

## **ABSTRACT**

HEADEN, MONICA DOLORES. The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina. (Under the direction of Dr. Tamara V. Young.)

This qualitative multiple case study examines how principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools in North Carolina and how their thoughts about PBIS informed their actions. Guided by the literature on principals and change efforts and sensemaking, this study used individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, questionnaires, and physical artifacts to understand how and why principals facilitate the successful implementation of a PBIS program in their respective schools. Data analysis included within-case analysis and cross-case analysis to identify and juxtapose emergent themes. The findings revealed that principals contribute to the success of their schools by making PBIS a priority, reinforcing expectations, analyzing data, attending meetings, supporting the staff, effectively communicating and collaborating with stakeholders, and gaining stakeholder buy-in. Principals also spent time advocating for the program, monitoring implementation, supporting staff, showcasing and celebrating milestones and creating strong committees. This study also provided explicit examples of how principals go about implementing the PBIS program in areas identified by the SET and demonstrate how schools maintain momentum in sustaining PBIS when there is principal turnover. The attributes of sensemaking most prominent were social, plausibility rather than accuracy, focused on and by cues, identity construction, and enactive of sensible environments. The results suggest that enhanced training programs for principals, details about successful practices, and support for district initiatives facilitate the success of the PBIS.

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The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina

by  
Monica Dolores Headen

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APPROVED BY:

---

Dr. Tamara V. Young  
Committee Chair

---

Dr. Paul F. Bitting  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Kenneth H. Brinson, Jnr.  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli  
Committee Member

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to my parents for their continuous prayers, love, and support. “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Monica D. Headen is a Sanford, North Carolina native and a graduate of Lee County Schools. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English education from North Carolina State University where she also minored in African American studies. She received a Master of School Administration degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2007 and was accepted into North Carolina State University's Educational Administration and Supervision program the following year.

Monica has served as the Education Director of a non-profit organization, and she has conducted workshops and staff development opportunities for students, teachers, churches, and other organizations. She has taught at the middle and high school levels, and she is currently an assistant principal at the elementary level. Her educational interests include principal leadership, teacher quality, school transformation, and student success. She hopes, one day, to inform educational policies at the national level.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A reduction in behavioral infractions, a reduction in office discipline referrals, more time on task for instruction, and an increase in the academic performance of students are common goals for school administrators. These aims are also the primary objectives of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a program that focuses on making schools safer and more effective by establishing discipline systems, reinforcing positive behaviors, and creating a rewards program (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). Essentially, PBIS directly addresses the disruptive behavior of students whose actions interfere with their learning as well as the learning of those who witness the behavior. Because suspensions and expulsions do not necessarily improve student behavior, PBIS has become a popular proactive approach to addressing discipline issues in schools (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Muscott et al., 2004).

In the PBIS framework, school-wide behavioral expectations are created and articulated, and students are given incentives for meeting those expectations. Positive behavior is rewarded within a management system that also encourages the use of data for decision-making (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009). PBIS is a federal initiative supported by the United States Department of Education which provides a plethora of resources to states and school districts that have adopted the program. There is a Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports through the Office of Special Education Programs, for example, that provides schools with capacity-building information, as well as, “assistance with identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective school-wide disciplinary practices” (OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports, 2010). There are also support networks at the state level, district level, and school level in the form of in-school coaches, district coaches, and regional coordinators.

In North Carolina, PBIS began in August, 2000 as part of the state's federally-funded State Improvement Program grant. By the end of 2009, there were 737 schools implementing the program in North Carolina, representing approximately 93% of 115 counties and local education agencies (Reynolds, Irwin, & Algozzine, 2009). Although there is extensive participation in the program and state-level consultants, regional coordinators, district coaches, and school coaches to assist with implementation, the PBIS program has not been successful in all school environments.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the thoughts and actions of principals who have successfully implemented the school-wide PBIS program in elementary schools in North Carolina, thereby helping schools who want to implement the program learn from those who have done it successfully. This study focuses specifically on PBIS in elementary schools deemed as exemplar—the highest level of PBIS program recognition—by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). By using the criteria established by NCDPI, this study will not need to evaluate the success of PBIS implementation for the schools presented herein. The criteria for success have already been decided and successful PBIS schools in North Carolina have already been identified. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explain how schools achieved exemplar status.

