral—it was—the referral data was bad. It was about disruptive behavior, like kids doing more like, “Fuck this, I’m not going to do it” and storming out of the classroom. So we felt like what do you mean we’re in a persistently dangerous (school)? This is a school that had actually kids dealing drugs in the hall, you know what I mean? It was like all those bad movies, you know, like *Stand and Deliver*.

Yet, with all of the hard work described by Wendy, the school was still put on the persistently dangerous list. The referral data indicated a high number of students being sent to the office and receiving detentions or suspensions. She explained that it was “like the pyramid was upside down,” meaning that the majority of the students at Wayne were at the top of the pyramid, signifying that they needed significant resources to be able to meet the school-wide expectations. Typically on this type of pyramid the majority of students would be at the bottom of the pyramid, which signifies that they are meeting the expectations, with fewer students at the top who are not. Wendy’s explanation above indicates that the administration at Wayne felt that the referral data were not accurate, because the students were not violent, but were being sent to the principal or being suspended for more minor infractions. It was during this time that SWPBS was presented

to the district and the three schools on the persistently dangerous list were the first schools to begin to implement SWPBS. This was also the first time that Wendy encountered SWPBS. The state had just begun to train key people in school districts and she was in the second cohort. Once trained, she became the internal coach for her school.

Wendy had gotten intensive training and was able to train her own school team at Wayne from September through January of that school year. Implementation at Wayne started that January when the students came back from December break. Wendy attributed the success at Wayne to the extensive training she received in Albany with George Sugai, co-director of the Office of Special Education (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). She explained, “Because we had all that training from September until January.... by March we had over 50% of the kids in the green [first tier], which for Wayne was huge.” It was during this time that the district had more funds available from the state to improve schools. These funds were crucial to allow schools to extensively train universal teams and for monthly professional development meetings, which were held at the regional teaching center and focused on what needed to be done at each tier of the pyramid.

When Wendy had been trained as an internal coach for SWPBS, she had already had training in another district initiative, Discipline with Dignity (Wendy), which is a behavior management approach based on building relationships, making curriculum relevant, and avoiding adult/student power struggles. In addition, Discipline with Dignity's (Curwin & Mindler, 1999) philosophy is that incentives and rewards work in the short term, but do not have lasting effects. Discipline with Dignity, therefore, takes a longer period of time to show positive results (Wendy). The district may have felt that they did not have sufficient time to wait for results. These approaches may not be at odds, however, since Discipline with Dignity provides



tools teachers need to work with students in the classroom and SWPBIS provides the overall structure. According to Wendy,

You need that kind of training. Teachers still to this day they need like a Discipline with Dignity kind of training to build their toolbox. But, you also need sort of those structures, like school-wide incentives and the matrix and that's what PBIS provided.

The teachers at Morgan had not gotten this same type or level of training and some teachers continued to have high numbers of office referrals. Wendy spoke about plans for the second year of implementation and how the data collected on referrals would be used to find “the teachers that are going to need that gentle nudge to—like, ‘You need to build your toolbox so that the universal stuff gets better’.”

I asked Wendy why, if the school district had begun using SWPBS in 2003, there were teachers who had either not heard of SWPBS or who had heard of it but had not known much about it now, more than seven years later. Wendy explained that the district is very large and on the “In Need of Improvement” list, because it was not making Adequate Yearly Progress due to low test scores on state assessments in many of its schools. In fact, schools in the district initially got involved with PBIS because they were ordered to do so as a result of state intervention. As Wendy explained, each school in the district had to write their own individual school improvement plan as a result of being put on the list:

Well, I got involved with PBIS, why? Because we were – we had to. We were on a list. So, when you're on a list, the money, the resources get channeled to fix the school that's on the list to get [the school] off the list. So, it wasn't like the district was adopting

something. This is the first time that the district initiative—2010 and 2011 was really the first time that we got a list that was clear that every school will do something around this. According to Wendy, this was the first time the district began implementing SWPBS in specific schools that had been placed on a list of needing improvement. Being placed on this list put the district under surveillance of the state and the federal government through No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB mandated that data be collected on test scores and the behavior of students. This data made the schools known to upper administrators in the district, but was also reported to the state. This meant that the district had to come up with a plan to show what specific scientifically-based interventions would be used to improve the district and specifically targeted schools. As more schools were placed on the list of needing improvement, the district mandated the use of SWPBS in all of its schools. This was just the beginning of school reform initiatives that would lead to school restructuring and closure within the district. School reform will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Robyn, the physical education teacher, had never heard of SWPBS before it was started at Morgan. Robyn said she had always been concerned about behavior and discipline at the school. In the past she was part of the discipline committee at the school, which is why she became part of the SWPBS team. Robyn stated that,

“[Discipline has] just been an issue here. If you talk to old, you know, I mean, people that have been here a while, they can tell you. It’s always an issue. And, I don’t know that it’s not an issue at other schools in the city, because I’ve talked to teachers and, you know, they’ll tell me the same thing. So, I know it’s not just [Morgan], but we’re here. We’re not at the other schools, so it’s always been a concern.”

Robyn explained that because behavior is “a concern, you know, you have expectations. The kids don’t or aren’t meeting those expectations. And, so, what are we doing about it, you know? Well, nothing. But – so when PBIS came around, I thought, ‘Okay, let’s do this now, maybe this will help a little bit.’”

Sally, a second grade teacher, had also not heard of SWPBS before it was being implemented at Morgan. She knew it was a district mandate and that it would be coming to Morgan. The team had formed in the spring, before the school-wide implementation, to mostly work on “the matrix.” Sally indicated that there was no formal training of the staff, but they did have a lot of guidance from Jeff and Sarah, the external coaches assigned to Morgan and several other schools in the district. They were assigned to train and guide staff through the implementation process for how to start SWPBS in the building. According to Sally, most of this time was spent on the matrix. Although Sally did not go, several of the team members went to other schools that were using SWPBS to bring back ideas for the team and some did their own research online as to how to teach the matrix. Jeff, the external coach, had given a short presentation to the whole staff that spring, but that was all the training that the whole staff received until September when an hour or two of training was provided for the staff. Students also received 30 minutes to an hour of training. Sally also stated that SWPBS had not been brought up at staff meetings either:

There has not been a refresher for the staff or students and without a refresher....It [SWPBS] gets pushed to the backside and old strategies are probably relied upon, which is probably doing this on our own.

Kate, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, had first been introduced to SWPBS while student teaching in a middle school in the district. She said that when she was first hired at Morgan the discipline at the school had been consistent. When she had joined the discipline team, she stated,

... we sort of tried to do some of the PBIS aspects without actually adopting the whole PBIS program, so we created like Golden Tickets and stuff to give out, similar to the Morgan Dollars. I mean, this was back in 2003, 2004. So it worked really nicely for about a year and a half and then it just went by the wayside, when that principal left and somebody else came in. So, it just, the lack of consistency, is the way that discipline was... (laughs), [which] became an issue.

Kate explained that the training that the team received was facilitated by the external coaches, Jeff and Sarah. They had been supporting the team during meetings throughout the implementation process and Kate believed that it had been effective. Kate indicated that a formal training for the entire school before the next school year should be done to make the SWPBS more successful. She stated,

I think it should be [provided] because as a staff, you know, there's lots of varying personalities and ideas and, you know, opinions about PBIS. But, I think that if everybody came together and were formally trained, then maybe everybody would be more on the same page and have a more common understanding.

The school district had been implementing SWPBS in various schools for approximately ten years prior to this study. Understanding participants' prior knowledge of SWPBS helped to provide a baseline of where they were at prior to implementation. Without this information, I might have assumed that since the district had been implementing SWPBS there would have been some district-wide training so that all school personnel would have a basic understanding of

it. The Team's lack of prior knowledge may have played a part in the Team's difficulties with the training they received.

### **The Training**

Training is a major component in the implementation process of SWPBS. School personnel must be well versed in the SWPBS framework, as well as in the SWPBS goals and objectives of the district and school in order to fully and effectively implement and sustain SWPBS. School personnel must have a unified understanding of how the behavioral matrix works, what the definitions and the expectations for behavior are, and how the system will be taught to students. According to the literature, if the school-based PBS team does not have the training necessary to teach the entire personnel, there can be inconsistencies when teaching students the expectations and difficulties in maintaining SWPBS (Bradshaw et al., 2008; George & Kincaid, 2008). At Morgan Elementary there was little formal training for the PBS Team prior to the implementation of SWPBS.

During the spring and summer of 2010, prior to implementation, the team had a few meetings with two external SWPBS coaches. The external coaches, Jeff and Sarah, were from an outside not-for-profit agency that worked with the district in providing training and assistance to schools implementing SWPBS. It was during the summer that the coaches presented the SWPBS model using presentation materials from the PBS website and *Blueprint*. They assisted the team in setting up the matrix, an array of behavioral expectations that everyone would follow in the school, with examples of what the expectations looked like in different locations throughout the school. The "Matrix" sets the standards by which students will be stratified according to their ability to meet the expectations. In addition, the school-wide reward system, Morgan Dollars, would augment this system. This group also helped with outlining how the first year of

implementation should take place. The Team used examples from other schools within the district, as well as the examples from the *Blueprint*.

During the time that SWPBS was being developed, Morgan's principal retired and it was unclear at the time who would replace her. The assistant principal was supportive, but unable to provide assistance due to the upheaval in the administration. Administration is an integral part of training and implementation of SWPBS and to have a new principal who did not know the school personnel, students, or community or who may not know about SWPBS could negatively impact the successful implementation process. The school personnel did not meet the new principal until a week before school started and it was not until the school year began that students and their families were introduced to the new principal, Wendy.

### **Training the team**

Resources are a driving factor in the training of school personnel to properly implement interventions in schools. Large urban school districts often do not have the funds to do a district wide training and resort to training a few people that then go back and train others. Hannah stated that if she and the rest of the team had had any formal training in SWPBS, she was having a difficult time remembering the system. Jeff and Sarah, the external SWPBIS coaches, came in and did a few presentations for the team on SWPBS and then Hannah says she did further research on her own:

I'm like a Google person, like I will just – I looked up a bunch of different cool tools and I looked up a bunch of different schools that had what they had for their Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible [behavioral criteria for the matrix]. [I] looked up what those were and then tried to compare it to, you know, our kind of population. So, it wasn't like the suburbs, where they might not have some of

these issues. So... I would just bring it to the table and make photocopies for everybody, and then we decided – not that everything I brought was good, because some of it was not so good.

There was not any formal training for the team, although the external coaches, Jeff and Sarah, did meet with them as they worked during the spring to create the matrix for the school. Hannah stated that they had visited some other schools in the district that had been using SWPBS for several years and received some good ideas, particularly in terms of the Proactive Incident Report (PIR).

When I asked Robyn if she had gotten training to be on a SWPBS team and implement it school-wide, she stated,

Yeah, I don't think we did. God, I don't even remember. I don't think so. I think Jeff came and talked to us. And, I don't think we went to the Teacher Center. I don't think we went to the Teacher Center for PBIS. I don't think so. I don't even remember. No, Sarah came – that's right, now – and even before we did anything, I think we started in September. We started implementing it -- rolled it out in September, so yeah. So last year, Sarah would come and Jeff would come and talk about what to do: "This is how you do it." And, we would meet and meet and talk and talk and, [he'd say] "This is how you implement it" and "This is where to start." Yeah, because we wanted to start when they started coming. We're like, "Okay, let's do it!" But, we didn't. We started in September. So yeah, there was that training, there was...

Thus, when the team rolled out the SWPBS to the whole school at the beginning of the school year in 2010, there had not been a whole staff introduction during the summer. It was during the September rollout that the staff got their first real introduction to what they would be doing.

Luckily Wendy had been involved with SWPBS in the school district for ten years and had been trained by George Sugai in a statewide training session. Wendy was an internal coach and had been the principal in several schools when the district first started SWPBS. During her first meeting with the Team, Wendy spoke about her expertise in SWPBS and its importance in turning struggling schools around. She told the group she was there to make SWPBS a success at Morgan Elementary.

### **Rollout for Staff**

Rollout for school personnel came the day before classes started for students. Teachers walked into the cafeteria eating and drinking coffee, talking, laughing, and catching up on what they had been doing over the summer. I sat in the back of the room so I could get a good view of how the SWPBS presentation would go and how teachers might respond. There were grumbles from the crowd as they were asked to sit for the presentation. A teacher asked me if I was new and I told her I was graduate student. She mumbled how she didn't want to listen to a presentation about another thing they would have to do on top of everything else and that she really needed to set up her room and prepare for the following day. She got up after waving to another teacher and they began to chat.

Wendy introduced herself briefly and then introduced Jeff, one of the external coaches. Jeff began his presentation by explaining to the teachers that no behavior modification program can focus on positives without behavioral expectations and consequences. He said that there are some students who have a high tolerance to negative consequences and to punishment, so we need to find the positives to motivate them. Jeff began a slide presentation that explained the SWPBS model and provided handouts to go along with it. Jeff told the audience that the district chose SWPBS because of the success the model had with lowering the suspension rates and



office referrals. He further explained that both research and evidence supports it and over 5200 districts around the U.S. have adopted it.

SWPBS had actually been in the School District for nine years and by the end of the school year all schools were working towards implementation. The trainers explained that each building would set up SWPBS so that it meets the needs of families, kids, and the community. Jeff explained that there was a steering committee [SWPBIS Team] set up, but teachers' voices or ideas would be a part of the process and that the team would embrace what was successful at the school. There was mumbling from the audience and people begin to chat with one another. Jeff then asked, "What things do you have that are universal supports for students [or] rewards?" Once again there was mumbling and it took a few minutes before someone answered, "In the classroom – lunch with the teacher." Another teacher replied, "We don't really have anything building wide."

Jeff ended his presentation by suggesting to the teachers that they be careful not to engage in behavior that they do not want the students to exhibit, stating that: "If you don't want sarcasm, then don't be sarcastic. And, if you don't want disrespect, then don't be disrespectful." Jeff concluded his presentation and the acting superintendent came into the room and spoke about the success of SWPBS. He explained that SWPBS was district mandated and that all schools, even high schools, would be implementing it. This was then followed by a motivational speech in response to the school district's financial struggles, which he said was "\$40 million in the hole." He stressed the district's dedication to teachers and staff, although he admitted that they had to lay off five percent of its employees and warned that there may be more layoffs in the future.

After the Superintendent left, Wendy spoke about her past experiences with SWPBS and her commitment to it. She stated, “SWPBS works and punishment doesn’t. It is up to staff to set examples. We are in this together.” Wendy addressed the high number of special education students with office referrals stating that it should not be happening. She also stressed that teachers need to teach kids what they are expecting of them. She stated, “A kid may have a label but look typical, that does not mean they act typical. If a student is in an 8:1:1 [segregated setting where there are eight students to one teacher and one teaching assistant] and is ED [emotionally disturbed], it’s because he has significant needs and should not be sent down to the office.” Students in special education should already have a behavior intervention plan that teachers are following. SWPBS can help reinforce the interventions in place when there are specific school-wide behavioral expectations in place that all students are taught, expected to follow, and consistently reinforced.

The next person to speak was Jessica, who was the lead person on the SWPBS Team. Jessica asked the teachers to pull out the matrix and explained how it worked. She stated that everyone would get a poster with the matrix on it to hang on their classroom wall so they could go over it with the students. Jessica then explained what “Morgan Dollars” were and how they were to be given out and used by the students. The teachers would be given the Dollars with the poster. After the presentation, the next phase of the training began. The teachers were placed in grade level teams and paired up with a SWPBS Team member. The Team member walked the teachers to different areas in the school where certain behaviors were expected and addressed in the matrix. I joined a group of teachers as they were walked through the rollout that the students would go through the next day. The teachers in the role of the students were taught the expectations for the bathroom. During this time the Team members would demonstrate the

expected behavior and would ask the teachers to role play a scenario in which they would exhibit the desired behavior. This same activity took place in the cafeteria, gym, hallways, playground and classrooms. The teachers were also praised and given Morgan Dollars in order to demonstrate how they would be given out to students. During this time the teachers were often talking and laughing during the instruction and sometimes needed information was repeated. Some complained that they really needed to be in their classrooms prepping for the start of school. As mentioned previously, the thought of a new initiative added onto the other things the teachers must do did not spark much interest in SWPBS and if anything resentment manifested itself in passive-aggressive behavior.

Although Hannah felt that SWPBS was important, she understood why the teachers were not so excited. She stated,

“I knew for me, it needed to be a change in the school, but – which is one of the reasons why I wanted to do it. But you know, you hear the other [teachers], well, this is just another initiative from the district that we have to do...”

Hannah’s comment about the amount of new initiatives being forced on teachers is not uncommon; I heard these same comments from other teachers during observations and this topic shows up in research literature as well. District may take on too many initiatives in an attempt to show that scientifically-based programs are being put in place to improve schools. Hannah explains,

... too many initiatives that you have to do each year and so I think the new initiatives, all the new – not just the PBIS, – there’s all these good things that are happening all over, but I think [the district] kind of just takes them and says, “Alright, Let’s do it. Let’s try it.” Like the Acuity. I like the Acuity. I’m not saying I don’t, but doing the Acuity. Fast

Forward, I think that's great for low language students, however, that's like another thing all the kids have to do. CCL, Collaborative Coaching and Learning. There's just all these new things and they wanted – they spent thousands and thousands of dollars last year training us to possibly do IB, which is International Baccalaureate. And then they're not even doing that. So they spent all this money, it's like, they want to try all these great things that are happening, but it's too much.

This demonstration of SWPBIS would be the only one the teachers would get before they would have to do the same thing with the students coming in the next day. The rollout for the teachers was an hour and a half and 30 minutes of that time was spent demonstrating how the matrix would be taught to students.

### **Student Roll Out**

When students arrived for their first day of school they were greeted by teachers, staff, and administrators ushering them to their classrooms. Many of the teachers and staff greeted the students by name and told them how happy they were to see them again. Students also hugged the teachers. All of the students began the day in their classrooms getting settled in. The rollout portion of the day would take place at different times throughout the day depending on the grade level. The school was divided into three groups; fourth and fifth, second and third, and Kindergarten and first. The second and third grade groups went first. They went to the gym where Wendy, who stood on a stage and introduced herself, greeted them. She told the students how excited she was to be their principal and that she had heard many great things about the school and students, and she was looking forward to meeting all of them. She told the students that they would be starting a new program this year that would help everyone have a positive year. Wendy explained what the matrix was and the vice-principal read the expectations to the

students. Wendy and the Vice-principal role-played for the students what one of the expectations looked like and what it did not. The students laughed and it took a little bit of time to get them to settle down. Wendy then showed the students the Morgan Dollars and explained that they would be getting these when an adult “caught” those following expectations and doing something kind or helpful to others.

After the assembly the students separated into groups by classroom and each group would meet at a separate station, such as the playground or cafeteria. I joined a group that met in front of a bathroom. The classroom teacher and a team member asked the students to sit on the floor in front of the restroom. Holding a poster with the matrix on it the Team member explained that the matrix shows you what the expectations are in different areas in the school. The teacher asked the kids what the behavioral expectations were, as she pointed to the chart. The students called out, “Be respectful; be safe; and be responsible.” The teacher continued by asking the students to raise their hands and wait to be called on. One student asked what a lavatory was and the teacher explained that it was another word for restroom. The teacher then read out loud from the matrix “what the behavioral expectations look like, sound like, and feel like (SWPBS Blueprint)” in all the restroom areas (example of the matrix below, Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. Morgan Matrix for Restroom**

	<b>Lavatory</b>
<b>Be Respectful</b>	*Patiently wait your turn *Give yourself and others privacy *Keep bathrooms clean
<b>Be Safe</b>	*Wash hands with soap and water *Keep water in sink *Turn off faucet *Report any concerns
<b>Be Responsible</b>	* Clean up after yourself

Figure 4.1 is a portion of the Morgan Elementary behavior matrix used as a guide for students to meet the school's behavioral objectives when using the restroom.