As with any reform initiative or program designed to bring about positive school changes, the role of the principal is paramount to the success of PBIS. Principal involvement

and leadership is one of the components used to determine whether a PBIS program is evaluated as successful (OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2010). In fact, in the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), the chosen instrument for conducting the yearly assessment of the PBIS program, 11 of the 28 questions on the scoring guide are directly tied to actions of the administrator (OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2010). In addition, the PBIS interview guides contain two questions directed at students, three questions directed at PBIS team members, seven questions directed at staff members, and twenty-one questions directed at administrators (administrator questions account for approximately 58% of the evaluation). With so much of the program's success hinging on the actions of the principal, understanding *how* principals make sense of PBIS and how these thoughts influence their actions to implement PBIS in their school is tantamount to understanding how to successfully implement PBIS. As such, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?
2. How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?

Much of the literature available about the program discusses the essential components that must be included during implementation and provides step-by-step guidelines for schools who are interested in its implementation (e.g., Handler et al., 2007; Muscott et al., 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2004; 2006). There is also a plethora of research describing the extent to which a PBIS program is effective in a specific school or locale (e.g., Bohanon et al., 2006; Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; Horner et al., 2009). However, there is little information about the role that principals play in contributing to the success of exemplar

PBIS sites. This study seeks to address this gap. A key advantage to examining exemplar sites is that it will allow us to “illustrate the possibility that is masked by the typical case” (Firestone, 1989, p. 162).

### **PBIS in North Carolina Elementary Schools**

This study focuses specifically on PBIS elementary schools deemed as exemplar schools by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). NCDPI has established the criteria for success for schools that have chosen to implement the PBIS model, and there are three levels of recognition: green ribbon schools, banner schools, and exemplar schools. In order to be recognized as an exemplar school, schools must complete the requirements for green ribbon schools and banner schools, and they must complete all of the PBIS program training modules. In addition, they must score at least a level 3 on the Implementation Inventory and achieve 95% on the SET. Further, schools who achieve exemplar status must have four data sources which show improvement for at least two consecutive years. Behavioral, attendance, and academic data are required data sources, and the fourth data source is at the school’s discretion (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.).

By focusing on schools identified as exemplar by NCDPI, the success of PBIS implementation and the identification of successful PBIS schools have already been decided. A key advantage of conducting case studies of success stories is that we get a glimpse of the possible. As Shulman (1983) noted, “the well-crafted case instantiates the possible, not only documenting that it can be done, but also laying out at least one detailed example of how it was organized, developed, and pursued” (p. 495). According to Hatch (1998), “stories about successful and sustained school improvement are rare, but the tales of unrealized expectations and failure in reform efforts are legion” (p. 4). Nevertheless, there are good

examples of case studies of exemplar sites in educational research (e.g., Borko, Wolf, Simone, & Uchiyama, 2003; Kelley & Protsik, 1997; Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000). Complementing the growing literature on exemplar sites in education, this study provides two detailed examples of exemplar PBIS schools so that those who aspire to the same level of success can build upon information that explains the factors contributing to success both within and across sites (Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000).

This study will focus on elementary schools because there is evidence that elementary schools, in general, have a higher rate of success implementing the PBIS program than schools at other levels (Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; Muscott et al., 2004). For example, of the 55 North Carolina schools receiving exemplar status during the 2009-2010 school year, 1 was a high school, 15 were middle schools, and 39 were elementary schools (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). This may be, in part, because as Flannery, Sugai, and Anderson (2009) surmise, school levels differ “in a number of ways, including how staff work together, how schools relate to their community, and how district policies and procedures are implemented” (p. 177).