The adults modeled for the students, using role-play, what the expectations looked like and what they did not look like. The adults then chose students to role-play the expectations. While the lesson was going, other adults in the group were handing out Morgan Dollars to students who were sitting and paying attention and to those who volunteered to role-play. The teachers had been given a stack of the Dollars to pass out to students who they caught doing something respectful, safe, or responsible. This activity was also done in the gym, hallway, cafeteria, playground, bus, and for arrival and dismissal. The students were given expectations for the classroom in their classrooms. Interesting to note is that several students were pulled out of the lessons for not paying attention. Students had 45 minutes of their first day devoted to SWPBS and the behaviors expected of them. During the first week of school the students were taught the matrix in class and learn about the "Morgan dollars" they will earn for modeling the expectations on the matrix. They did not have refresher training the rest of the year.

### **Where are the Interventions?**

In this section I will be describing the procedures of SWPBS as they were discussed in the SWPBS meetings I attended, as well as discussions that took place with the SWPBS Team and administrator at Morgan Elementary School. The focus of this section is the tiered system which is based on the compliance of students in regards to the Matrix, as well as the interventions that should be in place that allows for students to move through the tiered system with the objective of being on Tier 1, the universal level.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the SWPBS uses a three-tiered system according to the *Blueprint*. The universal or Tier 1 portion should meet the needs of approximately 80 to 85% of the student population. For students that were struggling, there should be interventions put in place to help them become successful. These interventions are dependent on what level the student is on and what has been done to help the students get back on track. In universal or Tier 1 level, students are supposed to be able to meet the expectations on the Matrix with minimal support. Tier 2 supports are for groups of students that need retraining of the matrix. In the tier students are taught skills that will help them meet expectations. This could be done through group social skills training, as well as peer and adult mentoring in school and out in the community.

The objective for the students is to move the students that have been struggling in Tier 2 or 3 back to the universal level on the pyramid so that they become successful in school behaviorally and in turn academically. Tier 3 interventions are more intensive and personal to the student. These interventions should happen when the student is unable to meet the universal expectation after interventions have been tried at the Tier 2 level. Tier 3 interventions include FBAs and BIPs, which should be written as a team. In Tier I: The universal level is the school-

wide use of the matrix, as discussed previously in this chapter. Interventions at this level are school-wide and classroom boosters on the matrix, incentives, and PIRs, which should keep students from getting office referrals and eventually suspended.

### **The Value of a Morgan Dollar**

In SWPBS one of the main positive behavior supports used is a token system in which a slip of paper, usually called a buck or dollar, such as “Morgan Dollar,” are used as way to recognize students who are meeting or exceeding expectations.

Throughout the year the students would have half days in which the students would go for the first half of the day and then there would be a school-wide meeting the second half of the day. On these days the Team would plan activities for the students to participate in and the students would use the dollars to choose what activities they wanted to engage in. There would also be pizza, ice cream and drinks to purchase with their dollars, as well as a school store. The school store consisted of things donated by people, schools supplies donated by Target, and items bought with some of the \$500.00 allocated for incentives for the students.

Many of the SWPBS meetings were used to discuss the activity days for the students and how to get a school store up and running. Approximately ten out of 19 of the meetings I observed were almost entirely about the activity days and the school store was discussed briefly in 17 out of 19 meetings during the first year. The planning really paid off for the students who were able to participate, as well as the Team and school in general.

Deanna: So those half days have been pretty –

Robyn: They’ve been wonderful.

Deanna: For the community probably too.



Robin: Oh, they are, but they don't come. But the kids, you know, the kids get to go to a dance and they have to pay five Morgan dollars so they get to go to a store, you know. They did the Christmas store and, you know, [they] got to spend their money on – like buy[ing] stuff with Morgan Dollars. I mean, they loved it. And you know, unfortunately, [in] March there's no half days, so we're doing a spirit week next week. But yeah, I think once they understood the concept, I think it's better to, you know, understand the whole thing. Once they understood what the Morgan Dollars were for and stuff.

Although the events were successful there was still the need for a more immediate reward for students who need a shorter time between rewards. Many of the Team members, as well as teachers and staff, were concerned about this need and pushed for the school store.

You could do your own thing at the classroom level, like for instance, if you want to come up for lunch with a friend, 10 Morgan Dollars to do that. But it's not – that's still not consistent across the school, like what do we do? I mean, we have the half days where the kids can come and something--there's a school store that they can purchase stuff in, but sometimes there's not. You're paying to get into an event which is great, like a dance or a movie, but there needs to be more regular rewards for the kids, I think. So like I suggested at one of the meetings, like doing the school store on a weekly or a biweekly basis, and instead of having like the whole class go down and something like that, just have, you know, like the junior leaders that you're working with, they just roll a cart around, you know, put everything on a cart. The kids could buy folders, the kids could buy erasers and stuff like that, and I think that that would be – you know, if they're seeing it consistently, then they're more likely to work toward the dollars. (Kate)

Many students did not come to school on half days because many of them walk to school or have to be taken to school by someone in the family. Half days are only two and a half hours and many do not see the point if the children are participating in activities and not academics. Kate spoke about a girl in her class who is doing so well and earning a lot of Morgan Dollars yet has not gotten to participate in the half-day activities. She has now collected 120 Morgan dollars and has nothing to spend them on. Kate, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher of, summarizes the issue with the reward system at Morgan:

I think the main concern for people is like the value of the Morgan – the Morgan Dollars, because some of our kids have like 60, 70 Morgan Dollars and not enough opportunity to spend the Morgan Dollars, you know what I mean? (Kate)

Teachers became confused as to what to do with the Dollars, since there were only the half-day activities and nothing else to use the dollars on. Administration and the Team encouraged the teachers to use them in their classes and have in class incentives for students needing immediate gratification, however many teachers already had their own systems that they were holding onto from previous years and did not necessarily have to do with the Matrix.

There's nothing right now that children can consistently say they're going to use their dollars for. I mean, I think it's better. We've come – and I get it's the first year, but these are the things, I think, as we roll this out, we have to keep re-looking at and tweaking and fixing. And, of course, unless there's somebody doing something in the classroom--and, I know there are still pockets of teachers in this building who are on a card system in addition to the Morgan dollars. And, I don't know – I mean, I don't know how that works for them, so I don't know if it's a mixed message or, I don't know (Sally)

Hannah, 4<sup>th</sup> grade special education teacher, explained,

So sometimes we're lacking with the Morgan dollars, because we've already had this in our classroom previous, so it's hard to – Well, I think when you're doing the Morgan dollars, you're not doing it because they're doing their work. Really, you should be giving their Morgan dollars because they were being respectful, they were being safe, they were being – Right, things on the matrix. So doing their work, well that's not necessarily on the matrix. Doing what they should be doing, but we do give Morgan dollars. So sometimes we'll go away from the tickets and we'll give the Morgan dollars.

During meetings there were discussions about teachers and their use of dollars. One month after the roll out, in October, one of the Team members expressed concern that there was a “decline in the number of dollars being given to students.” A month later, at a November meeting, a team member expressed concern that some “teachers were throwing the dollars away” and that, “the kids are into it, but the teachers are losing interest.” Half way through the school year in January, the question was asked of the external coach, “The teachers are not on board. How do we get them back on board?”

Wendy attributes the success of Wayne middle school in implementing SWPBS to the fact that they had a structure set in place for their Wayne Dollars.

Well, the problem with our [Morgan] school was we didn't have something right away for the kids to do with those Morgan Dollars. At Wayne, every single day, that school store was open and kids were buying stuff. So at Christmas time, a lot of good stuff, the kids were using their Wayne Dollars to buy presents for their family, it was like – Dollar Store stuff that the staff had donated and we used – you know, there was money set aside for those incentives. So there was real – there was incentives other than the booster days

to use those dollars. And then – and we [Morgan Team] had that idea, but it never really got off the ground. I think that was a weak part of our plan.

Most schools using SWPBS have some sort of token such as the Morgan dollar. These tokens are an important part of rewarding students at the universal level. The success of this system is the ability to provide teachers with a way to reward students consistently and in a timely manner. Part of the intended use is to reward students so that other students can see and want the reward as well and in order to do this there must be something for the students to use the dollars on. Although the Team spent most meetings discussing and planning for ways to reward students for doing well, they were not able to get a school store going or come up with other ways to reward students more immediately. This resulted in a loss of interest in the system by teachers and an inability for students who were struggling, and in need of an incentive to see the benefits of complying with the expectations. These incentives should keep students from getting proactive intervention referral as well as office referrals, however token reward systems are difficult to maintain and sustain.

In addition, this token system can also backfire. The students would be given the dollars in the presence of other students in order to motivate them to follow the behavioral expectations set forth in the matrix. This tactic can cause problems Sally, a second grade teacher, recounted problems with this:

Sally: Correct, because I rewarded the kids who were being positive. And, I'm thinking now that that's going to – it's going to begin the naughties, the way that they're talking about this one particular child, who really always is doing the right thing regardless. He's started to get targeted now. And, I on purpose try not to say his name anymore because I don't want him to be targeted. So I'm trying to be subtle about rewarding him. That's kind of defeating the purpose.

Deanna: Yeah, if he's going to get bullied for –

Sally: Right. And sadly, when you only have one or two role models out of 21, that's a big thing to overcome.

Rewarding students in front of others in order to pressure them to follow the Matrix can have the opposite effect on some students, especially when done within the classroom setting. Students receiving the reward may not want the attention they get, because of the harassment by peers. This can lead to students being ostracized by classmates. In addition, those students who never receive the reward may become resentful and angry, taking their feelings out on their student who earns the reward. Finally, the value of the reward may lose its affect causing the student to lose interest in following the Matrix, because they figure they will not get the reward no matter what they do. Even though teachers and staff would hand the dollars out at random throughout the day, it appeared that the students that really needed some sort of recognition would never get it, keeping them from participating in any of the school activities.

### **Implementing the Interventions.**

Some Team members spoke about the importance of interventions and their desire to have them for students who are struggling and in need of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. This group was often called “frequent flyers” because they were repeatedly the target of disciplinary actions. Despite these problems team meetings continued to spend a majority of the time on planning incentives or ways to spend the Morgan dollars. The following is an exchange between Robyn and I about interventions that were in place for students considered “frequent flyers.”

Robyn: I don't know that there are any.

Deanna: Interventions?

Robyn: No, I don't know if there are any...I try to reward them for following directions, because you're doing what you should do, you know? And, if I see a child who always makes bad choices making a good choice, yeah, I'm going to reward him too. But I'm not going to go out of my way to get him on track. I'm sorry, you have 20 kids here making good choices and you have five [that are] not. And it's always the same ones, so I don't know of any [Tier 2] interventions in place for them...I don't know. I have no idea what they're [the Team and SWPBS Coaches] doing for those kids. I'm not doing anything for them [laughs]. I can tell you that, I'm not doing a thing for them. I don't know if their classroom teacher is, I don't know if PBIS [is]— We talked about that — Well, you were at the last meeting, right?

I was, in fact, at “the last meeting” and interventions for students who were so-called “frequent flyers” *were* briefly mentioned. Yet, the perceived lack of attention paid to setting up the intervention phase was not for a lack of desire or understanding of its importance, this was discussed in the meeting, but rather a lack of training on how to go on to the next phase and the types of interventions that should be put in place. The Team did not get the in-depth training they should have gotten for the tier I implementation and it was taking a lot of planning and energy just getting the rewards system in place. Frustrations were often expressed to me more during individual interviews than in meetings. Sally, a second grade teacher told me, “I'm not feeling any intervention. And our support team meets with us once a week – I mean once a month, and the same names are still coming up from September.”

At the February 18, 2011 meeting, Sarah, the coach, and Jessica, the SWPBS Team Leader, spoke to the team about the 219 class referrals so far for February. Jessica and Sarah stated that the referrals were for things that should have been handled in class and only walking

out of class and bullying were instant referrals. Sarah explained to the group that, “You are at the universal level, it is time to move up to Tier 2 and Tier 3” of the SWPBS pyramid to provide interventions for the students considered “frequent flyers” or for the ones that were continuously getting PIRs and referrals. Part of the interventions was the implementation of functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs). The training for implementing FBAs would be done in March and due to budget constraints. Only one special education teacher from each grade level would be trained and then they would be assigned to help the grade level team with writing the FBAs on all students struggling with meeting the SWPBS expectations.

During this same meeting, Sally wanted to know what interventions were going to be put in place. She asked, “The year is half over and it’s the same kids getting the referrals so why aren’t we doing anything to help these students? The kids are in crisis and there needs to be some help. What about the FBAs and behavior plans?” Sarah looked at Sally and asked if she had students with FBAs and behavior plans or if she had written any? Sally said yes and then Sarah said that Sally needed to make sure that whoever was in charge of the behavior plan was following up. In addition, Sarah said that the Universal system needed to be used in the classrooms and the Morgan dollars utilized, “If Johnny isn’t successful because PBIS isn’t being implemented at the classroom level then how do we know there really is a problem? If it [PBIS] is [being implemented properly] and Johnny still is not meeting expectations then there is a problem.” In other words, she felt that students should not be getting PIRs and office referrals if they do not understand what the expectations are.

At the April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, Team members expressed concern over the high number of referrals students were still getting. There had been 900 referrals since the beginning of the year

and 201 were in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This is surprising since one of the Team members is a fifth grade special education teacher. Sarah explained that of the referrals, 25% were at Tier 3 (students who should be receiving intense behavioral interventions) and 75% were at Tier 2 (students who should be receiving moderate interventions), which was typical of urban schools. Sarah and Jessica once again reiterated that the teachers need to be reminded of what behaviors were level I and should be handled in class, not in the reflection room or office. Robyn asked how they could begin to target the students getting a high number of referrals. Sarah reminded the Team that the special education teachers had been trained to do FBAs and were now grade level experts.

Wendy attended the meeting, which was a rare occasion. She said that there should have been a January SWPBS booster to remind students and teachers what the matrix means and to reteach what the expectations look like. In addition she pointed out that the teachers should be doing “boosters,” or retraining of the matrix in their classrooms as well. Wendy gave some good advice to the Team in this meeting, albeit a little too late. After she spoke, the meeting once again turned to incentives and the school store, which they wanted to start up the following week. During the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, Jeff addressed the Team telling them that they needed to move to the next level for SWPBS so that the students could get the interventions needed to bring down office referrals.

An intervention, considered a Tier 2 intervention, which had been in place before SWPBS began was a program run by the school counselor, Andrea, who uses Aggressive Replacement Therapy to teach student social skills and anger control techniques. This is her second year at Morgan and she is working under a three-year grant. Unfortunately, the grant did not allow for Andrea to work with students who had IEPs. This was due to the supports that should already be in place for students with IEPs. In addition, she had constraints that would



only let her work with a certain number of students, some of which she had had the previous year. Although the grant did not allow Andrea to work with students with IEPs, she did work with teachers if they came to her. In the following quote Andrea talks about a working with teachers so that they had resources to help their students. Andrea stated,

... what I did at beginning of the school year, I gave the teachers a manual of all the first 15 – the most important skills, social skills, to learn and I worked with a teacher and gave her copies of skill cards, [and] all the worksheets that list the skills and stuff. I would push in and maybe do something, but that’s what I want to do more of next year. But I have met with teachers individually. A 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher came to me and said, “I need help,” because two of her students were just really frequent fliers. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Hannah, is a member of the Team and a special education teacher and both of the students being referred to had IEPs and were labeled as emotionally disturbed.

As Wendy stated earlier in the chapter, “You need to build your toolbox so that the universal stuff gets better.” Several teachers on the team indicated that they needed additional help, or training, to handle behavioral situations in their classrooms and that school-wide interventions or strategies would help with that. For Hannah, her frustration comes from a lack of interventions for special education students. She currently has four students labeled emotionally disturbed (ED) and does not feel she has enough experience dealing with ED students, because for years she has only taught students with learning disabilities. The counselor who teaches the social skills groups and anger management cannot take on special education students. Hannah stated:

I’m trying to take it upon myself, for me, like I’m taking two of my ED kids who really, really need it, and I’m kind of doing it at a slow pace, because I’m learning as I’m doing it. Sometimes we’re on the Internet together, a lot of planning time for this. Like this is

just something I know they need, I've never been trained in it. ... Wendy feels that special ed teachers should be trained and should be doing it. I agree.

Hannah also commented that the counselor had taken a couple of ED kids before, "But then it wasn't working for them, so she kicked them out. So if it's not working, now what are we going to do with those kids?" In addition, the grant that the counselor was working under has specific constraints, such as not working with special education because they are supposed to have services in place already, as well as having data that show success in the program. If the students have not shown progress in the program then they are let go and a new group starts. In other words, as Hannah stated,

"If they were in it last year and they were in it for so many weeks this year, if there's no impact on their behavior, they want to take new kids. Alright, I get that, you know, because she only can work with so many kids. But those kids, if it didn't work for them, what else are we doing?"

According to No Child Left Behind, IDEA, and SWPBS, one of the things that must be done for students who are having behavioral difficulties is a functional behavior assessment (FBA). For the most part, a special education teacher will typically have the most knowledge on FBAs because students in special education with behavioral issues must have one with their IEPs.

Frustration was evident in many of the conversations I had with the team, not just about the special education students, but also students who were considered "frequent flyers." The inability to get past the initial phase of implementation kept them from implementing interventions necessary for the school as a whole to be successful. Team members spoke about the lack of interventions individually, but the topic was not as prevalent in meetings. Lack of information and training on what strategies other schools, not just in the district but schools in

other districts were using, was also a frustration for everyone in the school. An important finding of this investigation is that teachers must have the tools to manage new initiatives and reforms in their classroom for these initiatives to be effective. However, often these reforms and initiatives do not come with adequate professional development, which was the case for FBAs and the entire SWPBS system.

### **Functional Behavior Assessments and Special Education**

According to the *SWPBS Blueprint*, “for students who are high risk for social failure, specific social skills are taught based on functional behavioral assessment of problem behaviors”(p.18). An FBA is an integral part of supporting students at the Tier 2 & III intervention level. This intervention should be done for not only special education students, but also for students who are at the cusp between being labeled “at-risk” and being labeled emotionally/ behaviorally disturbed. For “at-risk” students, the FBA and intervention plan can keep them from being identified for special education services or being caught in a vicious cycle of missed instructional time as a result of disciplinary actions and declining achievement. During my interviews and observations, it became clear that there were not many usable FBAs or behavior intervention plans for special education students. People I spoke with all knew what a FBA was, but were less knowledgeable about the process of conducting or implementing one. I was surprised that there were special education teachers who were still not trained in writing and conducting FBAs when there had been such an ongoing problem with behavior in the school. Wendy spoke about her reasoning behind sending special education teachers to FBA training:

Well see... that was part of the conversation about special education teachers-- putting the special back in special education. We should be able to do that. I was a special education teacher, so not only did I have to know how to modify curriculum, but I came

up with really strong behavior plan[s] for kids. And, then, if I needed – if they needed skills, you know, social skills streaming and that kind of stuff, I figured that out. And, that's where I don't see – that happening. So, that's why it was really important on two levels: One, was for all my special ed staff to go through that FBA training. [That] was one, because I thought it would make them better special ed teachers--because they have to look, you know, look at that, do that. And, then, Two, because [having this training] then that means they're an expert on their team too.

One special education teacher was sent from each grade level team so that they could assist the regular education teachers in assessing, collecting data, and writing the FBA and the BIP.

Hannah, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade special education teacher on the Team, spoke about her perceptions of being trained to write FBAs:

Wendy feels that special ed teachers should be trained and should be doing it. I agree.

Well, for some of my special ed kids that are ED, I have to write FBAs. So, I guess – um, none of the special ed teachers have ever been trained in writing these; we just had to do it and we always did it by ourselves. And, they did stress that we need[ed] to do it kind of together, just to get – just to get the right verbiage when you're writing it and have somebody else kind of from the outside looking in to look at that student to say, “You know what, your perceptions might be different from what's actually going on because you're with that child every day.” So that was, I would say, the best part, just hearing because at least now we could say, “You know what, I need help with this FBA. Who could observe? Who could help me write it?”

FBA training was not made available to the staff until March. By this time, more than half of the year was over and there were, as a result, many missed opportunities to reach

struggling students and teachers as well. Andrea understood that Wendy wanted the special education teachers to be trained so that they could work with people involved and get other people's input, but she was also frustrated because of the lost time. She explained, "I put it out there to the teachers that, you know, if you need help to write an FBA, I'm here. I had the training. I'm here to help in any way I can."

Hannah stated that, "I think now it's harder for the regular ed [teachers] because now they're required to write FBAs and they're just hearing about it." Sally spoke about not being trained to write FBAs and how the special education teachers were to be the first round of people trained, but that would not be until March. She ponders for a moment and then says,

And as I sit now, I almost wonder if it was a good idea to have the special education people go first, because it seems like a lot of the regular ed teachers are being asked to do that kind of thing. And, I'm also not – I'm too new to this, the FBA process, to know, is it really more than paperwork? Is really whatever's going to be put into that going to make a difference? Again, I think it comes to manpower, training.

Again, the lack of professional development and the lack of trained staff was an issue that seemed to be due to budgetary constraints and continued to hamper moving forward with the tier II phase of behavioral interventions for students struggling to meet behavioral expectations. .

Jessica answered the question that Sally had about whether the FBA makes a difference, at least at Morgan:

We do have several FBAs or behavioral plans written on students, but they're pretty much just sitting in a binder in Wendy's office. Information's not being relayed. Some of the special ed teachers are updating them due to IEPs, but there's not much consistency

and follow through and there's not much support in adapting and modifying things that aren't working for kids.

The quote above was referring to FBAs written for special education students prior to the introduction of SWPBS. I asked Jessica if there were a high number of special education students getting office referrals. She explained that there were not a lot of students at the school who were in special education because the district did not want kids being identified because the school was using Response to Intervention. So she answered with a "no" at first and then changed her mind; "I'm going to say yes and no because really, a lot of our true inclusion kids, who are inclusion, are under the consultant/teacher model. [They] are not our frequent fliers. They're really not. They're kids [not in special education] that maybe should or need more support that are acting out. Unfortunately, yes, [there] are kids in more of our self-contained 8-1-1 classes [that] tend to be high frequent fliers." This is significant in that many of the teachers had been at the school for more than five years and did not know what an FBA was. It was also problematic that special education teachers were just getting trained on how to conduct FBAs during this time. Morgan had been under review for low-test scores and high discipline data for several years, so why did it take so long for teachers to get trained in an intervention that is required by law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. An FBA, that is done well, can be used to develop a behavior intervention plan (BIP) that may, if consistently followed, keep a student from being suspended. Morgan's difficulty implementing and monitoring their FBAs and BIPs for the small number of special education students enrolled had me questioning whether the staff would be able to provide the interventions students would need when the school's SWPBS moved to the next level.

## Teacher Buy In

According to the SWPBS *Blueprint*, a major factor in the success of SWPBS is teacher buy-in. There must be at least 80% of the teachers and staff on board in order to have consistency, stability, and longevity for the structural benefits of SWPBS to take effect, because at the school-wide, universal or Tier I level, the interventions apply to all students, as well as faculty and staff (Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008). Research conducted by Kincaid, Childs, Blase, and Wallace (2007), on factors that inhibit successful implementation and sustainability of SWPBS, examined the opinions of school personnel who have experience implementing SWPBS for at least one year. From the findings four major themes emerged: these were staff buy-in, data, inconsistency, and reward systems. When Lohrmann, et.al (2008) reviewed the current literature in education on the adoption sustainability for classroom-based practices and school restructuring they found three consistent factors that influenced whether new school initiatives would be successfully implemented and sustained. These were a sustained commitment from a building administrator, the varying attitudes and beliefs that staff members have about new initiatives, and whether or not the staff believe they have the skills necessary to carry out these initiatives. When Lohrmann, et al. (2008) conducted their own research on the implementation of SWPBS in schools they took into account the specific barriers to SWPBS and the barriers that came up when trying to implement educational initiatives in general. In their study they interviewed educational consultants from 10 states. These educational consultants facilitated the initial implementation of SWPBS in the in their area. What Lohrmann, et al. (2008) found validated the evidence from the prior research they had reviewed. The facilitators experienced resistance from school personnel when they worked on creating the necessary

behavioral support structures and strategies need for the base universal level and that schools with “insurmountable resistance,” implementation never took place (Lohrmann, et al., 2008).

The barriers to implementation of SWPBS in these studies were some of the same ones I encountered during my own research. Administrative leadership and involvement in the process is one of the major components needed for implementation that is laid out in the *SWPBS Blueprint*. Although the Morgan’s PBIS Team all acknowledged that the principal, Wendy, was knowledgeable about and supportive of SWPBS, meeting with the team leader, Jessica, several times a month to discuss progress, there were many elements needed that Wendy did not provide. Wendy promoted SWPBS through public statements and written memos on its importance, but rarely attended team meetings, was unable to keep personnel motivated, and through no fault of her own, unable to allocate resources for support due to budget issues in the school district. Without leadership initiatives often lose momentum and fail (Lohrmann, et al., 2008).

An additional barrier to implementation was school personnel’s skepticism about the interventions. Lohrmann, et al. (2008) found that the staff at times did not believe that their school needed the universal interventions. In addition when many initiatives are being implemented in the schools, the staff are often overwhelmed and frustrated. When there are many “pressures on staff, particularly in urban or feeling schools, to improve achievement were so great that even when behavior and discipline needs were acknowledged, there was still a low priority on implementing the universal interventions” (Lohrmann, et al., 2008, pg. 63). In addition, with priority being placed on academic improvement this staff did not always make connections between academic achievement and behavior problems (Lohrmann, et al., 2008). Frustration with the amount of initiatives being put in place in order to meet the demands for



school reform also led to staff resistance to implementing SWPBS (Lohrmann, et al., 2008). I encountered this same frustration in my interviews. My participants would speak about initiatives being put in place, but never lasting long enough to see actual change. They did not want to put any more time and energy into something that would not last.

An additional theme that came to the surface in the Lohrmann, et al. (2008) research was a difference in the way staff perceived discipline and behavior management. The authors found that teachers and staff emphasized punitive responses as opposed to proactive and instructional interventions. One section in the article that resonated with what I observed at Morgan was punitive responses to “frequent flyers.” Like the teachers in Lohrmann, who believed, regardless of whether the data supported it or not, that punitive consequences should be effective and therefore were the logical response to problem behavior. This was particularly true when it came to students labeled as “high flyers.” “Participants found that some staff believe that if the high flyers were removed from the system, the schools problems would be solved” (Lohrmann, et al., 2008, pg. 264). In addition, a lack of consistency in the way punishment was dealt out to students by the administration was a concern for staff. The following quote, “I’ll hear staff complain because kids are responded to differently. One kid got a three day suspension; another kid didn’t get suspended at all. Staff get angry” (Lohrmann, et al., 2008, pg. 265) was repeated by participants in my own research, along with the belief by staff that it was the students who needed to change their behavior and not the way teachers interacted with students or their instructional strategies.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I examined several important themes in the process of implementing school-wide positive behavior support at Morgan. First, prior knowledge or experience with

SWPBS can have an impact on how well a SWPBS team is able to develop and plan for implementation. Wendy had extensive experience with SWPBS through statewide training conducted by leaders in the field, such as George Sugai, the head of the institute that started the SWPBS movement, in addition, she had many years of experience implementing SWPBS at other schools in the district. Unfortunately Wendy's knowledge and experience did not transfer to the leadership team., the institute is funded by the Department of Education. The second finding, however, is the importance of training the entire staff. Team members at Morgan had little understanding of SWPBS before it was announced that the school would begin using it six months later. The training that the Team received was minimal, as evidenced in the interviews. Finally, Wendy was not able to fully use her expertise as a trainer to work with her school level team in moving from basic school incentives (Tier 1) to the interventions that needed to be put in place for Tiers 2 and 3, so that struggling students could fully participate in the school program and receive supports for improving their behavior.

As stated previously, the training the SWPBS Team got was not at the level that Wendy had gotten in 2002, when the district had money from the state to use on new initiatives to improve schools. The lack of substantial training for the SWPBS Team at Morgan also contributed to the lack of whole school training. Neither the school personnel nor the students were able to get a complete understanding of the SWPBS program before it was initiated. As a result, systems were not fully put into place that would allow for the support of teachers who were struggling to use SWPBS as well as to students who were struggling to adhere to the demands being placed on them by this system.

The inability of the district and, therefore the Team, to provide more in depth training for everyone created obstacles that the team could not seem to bypass. One of these had to do with

developing and implementing the Matrix. Because the teachers did not have enough practice with the Matrix before trying to teach it to the students, this led to confusion, a lack of consistency, and unclear expectations for students. If teachers and students do not understand these expectations, how can they be reinforced consistently in the classroom? Teachers had a difficult time filling out the PIR forms correctly because they did not have a strong understanding of SWPBS, which also affected their investment in the system. Teachers needed help in teaching the skills to students so that they could meet the expectations on the Matrix. They also required more knowledge of intervention strategies that could be used to help keep students in class who were not meeting expectations. Lack of training created a situation where a great number of PIRs were being written for students, usually the same ones over and over, for behaviors that should have been handled by the teachers. In addition, the PIRs turned into office referrals for those students who were given multiple PIRs. As a consequence, the PIRs did not help reduce the schools office referrals and suspensions. Wendy was well aware that teachers needed tools to work with students who were exhibiting challenging behaviors. Unfortunately, professional development was not possible due to budget cuts.

Moreover, the school budget created a situation where training on FBAs was only provided to special education teachers. Yet, this training did not occur until three months prior to the end of the school year. Without training for regular education teachers as well, there was little work done to establish the more intensive interventions necessary to move students toward the universal level, Tier 1. Implementing SWPBS should decrease the number of students referred to special education, lower the number of office referrals and suspensions, increase the amount of time a student spends in the classroom, and improve test scores (because of increased

instructional time). For everything to fall into place, however, there must be support from the district and state for professional development and community support systems.

I want to end this chapter by mentioning that disability and race were significant in that race was never mentioned in my interviews and during observations. Although ED (emotional disturbed) was mentioned as a category by the interviewees, the number of students with this label was low, despite the fact that these students get suspended a lot. Hannah, the special education teacher, complained about her inability to deal with such students and a lack of training to do so. As Jessica, who is the team leader, suggested above when I asked her about whether there were students in special education that she was aware of – she replied yes and no because according to her the “true inclusion kids” are not “the frequent flyers”. She explained that it’s the kids who are not in special education but may need more assistance. Or that is what I understood her to mean. What she meant by “true inclusion” was never explained, I did not think at that time to ask. What is clear is that SWPBIS (as it was implemented at Morgan, but also maybe more generally) never blurred the binary between special education and regular education. It did not make teachers look at kids as more competent or encourage them to have higher expectations of them, just different expectations, the ones related to matrix.

The “inclusion kids” are not the ones that get into trouble, according to Jessica. So who are the frequent flyers? The biggest “offenders”? It is important to remember that Morgan Elementary has a student population that is 79% African American and 10 % White. In Chapter Six I will address the frequent use of racially coded language and discuss the implications of this for future research and interventions. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I provide an analysis of what is called for in *SWPBIS Implementers Blueprint* to establish SWPBS with fidelity and how it relates to the experiences of the school implementation team at Morgan.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Fidelity v. Reality in a School Struggling to Stay Afloat**

This chapter describes and analyzes in more detail what is involved in using a school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) framework. I start the chapter with a brief overview of the system of SWPBS (as they were already discussed in Chapter Two). I then describe the procedures of SWPBS as they were discussed in the SWPBS meetings I attended, as well as in discussions that took place with the SWPBS Team and administrator at Morgan Elementary School. This chapter aims to flesh out how standardized measures for assessing fidelity and gathering statistics construct an ostensibly scientific basis for the intervention; but for various reasons, they do not accurately reflect what is happening in the school.

### **Key Features of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports**

The seven Key features of SWPBS that must be in place for successful universal level (Tier I) implementations are (Lewis & Sugai, 1999):

1. Define three to five school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior;
2. Actively teach the school-wide behavioral expectations to all students;
3. Monitor and acknowledge students for engaging in behavioral expectations;
4. Correct problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of behavioral consequences;
5. Gather and use information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.
6. [Provide] leadership of school-wide practices from an administrator who
  - a. establishes a team to develop, implement, and manage the school-wide behavior support effort in a school;
  - b. serves as a member of the team;

- c. allocates sufficient time to implement behavior support procedures; and,
- d. [identifies] school-wide behavior as one of the top three improvement goals for the school.

7. Obtain district-level support in the form of:

- a. training in school-wide behavior support practices;
- b. policies emphasizing the expectations that schools are safe and organized for effective learning; and,
- c. expectation that information on problem behavior patterns be gathered and reported.

The chapter examines the key elements that with which the Morgan SWPBS school level team had direct involvement and are essential for successful implementation of the universal or Tier 1 level. I argue that the criteria for measuring fidelity are limited to easily assessed aspects of the SWPBS framework and give us a better understanding of how Morgan met the criteria for successful Tier 1 implementation when many aspects of the framework were not implemented as intended.

In the following sections I discuss each of the following components in more detail. First, defining school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior and actively teaching school-wide behavioral expectations to all students, will be discussed in relation to constructing the Matrix. The next component I discuss is the need to monitor and acknowledge students for engaging in behavioral expectations, which are in essence the incentives used. The fourth component is to correct problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of behavioral consequences, which is discussed in relation to the use of PIRs (Proactive Incident Report). And lastly, I discuss the importance of the need to gather and use information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, SWPBS uses a three-tiered behavior management system, according to the *SW-PBS Implementers Blueprint and Self-assessment*<sup>4</sup>(2004). The universal portion should meet the needs of approximately 80 to 85% of the student population. For students who are struggling, there should be interventions put in place to help them become successful. These interventions are dependent on what level the student is on and what has been done to help the student get back on track. The universal level is Tier 1 and the student is supposed to be able to meet the expectations on the Matrix with minimal support. Tier 2 supports are for groups of students that need retraining in the Matrix and are taught skills that will help them meet expectations. This could be done through group social skills training, as well as peer and adult mentoring in school and out in the community.

The objective of Tier 2 interventions is to move the students that have been struggling back to the universal level on the pyramid, so that they become successful in school both in terms of their behavior and in turn their academics. Tier 3 interventions are more intensive and personalized to the student. These interventions should happen when the student is unable to meet the universal expectations after interventions have been tried at the Tier 2 level. Tier 3 interventions include FBAs (Functional Behavior Assessments) and BIPs (Behavior Intervention Plans), which should be written as a team. To make sure that the majority of students are successful at the Tier 1 level, it is up to the school to make sure that the SWPBS implementation is being done correctly and with fidelity. I will explain more below about what the process of ensuring ‘fidelity’ entails and how it played out at Morgan. But for now, suffice to say that fidelity is considered necessary to achieve and measure accurate implementation. Schools

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<sup>4</sup>*SW-PBS Implementers Blueprint and Self-assessment* will be referred to as *Blueprint*

implementing SWPBS must be evaluated during the first year of implementation with a follow-up during the second year (Lewis, Barret, Sugai, & Horner, 2010).

### **School-wide Evaluation Tool: SET**

As a school begins to prepare for the implementation stage for SWPBIS there are certain criteria that must be put in place for the Team to have a successful implementation.

Implementation is crucial to the long term sustainability of SWPBS and it has to be implemented with fidelity (Lewis, et al., 2010). Prior research has shown that “high fidelity implementation is associated with a reduction in office discipline referrals and suspensions, increases in academic performance, and improvements in the staff reports of overall organizational health “(Bradshaw, Debnam, & Leaf, 2009). According to the designers of SWPBIS, measuring fidelity should be done during the implementation phase with self-assessment surveys as well as outside assessments to make sure that key elements are in place (Bradshaw, et al., 2009). Although, there are several evaluation tools available to assess the fidelity of implementation, one of the most common tools is the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET). The School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001) is a research instrument that was designed in 2001 at the University of Oregon to measure the implementation of SWPBS procedures (Horner et al., 2004).

Horner, Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Irvin, Sugai, and Boland (2004), creators of SET, conducted research on the school-wide evaluation tool demonstrating its validity in evaluating the initial implementation of SWPBS. Their research demonstrated the tool met “basic psychometric criteria for measurement tools used in research and that it can be administered with high inter-observer agreement and demonstrates excellent test-retest reliability” (p. 10). Notice here that the developers of the SET as a measuring tool seemed to focus more (or solely) on the



formal characteristics of the measurement, rather than on its validity as a tool for capturing what's actually happening in the school. The authors suggest that school boards and school districts might want to use the SET to assess the need for training and the impact of personnel development in SWPBS, as well as the use of SWPBS procedures and creating effective strategies for developing positive outcomes (Horner, et al., 2004).

Morgan Elementary's SWPBS was assessed by a specially trained evaluator from American Institutes for Research using the school-wide evaluation tool (SET) in November 2010. It took two days to do the evaluation in which she documented whether things like school expectations were posted in key areas and whether reward systems were in place. Since SET doesn't really attend to the complex realities of implementation, it was only possible to examine the set-up of the program and not what people were doing to operationalize its provisions. Also, the narrow time frame given for evaluation necessitated focus on the external or visible aspects on SWPBS (what's posted on the boards etc.). During the evaluation, the evaluator also spoke with students, teachers, and principals. It took three months to get the results back from the assessment. During a SWPBS meeting in March in which the external coach, Jeff, attended, which he did not do very often, he appeared extremely excited. He announced in the meeting that he had some really good news about how well the team and the school were doing setting up the program. Jeff explained that the school's score on the SET was 93 out of 100 and that usually you want to have a minimum of 80% to show that you have a universal system in place. Morgan's SET scores (see Appendix C) include numerical percentages for each of the seven components, but there is no explanation of how these assessments and percentages were reached. Jeff said at the meeting that according to the score it was time to move on to the next level, and focus on Tier 2 types of interventions. Everyone at the team meeting was really pleased and Jeff

asked if they thought he could get 10 to 15 minutes in the next faculty meeting to present the report. He felt that might jumpstart the teachers again and get them excited about SWPBS, since there seemed to be a lack of motivation in keeping it going at that juncture. Jeff asked Jessica, the SWPBS Team leader, if she thought they would have scored that well on the evaluation. The score surprised Jessica and Jeff stated that however it happened it looks really good for the school and he said he wanted to show it off to the district. After Jeff left the room, Jessica looked at me and said, that the teachers sure know how to answer those questions right. She said she was sure it was not a valid assessment of what really is happening at the school. The exchange seemed to suggest that Jeff was more concerned with the appearance of successful progress than acknowledging the school was struggling with some important elements to successful implementation of SWPBS.

### **The Matrix**

In order for the school-wide positive behavior supports to be successful the students need to be taught the school's expectations at the beginning of the school year, along with booster training several times a year to ensure that the students will know what's expected of them. These trainings are supposed to reduce the amount of discipline problems schools may encounter throughout the year. The tool that is used to do this is called, "the Matrix." The matrix is created with the input of school staff and should have community input as well. The matrix should include three to five behavioral objectives (such as be respectful, be safe, be responsible) and observable expectations for those objectives across a wide array of settings (school-wide, classroom, cafeteria, etc.). According to Horner, et al., (2004), "Establishing a positive student social culture involves providing students with(a) a common set of expectations, (b) a common language, and (c) a common set of experiences associated with the defined behavioral

expectations” (p. 4). The key is to present the same behavioral expectations to all of the students at the same time (i.e. the first two days of school) and to have peers who can support each other in following the expectations (Horner, et al., 2004). An example of the matrix used at Morgan is included in Appendix D.

In order for teachers to be able to implement the behavioral expectations in the matrix there needs to be training on how to teach the matrix in their classrooms and reinforce student compliance. There also needs to be buy-in by teachers for both the matrix and the reinforcement system, in this case the Morgan dollars, a school-wide token economy designed to achieve student buy-in and reduce office discipline referrals and suspensions so that overall academic performance will improve. Teachers at Morgan had input in the development of the matrix; however, there was no community involvement, such as parents, in these decisions. This is in spite of the fact that the matrix is supposed to be culturally relevant, an issue I will discuss later in this chapter, when I discuss some critiques of SWPBS. Although community involvement is an important part of sustaining SWPBS, according to the *Blueprint*, it is not part of the SET assessment for fidelity. In addition, as I chronicled more fully in the Chapter Four, the teachers received a crash course in school-wide positive behavior supports and the matrix for half a day, one day prior to school starting.

Students should be taught the matrix the first two days of school to ensure that they know from the beginning what is expected of them and so that they will have a positive start to the school year. Students should be taken to the spaces in the school where the expectations are set for particular behaviors. They should be taught what the behaviors are that they should exhibit through modeling and role-playing. It is during this time that school staff should be handing out tokens to students who are performing the expectations correctly so that students will learn about

the reinforcement system set up to encourage them to meet the expectations. Unfortunately, like the teachers, the students were rushed through a half a day of instruction on how to comply with the school expectations in the various settings throughout the school. The following week there were sporadic lessons on expectations for classroom settings as well as for the different areas of the school, mostly the hallways and bathroom. I believe that the lack of extensive training for staff and students had an impact on the buy in aspect of SWPBS throughout the year. It is also important to note, as mentioned previously, that training by itself is not measured by the SET or other tools that measure either fidelity or the success of SWPBS. Since training is part of the SWPBS Blueprint it was understood to be needed as part of successful implementation but there was no way to really measure its existence or effectiveness using the tools provided by those who wrote the Blueprint.

### **Importance of Data Collection in SWPBS and for School Decision Making**

An important part of SWPBS is the continuous collection of data in order to make decisions about the school's behavioral climate and individual student behavior. Office discipline referrals are the data that schools have consistently and most accurately collected over time. In the past, however, data have mostly been used as a way to focus on individual students as the problem that eventually leads to their removal from the general academic setting and not as a method for assessing the setting, understanding or solving problems. In informal conversations with teachers I have often heard that writing office discipline referrals on individual students is an important way of creating a "paper trail" that will justify removal of students who are perceived as interrupting the learning environment of others.

The *SW-PBS Implementers Blueprint and Self-assessment*<sup>5</sup> (2004), stresses the importance of leadership teams assessing how well they are implementing the SWPBS practices and choosing behavioral systems that are evidence-based. In addition, these teams must collect data to show that “targeted student outcomes are being and/or likely to be achieved” (p. 39) and can be linked to existing data.

In order to collect, maintain, and analyze data, certain systems need to be in place. The *Blueprint* lays out the criteria that these systems, which “supports the collective use of best practices by individuals within the organization” (OSEP CPBS, 2004, p. 13), must meet: specify a comprehensive set of behaviors that are of concern and interest to the school in decision making; define each behavior in terms that are measurable, distinctive, and mutually exclusive (i.e., not overlapping); develop procedures that take a minimal amount of time and resources to collect, store/enter, summarize, retrieve, and display the data; operate team-based processes by which school leadership teams regularly review and act on their data. Leadership teams must also review these data at least quarterly by looking “at graphs of the following five data displays: (a) number of office discipline referrals per day per month, (b) number of office referrals by type of problem behavior, (c) number of office discipline referrals by school location, (d) number of office discipline referrals by student, (e) number of office discipline referrals by staff member” (OSEP CPBS). The district that Morgan Elementary is part of chose not to buy into the SWIS and purchased an independent database software to track discipline data from each school. The database runs the same way as SWIS, however it does not feed data into the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports nation-wide data base. Like the SWIS software, Morgan was able to print the data for the Team to review at meetings, however there was not much time to discuss the issues regarding the students who were

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<sup>5</sup>*SW-PBS Implementers Blueprint and Self-assessment* will be referred to as *Blueprint*

continuously receiving office referrals. The data was supposed to be discussed during grade level meeting as well, although I had no verification that this was happening because I did not attend grade level meetings. The monthly data sheets included names of students that came up over and over again. Four of the students were from the same family. These students were often referred to as ‘frequent flyers’ or repeat offenders. I say offender, because it was actually the label used for students on the ODR data sheets highlighting the incursion of carceral disability to school-to-prison pipeline.

**Figure 5.1. Replica of the heading of the Morgan’s Discipline Data Report**

Grade	Student ID – Offender	Name Last-First-Middle – Offender	Has IEP	Referrals
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In an article by Clonan, McDougal, Clark, and Davidson (2007), the authors argue that the number of office referrals can be influenced intentionally or unintentionally by the biases of adults in the school. Teachers may write higher numbers of office discipline referrals if they think it will get them additional support in the classroom or for student. This can then affect the data that is being collected for decision making in the school, especially where there high numbers of referrals for African Americans students and Latino students based on more subjective observations, such as the teachers’ definitions of defiance and disrespect. Another factor that can affect the use of office discipline referrals for decision-making is the underreporting of behaviors that would result in office discipline referrals when teachers are afraid that school administrators will view frequent referrals as indicating a lack of behavior management skills or poor instruction. In addition administrators may be pressured into reporting lower rates of office discipline referrals as a way to show improvement in school climate or discipline. This is an issue for the implementation of SWPBS because students are not getting

consistent message regarding discipline expectation and their outcomes. For some students this may result on referral and for some not, so there is no consistency in the ways referrals are used and measured. It also gives a false impression that SWPBS is successful because it creates a potential of under reporting of school suspensions. In essence, it doesn't give an accurate picture of what is actually going on at the school if teachers are not sure how to use referrals and how to measure them and if students aren't sure what the expectations are of them.

### **P.I.R. Proactive Incident Report**

The universal level or Tier 1 of SWPBS involves the school-wide use of the matrix. Interventions at this level consist of school-wide and classroom boosters on the matrix, incentives (such as the Morgan dollars), and proactive incident reports. A proactive incident report (PIR) is designed to keep students from getting automatic office referrals for minor misbehaviors. The Team at Morgan developed the PIR form in the spring prior to the implementation of SWPBS. The Team spent time with coaches and collected examples of PIR forms from schools in the district that were already using SWPBS. It works within SWPBS so that students can have a way to take a break and speak with someone about what happened and what could be done to alleviate the problem. When the student gets a PIR, the teacher must fill out a form for the student indicating what the minor infraction was, what they believe the motivation for the behavior was, and what consequences were assigned to the student before sending the student to the reflection room. The consequences the teacher should try before writing a PIR on a student, as stated on the Morgan PIR form, are: time out in room; time out in partner room; loss of privilege; conference with student; and behavior plan, which could be an agreement between the teacher, student, and possibly the guardian, that would help the student meet the behavioral objectives expected in the classroom and school.

**Figure 5.2. Morgan Elementary PIR form:**

Student Name: _____		Homeroom _____	Date: _____
Location: _____		Time: _____	Staff Completing PIR: _____
<b>Primary Infraction</b>	<b>Possible Motivation</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	
Check <u>one</u> specific behavior: <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic refusal to follow directions <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic talking or disrupting others <input type="checkbox"/> Arguing/talking back <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate language <input type="checkbox"/> Minor teasing/taunting <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal to complete work <input type="checkbox"/> Minor property misuse <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____	Check all that may apply: <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain peer attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain adult attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain items/activities <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid peer <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid Adult <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid task/activity <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Consequences teacher assigned prior to this PIR: <input type="checkbox"/> Time out in room <input type="checkbox"/> Time out in partner room <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of privilege <input type="checkbox"/> Conference with student <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior Plan	
_____ 1 <sup>st</sup> PIR _____ 2 <sup>nd</sup> PIR _____ 3 <sup>rd</sup> PIR	<b>Parent Contact</b> Time: _____ Date: _____ Called by: _____ Summary: _____		Time arrived in Reflection Room: _____ Time returned to class: _____ Signature: _____

If the student receives three PIRs they receive an office referral and that data is entered into official discipline data. The PIR is supposed to encourage teachers to use their management skills to address behavior in the classroom, such as re-teaching the matrix. Andrea, the counselor, points out that a teacher's tolerance level will determine whether or not a child gets a PIR. She recounted a teacher who taught at Morgan for 30 years and had not written any PIRs. There were, however, also teachers, like a second grade teacher, who had been at Morgan for 24 years, and had written the highest number of PIRs in the school every month. Because of this inconsistency, a student could get an office referral for being disrespectful from one teacher, while another teacher would rightly fill out a PIR, thereby allowing for three chances to help that student understand that what they were doing that was disrespectful and what to do instead. As Andrea stated "... [a] student has three chances and I don't think that's been taken [into consideration] in all situations."



According to the SWPBS *Blueprint* a student should be retaught the matrix with classroom boosters and individual skills instruction. If a student at Morgan gets a PIR they would go to the reflection room at Morgan where they were to fill out the reflection form and talk with the staff (Tasha was the staff member in charge of in school suspensions as well as the PIR reflection room) in the reflection room. The guardian or parent was usually called so that they were aware the student was having difficulties at school and could therefore reinforce the school expectations at home. Unfortunately, parents and guardians were not provided either formal or informal SWPBS training. The student should spend no more than 15 minutes in the reflection room before being sent back to class. PIRs were designed to keep students in class and school so that they would not lose instructional time and could thus be more successful academically.

According to the procedures for PIRs and office referrals at Morgan, an office referral would be “handled and dealt with by administration for legality and logistic purposes. If a teacher writes a referral they are requesting help and support in handling a situation” (Sarah, PBIS coach). This support for teachers should come from the Team and could take the form of providing lesson plans to reteach the matrix, consultation, or observations of classroom environment to help teachers with teaching strategies and management skills.

In the initial rollout for teachers Wendy (the principal) provided there an introduction to the PIR form, but only ten minutes was spent on what a PIR was and how it would be filled out. Wendy explained the behaviors that should be dealt with in class prior to sending a student down to the reflection room, which also served as the In School Suspension (ISS) room. This overlap was confusing for both teachers and students. Kate explained that, “There’s the reflection room where kids are going and typically, it’s supposed to be like a 10 minute thing where they go and they talk to Tasha and she makes the phone call to the parents, just to let them know, ‘Your son

or daughter was in the reflection room. We talked about the issue and they're headed back to class.' But, I've noticed some people still referring to it as the ISS room. And, I've noticed some kids who are in there for longer than the 10 minutes, so I think that needs to be clear too. Is it a reflection room, is it an ISS room, you know what I mean." In essence, then, without understanding what is expected of them, the suspension room became the reflection room and vice versa. But the change was supposed to be not just about the name of the space but in the way it was used and thought about.

The lack of thorough training on filling out the PIR forms and how teachers should use them likely led to the overuse of PIRs to handle minor behaviors. After the first two weeks of implementation, Tasha expressed concern in a team meeting that the teachers needed a reminder on how to fill out PIR forms. A month from the first day of classes, Tasha once again stated that there needed to be a refresher on what the levels of behaviors were and how to fill out the PIR forms (PBS Team meeting notes October 22, 2010). The chart below shows the behaviors that should be addressed by teachers and suggestions on how to handle them.

**Figure 5.3. Unacceptable Behaviors for Level 1 and Level 2 Consequences**

<b>Unacceptable Classroom Behaviors:</b>	
<b>Level 1 Teacher Managed: Not Chronic</b>	
Examples	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Not prepared</li> <li>➤ Out of seat</li> <li>➤ Not following directions</li> <li>➤ Food/Drink/Gum</li> <li>➤ Inappropriate noises</li> <li>➤ Inappropriate talking/language</li> <li>➤ Whining</li> <li>➤ Homework not completed</li> <li>➤ Dress Code</li> <li>➤ Tardy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inform student of rule violated</li> <li>➤ Use matrix to describe expected behavior</li> <li>➤ Redirection/nonverbal cues</li> <li>➤ Ignore inappropriate behavior</li> <li>➤ Reinforce desired behaviors in student or in others</li> <li>➤ Verbal warning (in private)</li> <li>➤ Give choices</li> <li>➤ Proximity change (student or teacher)</li> <li>➤ Student conference</li> <li>➤ Contact Parent if necessary</li> </ul>
<b>Unacceptable Classroom Behaviors:</b>	
<b>Level 2 Teacher Managed: Chronic</b>	
Examples	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Constant talking</li> <li>➤ Significantly interfering with others' learning</li> <li>➤ Consistently not following directions</li> <li>➤ Disrespect to adults</li> <li>➤ Throwing things</li> <li>➤ Teasing</li> <li>➤ Lying/Cheating</li> <li>➤ Inappropriate language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Level 1 strategies</li> <li>➤ Classroom based intervention</li> <li>➤ Loss of privilege</li> <li>➤ Consult with grade level team</li> <li>➤ Behavior Contract</li> <li>➤ Referral to counselor</li> <li>➤ Proactive Incident Report (PIR)</li> <li>➤ Office Referral after 3<sup>rd</sup> PIR</li> </ul>

*Figure 5.3.* Chart displaying the examples of unacceptable student behaviors that should be dealt with by the teachers and the strategies that should be used by the teacher to correct the student's behavior.

**Figure 5.4. Record of the Number of Proactive Incidents Reports and the Reason Given**

9/10/10-10/21/10

Primary Infractions	Total number of Indicated Incidents on PIR forms
Chronic Refusal to Follow Directions	56
Chronic Talking or Disrupting Others	37
Arguing/Talking Back	32
Inappropriate Language	5
Minor Teasing/Taunting	9
Refusal to Complete Work	19
Minor Property Misuse	5
Other	28

\*Majority of Other: Leaving Classroom without permission.

Figure 5.4. Table of the primary student behavior infractions and the total number of Proactive Incident Reports (PIR) written on students by teachers during the first month of implementation of SWPBS.

**Figure 5.6. P.I.R. Proactive Incident Report**

## P.I.R. Proactive Incident Report

Grade	September	October	November	December
K	10	4		
1 <sup>St</sup>	3	8		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	25	12		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10	6		
4 <sup>th</sup>	7	8		
5 <sup>th</sup>	21	23		

Figure 5.5. Morgan PIR Report. Gives the number of PIRs written by grade level during the first two months of SWPBS of implementation in 2010.

During this same period that the above PIRs were written, there were 154 office discipline referrals written; 92 were from transportation and 43 from classroom teachers. Of the total number of referrals, 97 were for disruptive behavior and 29 were for “other disruptive incidents,” which are not defined on the office discipline referrals (ODR) and therefore can be more subjective.

Tasha's frustration bubbles up over what she considers ineffective use of PIRs by the teachers:

Tasha: I wonder what can be done? Is this program really meant for the school or what?

Because –

Deanna: Which program, the PBIS?

Tasha: The PBIS, because it's – and, I don't know if they don't quite understand the PBIS as much as we went over it, because it's the same thing[s]: refusing to follow directions, refusing to follow directions. And, I mean, this warrants a PIR to come down here? I mean, like we have said, what's going on in the classroom? What do you have in place for this child in the classroom before you send them out to the reflection room?

And, I – sometimes I really have to scratch my head sometimes, because I really wonder if there's anything in place? And, if it is, are they really using it? Because, from what I've seen since this has started, is [that] all these techniques can't be used. I mean, you could not have done a timeout in the room, timeout with a partner, you lost a privilege, conference with the student, [write a] behavior plan. You have to use all of these before you send the child to me, or tried at least three of them.

In April 2011, the Team was still talking about PIRs for the month of March. Jessica pointed out that there were too many PIRs being written for behaviors that should have been handled in class

and many of these were for things like chewing gum. This was also verified in by Tasha, who stated,

I don't think they're even going by the matrix. Or, have it put up on their wall the kids [will] be able to see this, you know. This is what's going to happen if you do this. I mean, I told Jessica, I've got so many of them for gum chewing. So many PIRs for gum chewing. That's not even on the list anywhere, I don't think.

You can have – my suggestion was spit it out and take the rest of the gum. You can't get any simpler than that. Tell the child spit out the gum and take the rest of it. They call me – or send a child over here for gum. First thing I say spit it out, give me the rest of your gum and they do it. I don't know if they asked them in a harsh way or a snappy way or whatever to make the child upset, but they can walk in here and anything I ask them to do, nine times out of 10, they'll do it. Unless somebody done really got them upset and they haven't calmed down enough by the time they got to my room. But nine times out of 10, they do what I ask them to do. And it's not that I'm yelling at them; I'm just talking to them and not at them.

I asked Wendy about how effective she felt the PIRs were for the teachers and students and she explained,

I think it has – well, according to [the vice-principal], who was here last year, it has slowed down, I think. How many kids are in the office. But the kids who get those PIRs really rely on them. It's not – once again, it's not changing behavior. It's slowing down those kids from getting office referrals.

The PIRs could turn into an office referral after a student received three PIRs.

Behavioral Interventions at the tier I level should be handled in class by teachers because the behaviors exhibited tend to be minor. However many of the PIRs turned into office referrals because teachers did not have the skills or possibly time to deal with minor problems that escalated quickly and an office referral would remove the student for at least the rest of the day. As Tasha pointed out, chewing gum is not on the list of behaviors that should warrant being sent to the reflection room. Gum chewing truly becomes a problem when students are sent out for such minor offenses repeatedly and then must be sent to the office with a referral. It is these kinds of referrals that will turn into suspensions and, eventually, an unnecessary loss of instructional time.

### **Matrix and Cultural Relevance**

Another explanation for why there were so many PIRs is not just lack of training but also issues stemming back from the Matrix itself. School leadership teams must be trained so that they can supervise the implementation of school-wide positive behavior supports at the universal level. Part of that task is setting up the matrix, which is one of the most important aspects of establishing school-wide expectations. These expectations need to “reflect the values of the schools or community social culture (George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2008)” (Lynass, et al., 2012, p. 154) because cultural relevance is one of the main components of SWPBS. School leadership teams must develop positively stated behavioral expectations and the school staff must identify what the behavioral criteria are for each expectation across school settings.

Lynass, Tsai, Richman, and Cheney (2012) examined the social expectations and behavioral indicators written into behavior matrices from 155 schools located in 12 regionally representative states. The authors found “that social expectations and behavior indicators in schools nationally are more alike than different” (p. 158). This uniformity “challenges the concept

that the social expectations and behavior indicators that schools create contain diverse, locally relevant, or contextually significant content for students” (p. 158). Uniformity of expectations might be the result of standardized training of leadership teams in the universal implementation of SWPBS and that the examples provided by the facilitators are being used in the development of the school’s behavioral expectations without consideration of the school in communities social culture (Lynass, et al., 2012). In order for schools to create behavioral expectations that are culturally relevant they must include “culturally diverse stakeholders who reflect the students various cultural backgrounds” (Lynass, et al., 2012, 159). But the community was not involved in any of these discussions, trainings, consultations or any other activity. Cultural relevance was never even brought up, only the inability of specific students and teachers to go by the rules of the matrix or follow directions.

But the point of SWPBS was not just to follow rules and then write referrals (or in this case PIRs) for students who misbehave. The point was to role model good behavior, to offer incentives, to attempt to uncover the core issue causing the behavior. But the experience at Morgan shows the conflicting part of SWPBIS, that it is so ‘data driven’ that often it becomes only about data and reports on reports, without much else changing in the school.

### **Critiques of SWPBS- Data Driven or Data Only?**

SWPBS is based on positivism, measuring and ranking of students through the use of databases and information collected at the school level. Heshusius (2005) writes that “the idea that one has the obligation to measure in order to know, seen in positivist traditions as the core obligation, is identical to the idea of needing to rank in order to know, for measurement makes the idea of failure concrete” (p.152). This notion seems very applicable when it comes to SWPBS. If researchers have ample data to show positive results, then it proves they did not fail



in their experiments. If the data collected on an individual student shows they have not responded to any proven interventions, then there must be something inherently wrong with the student causing them to fail, not with the system itself.

However, according to Sailor and Paul (2004), PBS was supposed to do the exact opposite. They claim that

PBS differs from more traditional interventions associated with professional practice by viewing behavioral (or any) change as requiring systemic rather than individual interventions. The person thus is not the locus of “the problem.” Instead, the problem emerges as a feature of dysfunctional elements in a broader system. The process of deciding on an intervention to address a problem (e.g., a behavior disorder) involves an examination of elements of multiple units of analysis, including the person’s daily routines, schedules, and social interactions, in a multiplicity of settings. (P. 45)

This sounds exactly like what scholars in Disability Studies in Education have been proposing for a long time. What needs to change are not children, and their disabilities, but the environment, which disables them and puts them at a disadvantage. However, even in the above quote it still seems like the onus is on the student and their particular “disordered” behavior. By ‘environment’, the authors refer to the close environment of the student and not structural issues (like economic or cultural issues, which were likewise never taken into account in the Matrix). I also must admit that even this statement above, with all of its problems, is not even something that I witnessed at Morgan. The interventions were not environment driven. They were not even always students driven. Some were just ‘data’ driven.

Jackson and Panyan (2002) also critique PBS and suggest that much of the research on behavior management is incomplete, misleading, and wrong. For instance, in behavioral

observations, schools often set up some type of school-wide system of “expectations, rules, and consequences as the primary mechanism for ensuring order” (p. 9). These systems will work for approximately 90% of students in the school (which is what the Universal level is all about). But Jackson and Payan contend that those 90% are those who are not likely to present a significant behavior problem in the first place. Given this, Jackson and Panyan (2002) pose the question,

... how is one to judge the effects of implementing certain discipline practices on these students who pose few problems? Some of these essentially compliant students might be responsive to any discipline model regardless of its features, and others are will respond to internal controls that are independent of the school's discipline policies. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty either from research or from the experiences of teachers and administrators whether these discipline "successes" are in any way connected with discipline practices. Yet, considering how success influences perceptions, it is easy to see how the successful 90% can mislead schools or professional communities into viewing their particular discipline models and policies as largely effective and therefore worthy of continuation and dissemination. Over time, what is likely created out of the dissemination of these kinds of experiences is a body of misinformation that "informs" the large-scale discipline practices that occur across public education. (p. 9)

The authors go on to say that if you continually remove students who have behavior problems, then how do you really know if the behavior management system that you are using is working? After an exhaustive review of the literature on PBS, I found that a majority of what is written about PBS has been by just a few authors: Sugai, Honer, Lewis, and Bradley. Moreover, implementation partners include various universities and organizations that are working with the

Department of Education on implementing SW-PBS programs in schools and promoting the use of their tracking system (SWIS) to collect data. These same authors have not only written the *Blueprint*, various manuals, and training materials, they have also conducted most of the existing research on SW-PBS. Conducting studies on their own projects over the past 10 years, they have been able to show that their behavioral interventions are evidence-based and that they establish validity through data collection and implementation of programs with fidelity.

In critiquing Sugai, Heshusius (2005) writes;

I read Sugai in a literal sense of actual proprietorship. The other is literally owned in an epistemological sense: when one owns the only correct way to know, what results from the process is, by extension, one's epistemological possession. The object of the measuring act becomes epistemologically known precisely, and only (positivists believe) because of having been put through the measuring/ranking act. No other ways of knowing (personal, political, cultural, sociological, descriptive, narrative, and knowing through close interactions in day-to-day living), however interesting perhaps, and possibly informative for informal purposes, are acceptable as formal knowledge claims. (p. 153)

Sugai and colleagues stress that interventions used by teachers must follow the protocol and be implemented with fidelity in order to measure its success, however these systems do not take in to account that teachers know their students and may feel that tweaking an intervention would work best for a student which, even if successful would invalidate the intervention.

Teacher interviews about students are collected, but this information is not easily uploaded into the SWIS database. Those who own the data have a powerful influence on the policies affecting students' lives.

So, was Morgan a success story of SWPBS or an utter failure? In terms of fidelity, it seems by the reviewers score, that Morgan was doing really well, at least initially, with implementing SWPBS. But as we have seen, data is not the only story. But I now turn to the end of the story of Morgan elementary. Its demise. In Chapter Six, I will address issues that affect a school's ability to implement state and district initiatives that could improve their status as a "school in need of improvement."

## **Chapter Six**

### **School Closure and Neoliberal Education Reform**

I spent the fall of 2010 attending School-wide Positive Behavior (SWPBS) meetings at Morgan Elementary and talking about the policy with the teachers and administrators there. I planned (and eventually did) continue to do so throughout spring of 2011, but this plan became obsolete rather quickly. In January 2011, I opened the local newspaper to read that Morgan was about to close. I was shocked. The immediate reason for my dismay, to be honest, was personal and professional--I thought about all the ways this would affect my research project. I wondered if I would have to find another research site? Go through IRB approval again? Immerse myself all over in a new school engaging with SWPBIS? But, after the initial shock wore off and I discussed this with other people it dawned on me that this was not a coincidental outcome. The school closing seemed so distanced from my initial dissertation topic of studying the implementation of SWPBIS. But of course, I have come to understand this one more urban school closing as an integral part of how neoliberal education policies are implemented nationally (or should I say not implemented). This chapter traces the process of the initial proposal to close Morgan, attempts made to save Morgan, and then the eventual closure of Morgan elementary as one example of what it means to try to do any kind of meaningful policy change during times of austerity and budget cuts. In this chapter I focus on the process of closure of Morgan and discuss the causes and implications of such processes not just on Morgan, but nationally as well.

#### **The Inevitable Path to Closure: NCLB and Neoliberal Reform**

Morgan Elementary was just one of many urban schools that had been struggling academically as well as behaviorally nationwide. With No Child Left Behind's (NCLB)

unrealistic expectations that all students must be proficient by 2014, the list of failing schools has been growing every year. The first No Child Left Behind Act was signed in to law by President Bush in 2001 to amend certain regulations of Title I in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. David Hursh (2007) writes that the popularity of No Child Left Behind was due to a “larger shift from social democratic to neoliberal policies that has been occurring over the past several decades; a shift accompanied by both discursive and structural change in education and society” (p. 494). Social democratic liberalism, is an approach in which the government provides social and economic policies to ensure the basic needs of its citizens are met through social services, equitable funding of education, and health care. This view of government was a hallmark of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency through the policies of the New Deal, which were instituted in order to shore up the country during the Great Depression and into WWII.

President Ronald Reagan ushered in neoliberal educational reforms with *A Nation at Risk*, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), which, in essence, blamed public schools for the downturn of the economy in the early 80s. Of course, the economic downturn was largely due to the fact that corporations were sending jobs overseas, not because public schools were not able to produce graduates with the skills to do those jobs (Hursh, 2007). According to the report, public education had failed to position the country to compete in a global economy. This became the rhetoric of neoliberals from the 1980s and continuing, it appears, into the future. Neo-liberal education reform policies focus on individualism, competition, and accountability through high stakes testing. According to proponents of neo-liberal reforms, the only way to improve the educational system is to create individual choice, in which data in the form of standardized test scores show which schools are

providing a high standard of education. Armed with this information, the individual (or family) can choose the school they want to attend, thereby creating competition among schools (Hursh, 2007). Activists and scholars have challenged a range of neoliberal reforms such as the common core curriculum, standardized testing, and school closures as being motivated by a desire to open up a market for the privatization of education.

Due to a history of inequitable educational opportunities and a lack of resources for high needs schools and communities, some argue that schools in high poverty areas were set up to fail. Aggarwal, Mayorga and Nevel (2012), for instance, looked at the closing of a high school in New York City, not as an isolated event, but as a result of decades long state driven educational reform targeted mostly at urban schools in poor districts with high numbers of low income minority students. Nationally, many schools were said to be failing year after year, unable to meet the expectations driven by NCLB. Moreover, the lowest performing schools were in urban areas with high enrollments of Blacks and Hispanic students receiving free or reduced price lunches, which are often used as a proxy for social class (Ravitch, 2012). The Center on Education Policy in November 2012 published a report of AYP results for 2010-2011, based on the adequate yearly progress (AYP) data provided to the US Department of Education for that school year. AYP measures whether the school is meeting the criteria set by the State for the amount of students passing State exams. According to the data, 48% of the nation's schools did not meet AYP. This was an increase from 39% in 2010 and represented the highest number since NCLB took effect in 2002. New York had 47% of its schools not make AYP, which was up from 36% the year before. This may seem like a large increase, however there was an even more significant increase between 2009 and 2010 when it went from 12% to 36% because New York State changed the criteria to meet state standards, as well as some of the tests given. .

Although Morgan was not meeting AYP, the district chose not to focus on that aspect as the reason for closure. Instead, the district claimed that it was a budget issue and that closure was needed to save jobs and make space for district renovations. The district had been looking for swing space for schools going through renovation as part of a 2008 grant. The swing space meant that the school being repaired would move to a different location for a year or two. Renting space in buildings not owned by the district was initially considered; however, this proved to be costly. At the January 12, 2011 Board of Education meeting, the Board indicated that there would be a special session to publicly discuss the closure of Morgan with a vote on whether to approve the closure or not. The following day the Superintendent announced that there would be two proposed school closings and that Morgan Elementary was one of them.

The District had been dealing with a budget deficit of \$47 million for the upcoming budget year, which led to devastating budget cuts and a possible loss of 450 jobs, including 150 teaching assistants and 140 teachers (Nolan, 2011). Say Yes to Education, a national non-profit organization, also played a role in the decision to close Morgan. Say Yes hired an outside firm to research how the district spent money and allocated its resources. The firm gathered information for over two months and made recommendations to a budget advisory group made up of representatives from Say Yes, the teacher's union, as well as representatives from the district, city, and county (Nolan, 2011).

The role played by non-profit (and often for-profit) entities in neoliberal school reform is staggering. Hursh (2007) discusses how privatization played a role in NCLB. When schools are failing to make annual yearly progress (AYP) they lose federal funding that they rely on to provide academic support and to pay for the general operation of the school. Instead those funds must be replaced by for-profit and nonprofit organizations to provide services, such as tutoring.



In addition, failing schools risk having their “administration taken over by outside private for-profit organizations” (p. 502).

### **Budget Deficit and Staff Deficit**

One of the stated arguments for closing Morgan was the need to save money. Closing Morgan would save three million dollars and therefore save jobs, as well as create the swing space needed to remodel a select number of schools for which the district had secured grant money. When the board ultimately decided to save Morgan, because of community pressure they made the difficult choice of cutting positions for the following year to partially make up for the shortfall. There had already been approximately 225 full time employees cut prior to the 2010-2011 school year--a fourth of those being teaching assistants. This loss impacted how teachers would be able to do their jobs as well as what services would be provided to students.

Staff shortages, especially teaching assistants, were felt strongly at Morgan already. Sally, a second grade teacher on the SWPBS Team, said that she had 21 students in her second grade class and a part-time teaching assistant that helped her with small group activities. The difficulty presented by a shortage of assistants and substitute teachers meant that if there was a need for an assistant in special education, Sally’s teaching assistant would have to go to the special education room or substitute for a teacher. Sally said that although this kind of support is not something she can count on every day, she could really use it to better meet her students’ needs and to support instruction. Schools that have high need students often need additional supports, but the budget cuts meant less help would be available for the next year. As Sally said, “... I’ve got to count my blessings; I know I will have a job. It might not be pretty on the other side, but I will have one.”

Everyone in the district was being affected by the budget cuts. Robyn spoke to the effects of budget cuts on academics and student behavior at Morgan:

I think, in my opinion, part of the problem last year and this year is that the class size has increased. So you have 28 to 33 kids in a fourth and fifth grade class and that – and you put in that many nine to eleven year olds and with that many different personalities, and I just think behaviors are going to get worse, you know? I don't think – it's not at the primary grades so much, in my opinion, as the intermediate. You can't put that many kids in a classroom. ... The district's expectations remain the same. We want to see high-test scores, we want to see achievement, blah, blah, blah. Are you kidding me? Really? With that many? And, the classroom itself stayed the same size, so you know, it's not like they gave you a bigger classroom. It's the same size you had for your 22. Taking away, but expecting the same expectations.

Andrea, the counselor, was also concerned about how the budget cuts the following year would affect behavior in classes, particularly because there were already staff shortages from the previous budget cuts. She felt the teachers needed support and training to help them deal with problem behaviors in the classroom. Andrea explained that,

“... classroom referrals are the highest, but we really want to just work with the teachers and try to have some context implemented and see what we can do....But next year – and I'm not trying to be a negative person, because I'm a positive person, but I just kind of – I don't like to say worried, but with all the budget cuts, we're not going to have as many teaching assistants, excuse me, in the classroom.”

The budget cuts for the next year would eliminate a large number of teaching assistants. At the time of this interview with Andrea, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade had 200 office referrals even with the number of teaching assistants and two teachers in these classrooms. Without these supports, staff predicted the numbers would be significantly higher. Andrea also said that the cuts would likely take special education teachers out of inclusive classrooms and instead shift the model to provide students only with consultant teachers. Still, she says, “I’m up for a challenge, you know, to help.” Nonetheless, teachers were already pushed to their maximum with the increase in the number of students. Participants worried that further reductions in staff would only heighten the stress on teachers as well as students struggling to meet the demands of NCLB and standardized testing.

PBIS was just one more among the many reform efforts that were put on the shoulders of fewer and fewer teachers, who were more overworked than ever. It was not surprising then that teachers were not very vocal against the decision to close the school, a point I will address at the end of this chapter, as well as in the conclusion.

### **Impact of the Closure Decision on Teachers**

The threat of Morgan school closing and the eventual announcement of its closure in 2011 had a chilling effect on the atmosphere at the school, both among teachers and students. It was half way through the school year and teachers were much more worried about their jobs than about state testing or SWPBS. I asked if the closure was having an effect on the implementation of SWPBS and participants expressed their frustrations with the closure. Sally stated,

I think it is affecting – I think it’s affecting some of the teachers. And, I don’t think it’s just affecting them in wanting to implement PBIS, I just think in everything that has to do with the job. It’s affecting them, yes. And then I

think there are those who have just come to terms with it; it is what it is and let the cards fall where they land. ... And, then, of course, there's that group that are fearful that they're going to get a pink slip in 15 days or 20 days. And that's definitely impacting their—not all of them, there are a couple, I have to say, [who] are coming in and still doing their job to the best of their ability. But, there are, you know, [those who feel like] what's the point?

Sally had been at Morgan for 24 years and although she was feeling the stress from the closure, she was secure in the knowledge that she would have a job in the district. Yet, in speaking with her, I got a sense of real problems with morale in the school. Keeping the staff motivated to improve the school, especially in terms of discipline, was difficult after the announcement. Kate, a teacher of eight years, spoke about trying to "keep things moving":

... I remember having a conversation in a meeting and Jessica was like well, we still, you know, we still have to go on and continue to do this because once the kids are moved to [Washington]—(because that was the plan). We were going to move the majority of our kids to [Washington]. That it [PBIS] would continue to take place there. So we really tried to keep things moving and keep things going in a positive direction. But at that point I think that, you know, a lot of the staff was so just, you know, turned off and upset by the fact that our school was closing that PBIS did go by the wayside for a little while. People started—[they] stopped handing out dollars and there wasn't any reward for the kids who had the dollars and stuff like that.

Morale was low within the school and it was having an effect on some teachers' motivation in the classroom, as well as on their relationships with students. Students too dealt with their own feelings about their school closing. Although I did not speak with students at the school, teachers, staff, and administrators all shared their observations and interactions with students in school. In addition, several newspaper articles documented comments that students and former students made during public meetings, which I discuss later in the chapter. Robyn, a teacher who had been at the school for 18 years, had prior knowledge that the school might close. She explained:

... so when they [school board] voted in January – and, let me also say, all the emails that led up to January were about us closing. So, this is what's going to happen when we close, you know? The next email: "They're going to vote on it. I'll email you as soon as they vote. If they vote to close, we'll send something around so you'll know that" Blah, blah, blah. ... In January we were sent an email that we were closing: "Morgan will close." So, okay, so then you go through your stages. You go through, "Oh my God"--you know, like, "I can't believe this" – right? And then, "What am I going to do?" What am I going to do, you know?

Even though Robyn had been getting emails about the possible closing, it did not lessen the shock and the initial feeling of panic. Robyn knew that she would have a job somewhere in the district, but Morgan had been her home for 18 years and she had developed a positive relationship with the kids and their families.

Teachers and staff were dealing with the stress of a possible job loss during a time when teaching positions were hard to come by. Teachers who had been with the district for many years were secure in the knowledge that they would have a job somewhere in

the district. For some there was the option for early retirement. But, for those teachers and staff that had been in the district for less than five years, there was a heightened level of uncertainty. Budget cuts can lead to “teaching force uncertainty and can detract from teachers’ efforts to engage with reform when it is not clear they will have a job” (Harris, 2012, p. 207). Swachuk (2011) relates similar situations across the U.S. where teachers have been affected by budget cuts and the threat of job loss takes a toll on morale. The teachers in his study also expressed frustration at the seemingly futile effort of entering data and going through the process of SWPBIS in the midst of an eminent school closing. What was the motivation to continue with initiatives like SWPBIS that required more work and would not guarantee that the school would even stay open? They might not even see these kids again after the end of the school year.

Teachers at Morgan continued to focus their energies on state tests because their jobs depended on it. However many teachers had stopped participating in SWPBS and continued sending students to the office for offenses that should have been handled in the classroom. The level of stress that adults were dealing with may have had a trickledown effect, heightening the stress levels of the students that they interacted with and lowering their tolerance for student misbehaviors. Wendy spoke about the “emotionality of the kids” because the school has been an “anchor” for them. She believed their insecurities came out in terms of their behavior. She said that students began to vocalize their frustration saying, “I hate this stupid school, I’m glad they’re closing!” Sally said her students were “tantruming” more and saying, “I hate this school. I hate this school!” She acknowledged, “It’s not the school, you know, but I do think it is impacting them. And generationally, a lot of their families, this is all they’ve known. I mean, I’m already on second generation in families of teaching them.”

### **Impact of the Closure on the Community**

Although the teachers struggled with the knowledge that their school would be closing, many were aware of how the devastating budget cuts were impacting jobs in the district and that even if the school stayed open, there was a possibility that they would be transferred at best, or lose their jobs entirely. The community was also in shock and felt betrayed by the district. Parents and community members were mostly unaware of the discussions taking place behind closed doors at the board meetings. Furthermore, the announcement of the potential closing with only one day to voice their ideas and opinions about the closure was seen as just another way for people in positions of power to chip away at the institutions that bind their community together. The community's voice was not represented at the table while these important decisions were being made, even though a closure would no doubt affect their lives in significant ways. January 18, 2011 was selected by the school board as the one date for a public meeting to hear the concerns of community members, as well as school personnel.

The community came out to express their concerns at the January 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. In an article published on minbc.com (xxx, 20<sup>6</sup>11) after the meeting, parents were quoted as saying, "They want to close two schools within the black community. Why are we always the target? It doesn't look good." An eleven year-old also spoke out, "Little kids love that school. My little cousin was watching the news yesterday and he was boo-hoo crying that they were going to close [Morgan]. He said he loves that school." In another article, parents expressed concern over the neighborhood the students would be going to; one parent suggested that the district was "sacrificing our kids." Another parent told the board that the "the community has not been a part of the decision-making process" and they wanted the board to wait until a new superintendent was in place (Nolan, 2011, January 19). At the January 21, 2011 School Board meeting, the

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<sup>6</sup> Citing the source will reveal the school.

board voted four to three to repurpose Morgan and one other school as the swing space, which would save the district three million dollars.

In her study of school closure brought about by neoliberal reforms, Johnson (2012) emphasizes that the state and the people most affected by the closure often do not see eye to eye in relation to the need and implications of the school closures. Johnson describes how the state sees closures as a benefit, even for the students at the school, whereas the community sees these closures as a form of “social death.” Morgan parents also spoke to local reporters about their children as being sacrificed by the district for its own ends.

The community that Morgan belongs to is reduced to a familiar statistic in a national trend that has developed since NCLB. An impoverished neighborhood in an urban area, the area surrounding Morgan is plagued by violence and is lacking resources within the neighborhood to provide for the overall health, food, and safety needs of its members. Taking the school away was another one of the many ways this community was disenfranchised and disempowered. After the decision was made, the community and teachers protested the decision. They went to Albany (the state capital) for Education Lobby Day to protest cuts in education funding and to ask the state to reject tax breaks for the wealthiest New Yorkers (Cain, 2011). A member of a community advocacy organization expressed the views of many minority communities around the nation when she said, “It's not OK to balance the state's budget on the backs of our school children. Our children deserve to have a quality education that prepares them for college and careers” (Cain, 2011).

At the March 9th, 2011 Board meeting, the PTO president attended the meeting and asked the Board to once again reconsider closing Morgan. A parent and a teacher asked the Board to save jobs by making budget cuts that would be less likely to negatively impact the



instruction of students. It was at that meeting that the Board voted to reverse their decision to close Morgan, even though the decision would mean more job cuts for the district. The change in the decision to close Morgan was an emotional rollercoaster for not only the staff, but the community as well. Parents who had fought hard to keep the school open were relieved--some shedding tears at the board meeting, according to an article by Nolan (2011). The Board said it had changed its decision due to protests of parents, city councilors, and the National Action Network.

### **“The Closer”**

Teachers were left with a feeling of uncertainty about the future of the school. Jessica, a SWPBS leader, spoke about how the threat of closure had an impact on her and SWPBS:

“January, things kind of like came to a screeching halt. And, then, it was all of a sudden in March, [we realized], ‘Oh my God, everything’s a mess. What are we going to—now we’re staying open—What are we going to do?’ You know, so we definitely, you know, lost a lot of momentum this winter...A lot of people—a lot of activities and things were being canceled, changed, kyboshed—those kinds of things. So, hopefully that won’t happen next year.”

Still, Jessica tried to remain positive about the following school year after things almost fell apart as a result of the prospect of a school closure. Robyn, however, expressed her uncertainty about the future of the school:

“So, you know, when you asked me if we’re happy to stay open, I mean, since December, it’s been, “You’re closing; You’re closing; You’re closing.” Four months, you know--three and a half months later, “Oh, you’re going to stay open”... A lot of us who have been here a long time were—[we] accepted it. And,

so, we were ready to move on. And now, like you said, another year. So, emotionally, next year this time, are we going to be going through the same thing? And we've been on the chopping block [before]. We went through this about six years ago when we had to go down to the school board and fight to stay open. So, I don't – I think they want us to close. They just haven't found a reason that's going to fly to close us. Like instead of just saying, this is why you have to close: because your test scores are down...[The reasons they gave] didn't fly with anyone. Just come out and say, "You've got to close."

Robyn's frustration about the closure threat comes out in this quote and there is a sense that the change of heart by the District was just a reprieve in what would become an inevitable event. This was reiterated later in the interview when Robyn discusses the "closer."

In a previous quote from Robyn, she mentioned that the school had been on the "chopping block" before and seemed to indicate that it was just a matter of time before the school would close. When I spoke with Robyn about administrative support, especially in regards to the principal, Mrs. Jacobs, and particularly for SWPBS, she replied, "My impression was, she was brought here to close the school. And that's basically what she [Wendy] told us when she first got here." She said, "They call me the closer because they bring me to schools to close them." That's what she told us in September ....And, the last two schools she's been to, she's closed. So no, she told us she was brought here because she's the closer, not because she's a PBIS and discipline expert."

I was surprised when Robyn said this because in a meeting prior to school starting, Wendy said that she believed in SWPBS and was there to help the school in the implementation process because she had experience with it in other schools. When I asked Wendy about Morgan

closing she laughed and spoke about the rumors that follow her, “I’ve been in schools that closed. Like last year, I was in a school that closed and the joke around the district was that I’m a closer, you know what I mean ... because I closed [Wayne] and I closed [Brown] and I’m closing down [Morgan]... This staff did not implode, do you know what I mean?”

From this quote it seems that Wendy had several past experiences working in schools that had closed. She also recounts that some of the faculty in those schools did not handle the closing well. When I spoke with Wendy it was after the District had reversed their decision and were going to keep Morgan open. There were two months from the time it was announced that Morgan would close and the announcement that it would stay open. As a new principal, Wendy may not have been aware of the impact the closure was having on her staff and faculty. She instead continued to speak about how the school was doing a good job with implementing SWPBS and the things they would work on the following year.

### **Administrative Turnover**

Wendy had been brought in after the last principal at Morgan had retired. She was one of the five principals that had been in and out of Morgan over the past several years. Schools in urban areas often experience a high turnover rate in administrators and teachers. Morgan was no exception. Further, because Morgan was a school under review, there were plenty of administrators rotating through. High turnover leads to inconsistency, a lack of stability and support, and a sense of uncertainty. Sally, who had been at the school for 24 years, said that for ten to 12 years Morgan had the same administrator and she knew “what was expected and what you were dealing with.” Knowing what the expectations are for the school keeps staff as well as students focused. Leadership can make the difference in academic achievement as well as discipline. Robyn explains,

Well, part of the problem is we've been through a lot of administrators. This, I think [Wendy], is our fourth or fifth administrator in just about six or seven years. So it's – that's really tough. And the principal that hired me was here for probably 13 of my 19 years was a hard-liner. I mean, it was just dealt with. I mean, [if you were a student] you didn't want to go to the office. You just didn't want to because she was very strict. There was a lot of respect for her; there was a lot of respect for the staff. And then when she retired and we got a new principal—and that one was here for three years. And, then, we had another one that was here for a year—so that's how it was dealt with. It was the principal that dealt with the discipline and the kids just knew. [They] just knew what was expected of them. And it's hard with so many administrators; it just changes all the time. An administrator doesn't get to put their mark on the school as far as what they expect because they're never here long enough.

It is the mark of good leadership that helps schools to become and stay successful. Morgan had a steady administrator for approximately 12 years and after she left the school lacked stable leadership and struggled to meet adequate yearly progress. Morgan had been a school under review for the past nine years.

After the implementation of NCLB, principals, as well as teachers, expressed feeling demoralized from the pressures to meet the demands of federal, state, and local level goals of proficiency without appropriate supports in place needed to meet the needs of low-income schools (Ravitch, 2013). Referring to the MetLife survey of teachers and principals in 2013, Ravitch (2013) claimed, "Most principals reported that their lives had become more difficult in the past five years and a third said they were likely to leave their jobs or change occupations" (p.

215). In a study of principals in NYS that were successful in improving their schools, Jacobs et al. (2005) found that these principals "... were leaders who managed to set and maintain a sense of purpose and direction for their schools and generally exerted a positive influence on people's willingness to follow their lead, even in the face of challenging conditions" (p. 616). Morgan faced many challenges over the years and, as research shows, without strong leadership it would be hard to implement initiatives in the school that could be sustained and implemented with fidelity if teachers do not have the support they need within the school.

### **Closing Again**

On April 18, 2012 the school board once again voted to close Morgan citing the financial savings of \$3,000,000. This time the board stressed the fact that Morgan had been in sanction status for ten years and at the time of the board meeting was once again unable to meet AYP. During the 2010-2011 school year, the school district that Morgan Elementary was part of had been under review for eight years. In fact, since NCLB took effect in 2002, the district, as well as Morgan Elementary, had been labeled as failing. The obvious question we might ask is if more and more reforms are put in place to fix schools and more and more schools are unable to meet the expectations, then might there be something wrong with the reform or the measures of success? Yet, according to the NYS Board of Regents who put out a news release on November 10, 2011, the Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch and the NYS Education Commissioner John King Jr. were quoted as blaming the districts and schools for the increase in the number of those on the needs improvement list statewide. The press release quotes the Board of Regents Chancellor, Merryl H. Tisch as saying:

This is just further evidence – as if we needed any – that we must move forward to reform our schools and change what is happening in our classrooms...Our goal

is to ensure every student graduates from high school college- and career-ready. These numbers show that too many schools are moving in the opposite direction. The Regents have adopted strong new reforms to improve student performance and increase accountability. If student performance doesn't improve, schools must be held accountable. We are watching. (NYS Board of Regents, November 10, 2011, para. 3)

The State Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr. further stated,

The Board of Regents is developing an NCLB waiver proposal to establish a better accountability formula that incorporates growth... But we cannot and should not accept disappointing proficiency rates at the school or sub-group level. (NYS Board of Regents, November 10, 2011, para. 4)

The new superintendent stated that she was recommending that the school be closed because of a lack of funds to provide the students with the extra resources needed to improve its chronically low student achievement. The superintendent, aware of the protests by the community the year before, said that, "Hopefully they [parents] will understand that that I am trying to make a decision that's in the best interest of their children" (Nolan, April 9, 2012, para. 5). With a budget shortfall of approximately \$35 million and a 9.5% increase for the budget year, additional layoffs were also going to happen.

At the budget hearing, when the community heard once again about the planned closing of Morgan at the end of the year, there was not the outcry there had been before. Members that had fought so hard to keep Morgan open the year prior had conceded after being informed of Morgan's poor performance: When data was presented that only approximately 20% of the students taking the test met the standards, it was inevitable that the school would not stay open.

Leaders in the movement apologized, publicly stating, "I'm ashamed I didn't understand the data last year. It was never laid out" (Nolan, April 10, 2012, para. 5). In addition, the president of the parent teacher's group said, "I come to you humbly to say I made a mistake" (Nolan, April 10, 2012, para. 7). She had not been presented with the data the prior year about the poor academic performance of the students coming out of Morgan. She stated, "Never once last year were we told that our kids were in an academic dilemma" (Nolan, April 10, 2012, para. 11). With the "truth" finally out, the community agreed that Morgan Elementary would close at the end of the year.

### **Conclusion: Reform and its disastrous consequences**

We might ask at this point, why were community members now suddenly apologizing for fighting against the injustices and oppression forced upon them by local and state officials? Where were the teachers in trying to stop Morgan from closing? And, what had been done either at the state level or the local administrative level in the past 10 years to help Morgan be successful in meeting AYP requirements of NCLB?

As discussed earlier, the teachers at Morgan were already stretched quite thin. The increased demands of data driven educational policies mandated by NCLB, were met with high administrative turnover and a lack of administrative or financial supports. It is therefore easy to see why teachers at Morgan were disgruntled when SWPBIS was introduced. It was just one more thing for them to collect data on and try to implement without adequate resources. When they heard that the school might close, their motivation for implementing SWPBIS decreased to a halt.

It is not surprising that teachers were not at the front line of opposing the closure of Morgan. The teachers and other school personnel, although dedicated to their students, did not

take up collective action to defend their school, because many felt disempowered and overworked. Others may have feared losing their jobs. As Aggarwal, Mayorga and Nevel (2012) demonstrate in their own chronicle of school reform, the teachers may have also internalized some of the guilt of working in a so called failing school, as they were blamed for the weak student performance and were often portrayed and perceived as part of the problem or even the primary the major reason for school failure.

The teachers also had difficulty organizing because of their poor working conditions (lack of resources to meet the needs of the students, pay cuts, less job security etc.). Aggarwal, Mayorga and Nevel (2012) also discuss the ways in which discipline referrals and new interventions played into the distancing of the teachers from the process of closure. They show that school officials used discipline tactics that made it hard for teachers to build positive relationships with the students or the community--acting as discipline enforcers and not educators. These factors led to a lack of dialogue between teachers, students, and the community, which led to a lack of collective opposition to the school restructuring and closure. A similar process occurred at Morgan with the introduction of SWPBIS, which was ironically supposed to prevent the school from closing and help them show improvement in school performance.

So called “turnaround” policies in school boast the idea that school closure, restructuring, privatizing and then potentially reopening as a Charter School, for instance, would lead to improved results for the school and/or the district. Johnson (2012) questions the reasoning and outcomes of school reform and discusses the school closures as “shock therapy” for the district and the state (a term she takes from Naomi Klein in relation to the US treatment of ‘failing’ economies overseas and the need to instill capitalism within them). She traces the term and strategies of education reform known as “turnaround” from business models that needed to turn



around corporations quickly. It is now applied to the education field as part of the “marketization of education” or neoliberal reforms, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

The truth is that Morgan had received a lot of interventions as a failing or low performing school. When I started my research I had no idea that Morgan was already on a restructuring plan when PBIS was introduced to the school. According to data from NYS Department of Education Accountability Status report from 2008 - 2009 school year, Morgan was undergoing the second year of restructuring during the 2009-10 school year. Restructuring (under NCLB) is supposed to improve the performance of the school and help prevent its closure. Under NCLB the State sends a Joint Intervention team (JIT) assess the school’s educational program and make recommendations in the development or modification of a school Restructuring Plan for schools that have not been making AYP. Schools that are restructuring must offer supplemental educational services and public school choice if available (meaning that parents can pull their children out of the school and send them to a ‘better performing’ school if they are able to do so).

But Johnson (2012) critiques the idea of restructuring. Rather than restructuring, the process in fact deconstructs the infrastructure, severing relations and social networks of the schools. When you add the negative news reports and a growing bad reputation of the school with a lack of resources (which were the problem to begin with), you are left with a recipe for disaster. What accompanies this downward spiral is also the idea that the root of failure is either in the students and their families (or communities) or within their teachers, as everything else is made to change (except the issue of resources of course). Further and, as Johnson (2012) chronicles, this perception follows the students even after the school closes. Thus, the process is very stigmatizing and often people in the community (including students, families, as well as teachers) buy into this idea of the failing students, which is very hard to recover from (in terms

of self-esteem and also appeals for resources). It puts the onus of proof on individuals (and their failure) instead on systems that are inequitable and inaccessible.

In short, we are left with a deficit model of education, where any deficit in learning is intrinsic to the child, which is the root of special education. The deficit model has been linked “with the historical devaluing of minorities in the United States that these two deficit lenses now deeply influence the special education placement process” (Harry & Klingner, 2007, p. 17). According to Harry and Kilngner (2007) “the deficit model is based on the normative development of students whose homes and communities have prepared them for schooling long before they enter school. Children who come to school without that preparation, and without the continuing home support of family members who can reinforce the goals of schooling, face expectations that they have not had the opportunity to fulfill” (p. 23). When students are not prepared to meet the expectations then the deficit is within the child, the family, and the community, not in the structure of the system (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Blanchet, 2005; Harry & Klingner, 2007).

It is through Dis/Crit, combines disability studies and critical race theory, that that we connect race and dis/ability to structural inequality (Annamma,, Ferri, Connor, 2013). Blanchet, Klingner, & Harry (2009) point out that a majority of students of color attend schools that are racially segregated and located in high poverty areas where the schools do not have the resources or funding equal to the schools attended by their White counter parts have access to. The quality of education “...seems to be affected by the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability” (Blanchet, Klingner, & Harry, 2009, p. 389). In using Dis/Crit, we can examine how, during this time of neoliberal education reform, students of color continue to be over-represented in special education and in exclusionary discipline practices as schools struggle to meet AYP. In

predominately urban areas school restructuring and closures are forms of punishment by the State; through No Child Left Behind policies there is a whole population of children being left behind, the ones where racism and ableism intersect.

Understanding school reform as punishment, in the context of my study, is of course very ironic, as SWPBIS was supposed to be the way to decrease the labeling and punishment of students, particularly marginalized students. In Chapter Seven, I conclude this study with an overview of the study, an analysis of my findings, as well as limitations and implications of the study.

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study is an ethnographic case study of one school, Morgan Elementary, an urban school district in New York, which was implementing SWPBS during the 2010 – 2011 school year. I initially became interested in SWPBS because I learned that national grassroots organizations such as Dignity in Schools Campaign, Advancement Project, and American Civil Liberties Union were all advocating it as a way to reduce discipline referrals and suspensions in schools, especially for students of color and those with those with disabilities. Changing the school discipline code is an important step to stopping the school-to-prison pipeline. SWPBS was promoted as a framework that incorporate restorative justice practices that had the potential to reduce violence, expulsions, and arrests at school. I wanted to learn how SWPBS was implemented in schools and what strategies were employed that would turn around a school with high numbers of discipline referrals.

My project began as an investigation into a school-wide behavior management framework based on positive behavior supports, referred to as school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS), but ended as an ethnography that also encompasses and chronicles the effects of neoliberal school reform policies on a struggling elementary school. Although the project changed due to circumstances beyond my control, I believe I was able to answer my original research questions, in regards to this particular research site. The following research questions drove my examination:

1. What are the factors that influence implementation of SWPBS in an urban elementary school?

2. How do factors related to school-based reforms mandated by No Child Left Behind, affect an underfunded urban school serving mostly students of color, as it implements SWPBS?

3. How do schools, administrators and teachers negotiate expectations for fidelity of implementation, which is seen as central to successful SWPBS, given the local conditions and the day-to-day realities of one urban school?

In the remainder of this chapter I will summarize my findings from the research in relation to each of the research questions I proposed for this research project. In addition, I will discuss the limitations of the research and its implications. Specifically, I will discuss how comprehensive school reform created the façade of choice for a failing school. I will then address some struggles I observed in regards to the implementation of SWPBS, especially in regards to fidelity, funding and training (as discussed in the previous chapters). I will end this section with a discussion of what makes SWPBS implementation successful and how and why the school in this study was unable to meet these expectations.

### **Factors that Influence the Implementation of SWPBS**

**Comprehensive school reform and the issue of choice.** No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandated that school districts and states collect data on each school on students' performance on grade level state tests, as well as all student discipline incidents that resulted in office discipline referrals, suspensions, arrests, restraints, and expulsions. The U.S. Department of Education determines which states are in compliance with NCLB regulations and releases a list of how districts and individual schools are performing on the academic standards set by each state. When a district is not meeting state standards, then they are placed on an 'in need of improvement list.' Being on this list means that the district has to come up with a plan, as part of

comprehensive school reform (CSR) in NCLB, to show what the specific scientifically-based interventions will be used to improve the district and the targeted schools. Morgan had been on the persistently low performing school list and was in its second year of restructuring when SWPBS was being implemented. A restructuring plan was created by the district to assist Morgan in meeting AYP, and SWPBS was one of the scientifically-based interventions the district agreed to enact. According to the principal of Morgan, the district had been implementing SWPBS in specific schools when it was first placed on a list of needing improvement in 2002.

### **Reform Initiatives are not a Choice**

Thus, as indicated in Chapter Two, comprehensive school reform is not actually a choice for schools that are struggling to meet annually yearly progress (AYP). Federal funding through Title I is now connected to the requirement in these reforms that schools implement and demonstrate improvement each year. Districts and schools can lose out on additional funds from the federal government if CSR improvement plans are not followed. Therefore, schools must “implement scientifically proven reform strategies” (CSR, Para. 8), such as response to intervention (RTI) and school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) once they are included on lists of underperforming schools. In the following quote taken from Chapter Four, the principal, Wendy, explains why the district and Morgan were implementing SWPBS,

Well, I got involved with PBIS, why? Because we were – we had to. We were on a list. So, when you’re on a list, the money, the resources get channeled to fix the school that’s on the list to get [the school] off the list. So, it wasn’t like the district was adopting something. This is the first time that the district initiative—2010 and 2011 was really the first time that we got a list that was clear that every school will do something around this.

Although the use of SWPBS and RTI are strongly suggested by NCLB and IDEA as ways to improve schools both in terms of behavior, and academics, SWPBS and RTI are not a choice when it comes to CSR. These are, thus, mandates from the district and state when schools are labeled as failing.

The promotional materials on SWPBS often claim that schools are choosing to implement it. In 2013, for example, there were 19,054 schools implementing SWPBS (Horner, 2013). Yet, if districts are ‘choosing’ to implement SWPBS is it because they are under review for low performance? Are poor urban schools, primarily serving students of color (Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2005)? Certainly students at Morgan, as well as the district as a whole, were mostly students of color. In the district, only 10% of the student population were White and 79% Black, mostly from low-income families (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2012). It was approximated that in the 2010-2011 school year 81 - 90% of students at Morgan were from families receiving public assistance and 84% of the students received free lunch (NYSED, 2012).

It is interesting to note that in a study done by Frank, Horner, and Anderson (2009), found that,

socioeconomic status of the student population was not significantly associated with first year implementation outcomes. In fact, very low SES schools were almost as equally likely to attain 80%-80% status within one year as their very high SES counterparts. Although very low SES schools were somewhat under-represented in this sample, the hypothesis that socioeconomic status significantly advantages (or disadvantages) schools’ implementation efforts was not supported. (pg. 6)

I used the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) to examine how Morgan was implementing SWPBS. As noted in Chapter Five, the SET is not necessarily a reliable instrument for assessing successful implementation of SWPBS (Vincent, Spalding, & Tobin, 2010). Morgan's SET evaluation score, for instance, was 93 out of 100. As Jessica commented, "the teachers sure know how to answer those questions right [on the SET]" further illustrated its inaccuracy. It is also important to note that most of the studies done on the validity of SWPBS are based solely on quantitative data and written by the developers of SWPBS.

In regard to implementation of SWPBS at Morgan, the SET was not a reliable instrument for measuring the fidelity of implementation of SWPBS. I could not, however, find qualitative research done on the measurements for successful implementation of SWPBS. I was with Morgan's SWPBS team during the implementation phase and I know the progress that was being made and the issues that got in the way. The score for successful progress on the SET is 80 and Morgan got a 93, a perfect score of 100 in several areas. At the end of Morgan's first year of implementation they were not at a stage to use intervention strategies with students were consistently receiving office referrals. In addition, I am skeptical of Frank, Horner, and Anderson's (2009) finding that "very low SES schools were almost as equally likely to attain 80%-80% [SET] status within one year as their very high SES counterparts" (p. 6) since the data is taken from large data sets and used statistical analysis to make comparisons between schools from different socioeconomic status (SES). Morgan is a "very low SES school" and numerical data cannot begin to capture the reality of what takes place in schools and districts that are under such immense pressures and have a student population that experience this level of poverty. When comprehensive school reforms are applied to districts and schools that are progressing,



despite the fact that they are lacking resources, it is the numerical data that is the basis for success. Numerical data determines if a school will thrive, restructure, or ultimately close.

### **Reform and closure.**

Although the school closure was an unexpected outcome, as discussed in previous chapters, it posed a unique, albeit unwelcome opportunity as well. Even though my original research questions and the design of this study were focused on the implementation of SWPBS in an urban school in New York State, the announcement and eventual outcome of school closure shaped the study in profound ways. The relevance of this reality is not unique to Morgan, however, as closure is an outcome faced by many schools that are similarly situated. As suggested at the beginning of this concluding chapter, implementing SWPBS and other mandated programs are not presented as choices, but tied to federal policies, such as No Child Left Behind and other top down education reforms. Mandates such as “turn around schools”, discussed in the previous chapter go hand in hand with cuts backs to education and policies that aim more toward privatizations of schools. These reforms have done little to improve the situation for struggling schools or the students who attend them. Therefore it is more than just a coincidence that Morgan closed just as it was beginning to (ineffectively) implement SWPBS. Morgan, like many schools like it, never had a fair chance.

### **The Struggle to Implement SWPBS: Fidelity v. Reality**

**Funding for SWPBS.** Funding for implementing and sustaining SWPBS is important to its success. The *Blueprint* specifically states that, “establishing accurate and durable implementation of systems level change efforts can require as much as three to five years” (p.33). Thus, funding must be sufficient enough to cover activities for at least three years. Underfunded and under-resourced schools can apply for grants to support initiatives directed at failing

schools, however that money may not go to the professional development needed to properly train staff to implement the initiatives. School districts, particularly under-resourced ones like Morgan's large urban district, often experience budget shortfalls. These districts are often scrambling to save jobs, restructure schools, and update curriculum to meet state standards. In an informal conversation with one of the external SWPBS coaches, I was told that the district would not invest any more money into Morgan for SWPBS because the district was likely to close the school. The district was focused on training for high stakes testing, so there was not time in the schedule for SWPBS training or funds to support activities and after school workshops. Moreover, Morgan only received \$500 from a SWPBS grant. The district still had the CSR money to use, however they made the decision to invest it elsewhere.

Districts in budget crisis may pull money from schools that need more support because they want to shore up the schools that they see as having a chance to move up. NCLB allows for money traditionally used for special education to be used for CSR initiatives such as RTI and professional development and school districts have more discretion as to where the money goes. Lack of funding results in an inability for schools to correctly implement and sustain any school initiative.

**Training.** In order for SWPBS to be successful the district and individual schools require training to establish capacity, which means schools need to be able to “self-assess for specific programmatic and staff development needs and objectives, develop a training action plan, invest in increasing local training capacity, and implement effective and efficient training activities” (Blueprint, 2004, p. 37). According to Dunlap (2001), in order for there to be successful implementation there must be training at both the state and local level. Moreover, since SWPBS is linked with Response to Intervention, there should be academic gains associated with SWPBS.

Scott & Martinek (2006) make the connection between improvements in academic achievement and discipline data, but this requires SWPBS to be properly implemented with fidelity.

The *Blueprint* indicates schools develop coaching capacity in the district. This is described as the “ability to organize personnel and resources for facilitating, assisting, maintaining, and adapting local school training implementation efforts for both initial training and on-going implementation support” (Blueprint, p. 24). As discussed in Chapter Four, “if the school-based PBS team does not have the training necessary to teach the entire personnel, there can be inconsistencies when teaching students the expectations and difficulties in maintaining SWPBS (Bradshaw et al., 2008; George & Kincaid, 2008)” (pg. 8). Morgan Elementary provided little formal training for the SWPBS Team prior to the implementation of SWPBS. As stated in Chapter Four, this lack of training contributed to difficulties implementing SWPBS.

### **Key Features for Successful Implementation**

In Chapter Five I discussed some of the key features of SWPBS that must be in place for successful implementation of universal level (Tier I) interventions (Lewis & Sugai, 1999) these include:

1. Defining school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior;
2. Actively teaching school-wide behavioral expectations to all students;
3. Monitoring and acknowledging students for engaging in behavioral expectations; and
4. Correcting problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of behavioral consequences.

Next, I discuss how Morgan’s difficulty in meeting some of the features was a direct result of inadequate training of teachers and students.

**Defining and teaching school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior.** According to the model, school expectations must be taught to students at the beginning of the school year, along with booster training several times a year to ensure that the students will know what's expected of them. Morgan used a tool called, "the Matrix," which included three to five behavioral objectives (such as be respectful, be safe, be responsible) and observable expectations for those objectives across a wide array of settings (school-wide, classroom, cafeteria, etc.). Training the students should have reduced the amount of discipline problems at Morgan. Teachers and the students however were rushed through a half a day of instruction on how to comply with the school expectations. The students were supposed to be retaught the expectations in a school-wide training several times during the year, but this did not happen. The lack of extensive training for staff and students affected consistent reinforcement of behavioral expectations. As a result, Morgan continued to have high discipline reports. In fact they increased from the previous year. Rather than institute a unified criteria, teachers used their own criteria for rewarding and disciplining students. Monitor and acknowledge students for engaging in behavioral expectations. Since there was little training for the staff on SWPBS, the matrix, or the reward system, there were also no specific protocols established for rewarding students when they were doing well.

**The reward system in SWPBS is generally a school-wide token economy.** Teachers give out 'Morgan Dollars', for example, to students who are following behavioral expectations or being a good citizen. As the school year progressed at Morgan, however, the teachers gave out fewer dollars or used them as bribes. As a result, students began to lose interest. There were activities that the students could use dollars to participate in, however, there were rarely any tangible incentives (despite the fact the school store was a topic of contention at most of the

SWPBS meetings at Morgan). In addition, there were students who never got to participate in activities because of discipline problems and these were the students who most needed positive interactions with peers.

**Correct Problem Behaviors using PIRs (Proactive Incident Reports).** A proactive incident report (PIR) is designed to keep students from getting automatic office referrals for minor misbehaviors. Within SWPBS These PIRs are used so that students can have a way to take a break and speak with someone about what happened and what could be done to alleviate the problem. When the student got a PIR, the teacher would have to fill out a form for the student indicating what the minor infraction was, what they believe the motivation for the behavior was and, what consequences were assigned to the student before sending them to the reflection room.

The lack of thorough training on filling out the PIR forms at Morgan and instructing teachers about how to use them likely led to the overuse of PIRs to handle minor behaviors. After the first two weeks of implementation, Tasha expressed concern in a team meeting that the teachers needed a reminder on how to fill out PIR forms. A month into the school year, Tasha once again stated that there needed to be a refresher course on what the levels of behaviors were and how to fill out the PIR forms;

I don't think they're even going by the matrix. Or, have it put up on their wall the kids [will] be able to see this, you know. This is what's going to happen if you do this. I mean, I told Jessica, I've got so many of them for gum chewing. So many PIRs for gum chewing. That's not even on the list anywhere, I don't think.

Teachers' lack of training on how to fill out the forms, as well as clear understandings about what behaviors warranted a PIR and what behaviors should be handled in class, caused an overflow of students in the reflection room. In addition, teachers at Morgan were not supposed to

write office referrals if they could help it so many of them used PIRs as way to remove the students from the classroom, because three PIRs or more equaled an office referral. The more office referrals a student received the more likely they would be suspended. This is important because SWPBS is supposed to reduce the number of discipline referrals, not increase them. The intermediary interventions simply slowed the inevitable suspension at Morgan rather than eliminate or reduce them. These findings therefore point to several important implications regarding the implementation of SWPBS in urban schools in times of school reform.

### **Limitations of Study**

There are several limitations to this study that warrant some discussion. The first limitation is that it is a case study of one urban school working through the initial phase of implementing SWPBS. Although there are specific guidelines for implementing and sustaining SWPBS at the state, district, and school levels, along with training materials and protocols that are the same, each school is its own entity. Thus, there are a myriad of factors that can affect how successful SWPBS will be at each school. In addition, the research site began the process of closing during the first year of the study. The announcement of the closure came in January 2011 and then the cancelation of it in was in March 2011. At the beginning of the 2011 – 2012 school year it was decided that Morgan would close in June 2012. The implementation process of SWPBS continued but deteriorated as the staff and students struggled with the impending closure.

### **Implications of the Study**

The barriers to implementing SWPBS at Morgan could be conceived as a local failure, which led to the untimely closure of the school, but this was not the case. As I have demonstrated, comprehensive school reform requires adequate funding and training. Neoliberal policies contributed (rather than ameliorated) the lack of available resources for adequately

funding SWPBS. Due to threats of closure, managing students' behavior fell to the wayside and was not a priority.

The conclusions based on this study leads to several recommendations for schools implementing SWPBS, particularly those facing similar issues. In terms of implementation of SWPBS, my study shows the importance of principals and other administrators to become more involved in the hands-on implementation of SWPBS. The importance of constant training and reinforcement (not just once or twice) for teachers and the students also cannot be underestimated.

**On the school district level.** Professional development for teachers and staff in culturally relevant positive behavior supports is essential. In addition, it would be highly beneficial to build community and relationships with so called difficult or challenging students by using principles of restorative justice. The focus in Restorative Justice on involving the school community in resolving conflicts and not placing blame or punishing the “offender”, but coming up with a mutual solution to restoring relationships and building trust (Hopkins, 2002) is a promising practice. Restorative Justice also helps focus on establishing relationships and trust, offers a more meaningful approach to dealing with difficult behaviors and then ineffective reliance on token economies in SWPBS. It is also essential to change the discipline codes so that students are not penalized for minor infractions that are not specified (the more ‘subjective’ discipline categories).

**At the school level.** Administrators must play an active role. The more involved administrators are, the more there will be buy in and fidelity amongst teachers and staff. School leaders must also actively involve community in decision-making and not just alert them after decisions have been made. Of course, such relationships should be developed by building trust

and not sending misinformation, as was done during the closure announcement at Morgan. At Morgan, there was inconsistent and infrequent communication between the SWPBS team and the administrators, leading to misunderstandings and ...

Teachers. It would be important to create classroom communities that are built on constructivist approaches, which focus on social interaction, community-building, and trust (Danforth and Smith 2005). Instead of reward systems that are proven to be short lived, constructivist approaches can be used to problem solve situations as they come up. Such approaches cultivate relationships of trust that are meaningful and lasting. It would also be beneficial for teachers to understand their students with disabilities from a social model perspective and not a deficit oriented one. Building coursework in disability studies in education and Dis/Crit, within teacher education programs could help facilitate this shift in perspective.

Future research. Lastly, as this is one of only a handful of ethnographic or qualitative studies on SWPBS, more scholarship is needed to help understand the lived experiences of implementing school reforms, like SWPBS, from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. This research would strengthen existing literature on the topic and be helpful to schools who are implementing school reforms in challenging school contexts.

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude this dissertation, I cannot help but reflect back on my own teaching career as a special education teacher for high school students who had difficulty meeting the behavioral expectations set by the school and school district. In other words, my students were primarily labeled as emotionally disturbed. My own teacher training had been in elementary education with a certification in special education, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Although my student teaching internship took place in a regular education second grade classroom and a



prekindergarten segregated classroom for students with developmental disabilities, I never taught in an elementary classroom. Once I took the job as a high school special education teacher of students labeled as emotionally disturbed, I became labeled myself as someone who was special enough to teach these kids. Over the years I heard people tell me that it takes a special person to do what I do or that I had the patience of a saint. There was nothing special about me other than the fact that I had been one of these special kids at one time, and maybe I still am.

I had received behavior management training in two separate courses in my undergraduate degree: one for the elementary classroom and another focused on working with students labeled as emotionally disturbed or behavioral disordered. In my semester long class on emotionally disturbed kids, we spent a lot of time not only learning about why children might be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, but also how to modify their behavior. Behavior contracts, social skills training, token systems, and lists of consequences to choose from when students were exhibiting specific behaviors were all addressed in the texts or were behavior management strategies we learned in class. It took me several years as a teacher before I learned that there was more to getting students to behave than manipulation, coercion, and punishment.

This type of behavior management not only frustrated the students, it frustrated me as well, to the point that I would almost lose my temper. I took a step back and reflected on my own background and why I have become a teacher in the first place. I knew I needed to learn about the students and build relationships with them, not as the White savior teacher, but as someone who really genuinely cared and wanted to help them through the rough spots that come with not quite fitting in to the rigid structure of the school system. When things are done to children they will push back, but when we work together we build relationships (Kohn, 1998). School-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) is a framework that promotes positive interactions between

adults and students, meaning that adults modify their own behavior and the students' behavior in a positive way, thus reducing punitive discipline measures that remove students from the class.

I must end this study with the unfortunate admission that school-wide positive behavior supports is not the panacea that much of the literature claims it to be. A majority of the research is based on statistical data and small case studies conducted by the founders of SWPBS and their subsidiaries around the United States. These research studies are usually done within a school for a short period of time, and are based on survey data, such as the SET, and school discipline data. It is important that research on SWPBS be more extensive and longitudinal, using qualitative methods, which can help illuminate what is happening in the schools.

This research is nonetheless important because it tells the story of a public school struggling to meet state standards, follow a school restructuring plan created by the district and state, and implement school reform initiatives, all the while facing closure. This is a story of many public schools in urban areas that are working hard to meet the needs of their students in an age of neoliberal school policies. I hope the struggles of my participants help to smooth the way for others facing similar challenges in this age of neoliberal reforms.

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**APPENDIX A: IRB Consent Form**

Dear Administrator/ Teacher/ Support Staff:

My name is Deanna Adams, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

I am interested in learning more about the process that the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) Team goes through in implementing a SW-PBIS system, as well as the policies and procedures that are adopted by the school, and the acceptance of the system by faculty and support staff in the school. I will be conducting this research over the 2010 - 2011 school year and during this time I will be doing participant observations of PBIS team meetings and whole school meetings in regards to the development of the system as well as the school-wide implementation and training. Observations during lunch in the cafeteria and in the hallways in-between class times will occasionally be done in order to see how people are enacting PBIS during those times. In addition I will be conducting interviews with teachers, administration, and staff during this time.

You will be asked to participate in two to three in person interviews in person over the course of the school year. I anticipate that each interview would take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. All information that you share with me will be kept confidential. By checking the box at the end of this letter, you are giving your consent for your interview to be recorded. Any audio files will be transcribed by the researcher, after which they will be erased. I will use a fictitious name to identify your responses and I will omit any identifying information from our interview transcripts. Also, in any articles I write or any presentations that I make on the topic, I will not



reveal details that could be used to identify you in any way (such as where you live, where you teach, and so on).

A benefit of participating in this research is that you may be helping us to better understand the experiences of educators developing and implementing SW-PBIS systems, and how we can improve these systems so that success and sustainability can be achieved. Although there are no immediate or tangible benefits to your participation, I hope that you find participating in the study and contributing to our knowledge base a positive experience.

The risks to you of participating in this study are negligible. I will minimize any discomfort you might have in sharing your experiences by allowing you to pass on any question that you do not wish to answer. You will also have the right to refuse to take part in the study at any time without penalty. If you decide to take part, but later decide that you no longer wish to continue, you reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact the investigator, Deanna Adams at (315) 569-3569 or the project advisor, Dr. Beth Ferri at (315) 443-1465. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

Thank you for your interest in this project. I look forward to talking with you.

Best regards,

Deanna Adams, M.S.

All of my questions have been answered, I am over the age of 18 and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_ I agree to be audio taped.

\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio taped.

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

---

Printed name of participant

---

Signature of researcher

---

Date

---

Printed name of researcher

**APPENDIX B: Semi-structured interview guide**

- 1) Tell me about your background in education. How long have you been in working in an educational setting? How long have you worked at this school? Where you at in schools prior to coming to this one? What positions have you had in the past?
- 2) Tell me about your school. What is the population at your school? Is there community involvement in school?
- 3) The school is starting to implement positive behavior supports in your school. What do you know about it? What have you heard?
- 4) What has the behavior management like in the school before the decision to implement PBS?
- 5) Who made the decision to implement PBS in your school? How were you informed of the decision?
- 6) What made you decide to be on the implementation team? Did you get formal training in what PBS is and how it works? Who helped you in the preparing for the implementation? What guided you? What support did the administration provide?
- 7) How were the school staff trained in implementing PBS? Where they involved in any of the decision making?
- 8) How were the students taught the new school-wide behavior system?
- 9) Where did the protocol come from for the implementation? Was it created by the team? How does PBS work in your school? Do you have a rubric? What are the incentives for the students? How is discipline handled differently?
- 10) How have staff responded to the use of PBS in the school?
- 11) How have students responded to the use of PBS in the school? Is there a difference in behavior? A reduction in the number of referrals?

12) Has there been community involvement in to the implementation of PBS in the school?

How have parents been involved?

13) What has been successful and was needs to be improved?

## APPENDIX C: Morgan's SET

### School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) Scoring Guide

School \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 District \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pre \_\_\_\_\_ Post \_\_\_\_\_ SET data collector \_\_\_\_\_

Feature	Evaluation Question	Data Source (circle sources used) P= product; I= interview; O= observation	Score: 0-2
<b>A. Expectations Defined</b>	1. Is there documentation that staff has agreed to 5 or fewer positively stated school rules/ behavioral expectations? (0=no; 1= too many/negatively focused; 2= yes)	Discipline handbook, Instructional materials Other _____ P	
	2. Are the agreed upon rules & expectations publicly posted in 8 of 10 locations? (See interview & observation form for selection of locations). (0= 0-4; 1= 5-7; 2= 8-10)	Wall posters Other _____ O	
<b>B. Behavioral Expectations Taught</b>	1. Is there a documented system for teaching behavioral expectations to students on an annual basis? (0= no; 1= states that teaching will occur; 2= yes)	Lesson plan books, Instructional materials Other _____ P	
	2. Do 90% of the staff asked state that teaching of behavioral expectations to students has occurred this year? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2=90%-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
	3. Do 90% of team members asked state that the school-wide program has been taught/reviewed with staff on an annual basis? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2=90%-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
	4. Can at least 70% of 15 or more students state 67% of the school rules? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 70-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
	5. Can 90% or more of the staff asked list 67% of the school rules? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2=90%-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
<b>C. On-going System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations</b>	1. Is there a documented system for rewarding student behavior? (0= no; 1= states to acknowledge, but not how; 2= yes)	Instructional materials, Lesson Plans, Interviews Other _____ P	
	2. Do 50% or more students asked indicate they have received a reward (other than verbal praise) for expected behaviors over the past two months? (0= 0-25%; 1= 26-49%; 2= 50-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
	3. Do 90% of staff asked indicate they have delivered a reward (other than verbal praise) to students for expected behavior over the past two months? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
<b>D. System for Responding to Behavioral Violations</b>	1. Is there a documented system for dealing with and reporting specific behavioral violations? (0= no; 1= states to document, but not how; 2= yes)	Discipline handbook, Instructional materials Other _____ P	
	2. Do 90% of staff asked agree with administration on what problems are office-managed and what problems are classroom-managed? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	
	3. Is the documented crisis plan for responding to extreme dangerous situations readily available in 6 of 7 locations? (0= 0-3; 1= 4-5; 2= 6-7)	Walls Other _____ O	
	4. Do 90% of staff asked agree with administration on the procedure for handling extreme emergencies (stranger in building with a weapon)? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____ I	



Feature	Evaluation Question	Data Source (circle sources used) P= product; I= interview; O= observation	Score: 0-2		
E. Monitoring & Decision-Making	1. Does the discipline referral form list (a) student/grade, (b) date, (c) time, (d) referring staff, (e) problem behavior, (f) location, (g) persons involved, (h) probable motivation, & (i) administrative decision? (0=0-3 items; 1= 4-6 items; 2= 7-9 items)	Referral form (circle items present on the referral form)	P		
	2. Can the administrator clearly define a system for collecting & summarizing discipline referrals (computer software, data entry time)? (0=no; 1= referrals are collected; 2= yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
	3. Does the administrator report that the team provides discipline data summary reports to the staff at least three times/year? (0= no; 1= 1-2 times/yr.; 2= 3 or more times/yr)	Interview Other _____	I		
	4. Do 90% of team members asked report that discipline data is used for making decisions in designing, implementing, and revising school-wide effective behavior support efforts? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____	I		
F. Management	1. Does the school improvement plan list improving behavior support systems as one of the top 3 school improvement plan goals? (0= no; 1= 4 <sup>th</sup> or lower priority; 2 = 1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> priority)	School Improvement Plan, Interview Other _____	P I		
	2. Can 90% of staff asked report that there is a school-wide team established to address behavior support systems in the school? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____	I		
	3. Does the administrator report that team membership includes representation of all staff? (0= no; 2= yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
	4. Can 90% of team members asked identify the team leader? (0= 0-50%; 1= 51-89%; 2= 90-100%)	Interviews Other _____	I		
	5. Is the administrator an active member of the school-wide behavior support team? (0= no; 1= yes, but not consistently; 2 = yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
	6. Does the administrator report that team meetings occur at least monthly? (0=no team meeting; 1=less often than monthly; 2= at least monthly)	Interview Other _____	I		
	7. Does the administrator report that the team reports progress to the staff at least four times per year? (0=no; 1= less than 4 times per year; 2= yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
	8. Does the team have an action plan with specific goals that is less than one year old? (0=no; 2=yes)	Annual Plan, calendar Other _____	P		
G. District-Level Support	1. Does the school budget contain an allocated amount of money for building and maintaining school-wide behavioral support? (0= no; 2= yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
	2. Can the administrator identify an out-of-school liaison in the district or state? (0= no; 2=yes)	Interview Other _____	I		
Summary Scores:	A = /4	B = /10	C = /6	D = /8	E = /8
	F = /16	G = /4	Mean = /7		

APPENDIX D: Morgan’s Matrix

School-Wide Expectations

	School-Wide	Classroom	Cafeteria	Hallway	Lavatory	Arrival/ Dismissal	Bus	Playground
<b>Be Respectful</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Follow all directions</li> <li>*Be an active listener</li> <li>*Take care of school property and materials</li> <li>*Treat each other kindly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Treat each other kindly</li> <li>*Listen to each other</li> <li>*Follow directions</li> <li>*Take care of classroom materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Use manners</li> <li>*Wait patiently</li> <li>*Listen/respond politely to directions</li> <li>*Use indoor voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk quietly</li> <li>*Respect walls and bulletin boards</li> <li>*Use indoor voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Patiently wait your turn</li> <li>*Give yourself and others privacy</li> <li>*Keep bathrooms clean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Wait quietly</li> <li>*Listen to all adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Follow the bus rules</li> <li>*Listen to bus driver and bus aid</li> <li>*Treat each other kindly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Follow all directions</li> <li>*Be fair and share</li> </ul>
<b>Be Safe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk quietly</li> <li>*Bring only appropriate items to school</li> <li>*Keep hands and feet to yourself</li> <li>*Follow all directions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk quietly</li> <li>*Use materials carefully and appropriately</li> <li>*Keep hands and feet to yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk quietly</li> <li>*Keep hands/feet to yourself</li> <li>*Eat own food</li> <li>*Remain in your seat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk quietly</li> <li>*Keep hands and feet to yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Wash hands with soap and water</li> <li>*Keep water in sink</li> <li>*Turn off faucet</li> <li>*Report any concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk to designated area</li> <li>*Use crosswalks/sidewalks</li> <li>*Keep hands and feet to yourself</li> <li>*Report dangerous situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Stay seated</li> <li>*Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself</li> <li>*Use playground equipment appropriately</li> <li>*Stay in approved areas</li> <li>*Signal/Freeze/Walk</li> <li>*Report dangerous situations</li> </ul>
<b>Be Responsible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Take responsibility for own actions</li> <li>*Keep Elimwood School clean inside and out</li> <li>*Be a leader and role model</li> <li>*Follow dress code</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Be prepared</li> <li>*Complete assignments with best effort</li> <li>*Participate actively in your learning</li> <li>*Work cooperatively and independently</li> <li>*Seek help when needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Engage in positive conversations</li> <li>*Keep your table neat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walk directly to your destination</li> <li>*Carry a pass at all times</li> <li>*Keep hallways clean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Clean up after yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Be on time</li> <li>*Use appropriate entrance/exit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Talk quietly</li> <li>*Take care of your belongings</li> <li>*Keep bus clean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Dress for weather</li> <li>*Properly return equipment</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX E: Permission to use PBIS data from the national site



DATE: October 28, 2013

Deanna Adams

RE: Permission to use information from [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org) for educational citations:

This letter gives permission to use the following images for the purposes of dissertation, review of literature, professional development, or other related non-profit endeavors:

- PBIS Triangle or Pyramid- Continuum of Services for School-Wide PBS
- PBIS Circles- 4 PBS Elements
- Flow Chart for Leadership Team (State and District)
- Implementation Levels
- School-wide Systems Circles
- General Implementation Process Flow-Chart
- Behavior Support Elements
- Sustainable Implementation & Durable Results Through Continuous Regeneration

Caveats for using the above images are as follows:

- For research, academic, and professional development purposes
- Not to be used for profit, monetary gain, or other activities that might represent conflict of interest

Not to be altered or given authorship to anyone other than indicated original authors. If authorship not stated specifically, credit and source should be cited as the "OSEP Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support."

For clarifications, questions, or additional information, please contact Project Directors

Rob Horner, [robh@uoregon.edu](mailto:robh@uoregon.edu); George Sugai, [George.sugai@uconn.edu](mailto:George.sugai@uconn.edu).

Sincerely,

Dr. Rob Horner and Dr. George Sugai

Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports  
1235 University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1235  
[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Name of Author:** Deanna L. Adams

**Birth Date:** June 2, 1966

### EDUCATION

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| August 2015 | <b>Ph.D. Special Education</b><br>Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Dissertation: "How positive is Positive Behavior Supports: An Investigation into the Implementation Process of a School Wide PBS System." Advisors: Prof. Beth Ferri; |
| 2011        | <b>Certificate of Advanced Study in Disability Studies</b> , Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.  |
| 2011        | <b>Certificate of Advanced Study in Women and Gender Studies</b> , Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.  |
| 1999 - 2001 | <b>M.S. Special Education</b> , SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, New York.   |
| 1996        | <b>New York State Permanent Teacher Certification in Special Education K - 12</b>  |
| 1991- 1996  | <b>B.S. Applied Learning and Development – Special Education</b> , University of Texas, Austin, Texas  |

### RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Inclusive pedagogy and inclusive education  
 Special Education from a Disability Studies perspective  
 Racism, queerness and classism in Education  
 Analysis of the school to prison pipeline  
 Positive behavior supports; Supporting emotionally disturbed students

### HONORS, AWARDS AND GRANTS

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 2006- 2008; 2009-2010       | Preparation of Leadership Personnel: Pre-Service Special Education Doctoral Program Grant |
| 2005 - 2012                 | Teaching and Leadership travel funds (\$400 annually)                                     |
| Spring/Fall 1995; Fall 1994 | Dean's List, University of Texas  |

### TEACHING AND WORK EXPERIENCE

#### University of Toledo

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Spring 2014 - | <i>Part-time Faculty Women and Gender Studies,</i>                         |
| Present       | <i>Introduction to Gender Studies, This course is an entry level Women</i> |

and Gender Studies Course and covers the history of the feminist movement; the impact of media on gender; violence against women; health; religion; and much more.

Spring 2015 *Transcending Gender*, I designed and taught this special topics course. This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of gender/queer studies and examines historical and contemporary complexities of identity, embodiment, language, activism, and various intersecting social locations for individuals that do not identify with the sex and/or gender they were assigned at birth.

### **University of San Diego**

Summer 2014 *Instructor, Universal Design for Learners*. This is an on-line course for teachers working on their masters degree and certification in Universal Design for Teaching. The course uses a disability studies lens to instruct students on how to prepare lessons that promote inclusion through the use of universal design.

Spring 2014 *Curriculum Developer*, Developed an on-line course on using universal design in the classroom for the universities on-line program teacher education program.

### **University of Illinois-Chicago**

Fall 2012 –  
Summer 2013

*Academic Coordinator for the PhD Program in Disability Studies*  
Advise current students in areas such as class schedules, editing thesis and dissertations, exams, visas, preparing for graduation, tuition and fees, and opportunities for financial assistance. Serve as liaison for students and the department regarding working with the student council, faculty, and other campus departments. Answer questions of prospective students and advise them of admission requirements and resolves application issues. Coordinate the preparation of class schedules with participating departments; coordinate and participate in the recruitment of students for on-campus positions; review and screen credentials of prospective students; and process applications. Develop recruitment and retention materials, including mailings, brochures, program website maintenance, and promotion of the department's activities and services. Develop and maintain a comprehensive student records database and ensure that University policies and standards are met in relation to grades, graduation requirements, admissions, withdrawals, and related issues.

### **Instruction at National Louis University, Chicago, IL**

- Fall 2012  
*Support*      *Instructor, SPE 507: Social/Emotional Development, Teaching and*
- This course is designed to explore social and emotional components of behavior and learning. Historical, political, social, and cultural factors which impact the student and teacher in school and home environments are examined. Legal issues, evaluation, and ethical considerations in relationship to students' social and emotional growth and classroom behavior will be explored. Multiple theoretical positions and pedagogical approaches to individual and school relationships will be discussed. The importance of viewing behavior as communication is emphasized. The interaction of various disabilities and behavior are explored. Cultural and ethical issues relative to the educational process are considered throughout.
- Spring 2012      *Instructor, SPE 527: Individualized Curriculum and Instruction*
- This course addresses the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of individualized curriculum and instruction. It will focus on a planning and implementation process for incorporating general education learning standards, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations to the general education curriculum, ecological assessment, IEP development, systematic instruction, self-advocacy and self-determination.
- Spring 2012      *Instructor, SPE 500: Introduction to Exceptional Children and Adolescents/ Special Education*
- This course provides a fundamental understanding of the historical, legal, philosophical, legal, and pedagogical issues pertaining to the education of students with disabilities. Implications of current laws, public policies and responsibilities of general educators, special educators, administrators, parents/guardians and individuals are addressed.
- Spring 2012-  
Fall 2011      *Practicum Supervisor* for student interns in the alternative teacher certification programs.
- Winter 2012      *Instructor, SPE 506: Perspectives and Foundations of Special Education.*
- Masters level course for students seek alternative certification, special education endorsement, or a Masters in Special Education. Course focuses on the foundational frameworks of special education and the resulting implications on policy and practice.
- Winter 2012      *Instructor, SPE 500: Introduction to Exceptional Children and Adolescents/ Special Education (On-line course)*
- Fall 2011      *Instructor, SPE 506: Perspectives and Foundations of Special Education*

- Summer 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015      *Instructor, SPE 600: Positive Behavior Support for Secondary Students.*  
Developed and taught course for Master's secondary education students that focused on behavior management based on relationship building; positive intervention strategies, functional behavior analysis and behavior intervention plans.
- Spring 2011      *Co-instructor with Prof. Beth Ferri, SED 609: Adapting Instruction for Student Needs*  
Master's level course for pre-service teachers at the secondary level. Topics included social construction of disability, adaptations and modifications to curriculum, universal design, and inclusive pedagogy.
- Fall 2010  
Summer 2010      *Field Supervisor, Department of Teaching and Leadership*  
Supervised student teaching experience in undergraduate inclusive education program and graduate childhood education. Courses: EED 336, EDU 508, and SPE 348.
- Fall 2009 – 2010      *Instructor, SPE 348: Seminar in Severe Disabilities*  
Required course for inclusive education majors. Students get practical experience in the field learning how to adapt and modify curriculum based on individual student needs, as well as developing functional behavior assessments.
- Fall 2008 – 2009      *Co-instructor with Prof. Corinne Smith, SPE 311: Perspectives in Disability.* Required course for inclusive education majors. Provides an in depth coverage of learning disabilities and a variety of disabilities that teachers may encounter in classroom settings. Prepared lessons on topics such as autism, cognitive disabilities, family dynamics, and school structure.
- Fall 2006- 2008      *Teaching Assistant, EDU 203: Introduction to elementary and special education.*  
Covered techniques of inquiry into classroom and school practices and issues related to inclusive education. Focused on application of observation skills in field or laboratory settings.
- Fall 2008      *Co-instructor with Beth Ferri, EDU 409: Adaptations*  
Upper level course for pre-service teachers at the secondary level. Topics included social construction of disability, adaptations and modifications to curriculum, universal design, and inclusive pedagogy.
- Summer 2007      *Instructor: SPE 705, Psycho- Educational Evaluations & Planning for School Aged Children*  
Course was structured as a summer clinic where families came to have the children formally assessed for learning disabilities and recommendations were made that would help the student achieve better in their school.

Supervised graduate students in school psychology and special education through the process of evaluating children, interpreting results, writing reports and making recommendations to parents.

August 2005-  
June 2006

*Field Supervisor, Department of Teaching and Leadership*

Supervised student teaching experience in undergraduate inclusive education program and graduate childhood education. Courses: EED 336, EDU 508, and SPE 348.

### **Other employment and teaching**

2004–2011

Liverpool Central School District, Liverpool, NY  
*Homebound Instructor*

Tutor students who are unable to attend school for medical or behavioral reasons.

Spring 2007

Consultant for *PJ vs. the Board of Regents of the State of Connecticut* civil suit. Hired by the law firm representing PJ in a civil suit against the state for not implementing inclusion policies in the schools

2005-2006

*Reduction of Stigma in Schools* intern

Developed awareness training to be used in secondary schools to provide information on the implications of bullying and harassment on educational outcomes of LGBT youth.

Spring 2005

*Administrative Assistant*, Department of Teaching and Leadership, Syracuse University. *Beyond Access to Mathematics* Achievement Grant; a collaboration between Syracuse University and Syracuse City School District. Collected data on student achievement and teacher training and set up codes and spreadsheets.

2003–2004

Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES, Liverpool, NY  
*Special Education Teacher*

Taught basic academics and life skills to emotionally disturbed students in an 8:1:1 setting. Assessed students for academic abilities and develop Individual Education Plans (IEP) from these results. Met with parents to discuss the needs and goals of their children. Served as a member of the Committee on Special Education and member of the BOCES Shared Decision Making Committee.

1999–2003

Annsville Residential Center, Taberg, NY  
*Special Education Teacher*

Chair of the Committee on Special Education.; Member of the School to Work Committee and the Technology Committee.

Consultant teacher for students in an inclusive setting.

Assessed students for academic abilities and develop IEPs from these

results. Taught social studies, career explorations, computer skills, job readiness skills and GED preparation. Provided special education services for emotionally disturbed and/or learning disabled, incarcerated youth.

1997–1999

Morrisville-Eaton Jr/Sr High, Morrisville, NY

*Special Education Teacher*

Provided consultant teacher and resource room services to learning disabled students in grades 9-12. Assessed students their academic abilities and produced IEPs from these results.

1996-1997

Otselic Valley Jr/Sr High, South Otselic, NY

*Special Education Teacher*

Taught core subjects to low functioning students in a self- contained setting. Provided resource services to learning disabled students. Assessed students for their academic abilities and produced IEPs from these results.

## **SCHOLARSHIP**

### **Publications**

Erevelles, N. and Adams, D ( projected 2015). *Shadow Play: DISCRIT, Dis/Respectability and Carceral Logics*. Annamma, A.S., Connor, D., and Ferri, B. (eds.) In *DisCrit: Critical Conversations Across Race, Class, & Dis/ability*

Morgan, J. J. and Adams, D.L. ( 2013). *Bullying and Students with Disabilities: The Bully, the Bullied, and the Misunderstood*. In Miller, S., Burns, L., and Johnson, T.S. (eds.) *Generation BULLIED 2.0: Prevention and intervention strategies for our most vulnerable students*, New York: Peter Lang.

Adams, D. and Miners, E. (2013). *Who wants to be special? Pathologization and the Preparation of Bodies for Prison*. In Nocella II, A., Parmar, P., and Stovall, D. (eds.) *Critical Urban Education: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline*

Adams, D. and Socha, K. (2012). *Shocking into Submission: Suppressive Practices and Use of Behavior Modification on Nonhuman Animals, People with Disabilities and the Environment*. In Bentley, J., Duncan, J., and Nocella, A. (eds.) *Eco-Ability and Inclusive Education: Nature, Animals, and Disability*, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Stuckey, Z., Adams, D. and Ferri, B. (2009). *LGBT Issues and Disability*. In Burch, S. and Longmore, P. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*. Facts on File

### **Presentations**

August 2015

*Shadow Play: DISCRIT, Dis/Respectability and Carceral Logics*. Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

April 2015

*Shadow Play: DISCRIT, Dis/Respectability and Carceral Logics*. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL

- March 2015      Invited speaker. *Disability and the School to Prison Pipeline*. U. C. Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
- June 2014      *Aversive Technologies and “Bare Life” in Special Education Classrooms*. With Nirmala Erevelles, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, Minneapolis, MN
- June 2012      *Shocking into Submission: Suppressive Practices and Use of Behavior Modification on Animals and Humans*, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, Denver, CO
- May 2012      *Who wants to be special? Pathologization and the Preparation of Bodies for Prison*, Annual Conference Disability Studies in Education, NYC, NY
- June 2011      *Positivism goes to School: Positive Behavior Support for Inclusion*, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, San Jose, CA
- Crip Mates*, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, San Jose, CA
- December 2010      *Disability studies in education: A critical perspective of special education*, International Disability Studies Conference, Tel Aviv, Israel
- November 2010      *How Positive is School-wide Positive Behavior Supports?* 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Peace Studies Conference, Cortland, NY
- August 2009      *Explicating the Ruling Relations that Inhibit Inclusion for Students with Disabilities*, Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meeting, San Francisco
- May 2009      *“There are many destinies”*: *Fictional accounts of autism through lived experience*. Disability Studies in Education (DSE) conference, Syracuse University, NY
- March 2009      *Inclusion Delusion*, American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, Nevada
- December 2008      *Inclusive Education and Social construction of Disability* (Invited talk) Haifa University Haifa, Israel
- March 2008      *How did inclusion become the new exclusion?* Disability Studies in Education (DSE) conference, New York City

- January 2008 *What is Disability Studies in Education?* With Liat Ben-Moshe. Seminar Hakibutzim (Teacher preparation college), Tel Aviv, Israel (invited talk)
- June 2007 Going Beyond Compliance. Poster session, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, Seattle, Washington
- March 2007 “*I should have been a hallway kid*”, with Nicole DeClouet. DSE annual conference , Chicago, IL
- June 2006 Going Beyond Compliance. Poster session, Annual Conference of Society for Disability Studies, Washington D.C
- May 2006 “*Advocating Beyond Compliance*”. With Jagdish Chander, Beth Metcalf, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Jitka Seneca. Canadian Association for Disability Studies Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada.
- March 2006 “*Advocating Beyond Compliance*”. With Jagdish Chander and Beth Metcalf. Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities Annual Conference, Syracuse, NY.
- SERVICE**
- 2008 Member of the Chancellor’s Disability Task Force subcommittee on the hiring and retention of faculty and staff with disabilities in Syracuse University
- 2008 Co-organizer of first regional graduate students disability studies conference, Syracuse University
- 2007 - 2009 Member of the executive committee and Secretary of the board of *Exceptional Family Resources*
- 2005 - 2008 Chair of Program Review and Member of the Board of Directors for *Exceptional Family Resources*; A non-profit agency that assists people with developmental disorders and their families.
- 2005 - 2011 *Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee*, Syracuse University: member of a student group that aims at raising disability awareness; broadening the definition of diversity to include disability and advocating for model accommodation for students with disabilities.
- Spring 2006 Secretary of *Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee*, Syracuse University. The BCCC was recipient of the 2006 *Chancellor’s Public Service Honorary Award*.
- Spring 2006 Associate Vice President’s Working Group, Syracuse University: Member of advisory committee that works with the Associate Vice



President of student support and retention, the 504 Compliance Officer,  
and the Director of the Office of Disability Services

Fall 2006 *Imagine that: Oppression and Resistance in Film*, Syracuse University:  
planned and co-organized a monthly film series on disability and diversity  
in film

Fall 2005 *Beyond Borders: The illusion of normalcy in film*, Syracuse University:  
co-organized and produced a bi-weekly film series centering on disability  
and diversity issues.

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

2006- Present Society for Disability Studies (SDS)  
2006- Present American Education Research Association (AERA)  
2006- Present Disability Studies in Education (DSE)  
2005 - Present The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH)  
2004- Present Council for Exceptional Children