In addition, research shows that younger children are more susceptible to programs targeting behavior than older youth (Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002). When these challenging behaviors are targeted and resolved early, the long-reaching effects can contribute to the student doing better in school academically and behaviorally throughout early childhood and adolescence; increasing social acceptance and competence skills, reducing office discipline referrals, and increasing graduation rates. In contrast, “young children with untreated behavior problems often experience significant adjustment problems and psychopathology later in life” (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010, p. 86). As

Dunlap, Lewis, and McCart (2006) explained, “it has become widely understood that persistent, challenging behaviors in early childhood are associated with subsequent problems in socialization, school adjustment, and academic performance, and that these problems can continue to affect adaptation in adolescence and adulthood” (p. 1). That is, elementary school students with untreated behavior problems often become middle school students and high school students with untreated behavior problems, and the behaviors become more severe as they grow older (Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Two lines of inquiry inform this study: (a) principals and change efforts and (b) the use of sensemaking in principal decision-making. These approaches will be used to understand the role principals play in the successful implementation of the PBIS program in exemplar elementary schools. Scholars have made substantial progress understanding principals as instructional change agents (e.g., Fullan, 1982; 1985; 1999; Firestone, 1989; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), and there is also research on sensemaking and its use by organizational leaders (e.g., Burch & Spillane, 2003; Burch, Theoharis, & Rauscher, 2010; Grisoni & Beeby, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Yet, current studies provide little information about how principals use sensemaking to guide the successful implementation of the PBIS program. As with many school reform efforts, implementation can be problematic without the vision and commitment of the school principal (Firestone, 1989; Murphy & Datnow, 2003).

## **Principals and Change**

Change happens easily in some schools but not so easily in others, and Rallis and Goldring (1993) argue that “the principal is the prime catalyst in bringing about meaningful change” (p. 18). The way in which a principal approaches change and how much effort they expend in bringing it about can have a bearing on its success. Schools are impacted by internal and external forces in ways that they have not been in the past (e.g., national curriculum standards, more site-based management, a reduction in positions due to budget cuts) and “in response to these changing organizational contexts, principals, if their schools are to be active and positively changing schools, must take on new roles and revise their leadership styles” (Rallis & Goldring, 1993, p. 19). Principals must not only be able to lead effective change, they must be willing to change as well if necessary.

Top-down leadership has given way to teacher leadership, parent and community involvement, and public accountability, and while many principals would like 100% buy-in from school stakeholders, Ackerman, Donaldson, and van der Bogert (1996) argue that “the principals’ challenge is not to forge total agreement. Rather, it is to find ways of creatively harnessing the energy created by the tension of advocating for change while respecting the legitimate interests and needs of each person” (p. 100). This study will consider the important role that the principal plays in implementing the PBIS program and how they successfully navigate the change process.

## **Sensemaking**

The basic definition of sensemaking means to make sense of events and circumstances (Weick, 1995). This concept will be used as a lens to help explain the ways in which principals make sense of PBIS and the school environment and how their

understandings impact their decisions concerning the implementation of PBIS. As the sensemakers for their schools, Ackerman, Donaldson, and van der Bogert (1996) maintain that:

Their success at leading hinges, to a great degree, on their ability to see clearly the school's core functions, to evaluate events in light of those functions, and to help the members of the school community conduct their work and their relationships in ways that serve these core functions. (p. 1)

Although there is a plethora of research on sensemaking and its use by organizational leaders, this study utilizes the seven characteristics that Weick (1995) associates with the sensemaking process:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

Evidence of these characteristics will be identified and explored in order to understand the role that principals play in contributing to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools.

### **Overview of Methods**

This study takes on a qualitative, multiple case study research design. A qualitative approach is often selected when there is an opportunity to study participants in their natural setting, a need to tell the story from the participants' point of view, and when it corresponds

to the nature of the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). According to Yin (2003), the case study method is the preferred method when *how* and *why* questions are being posed, such as with this study. In addition, case studies are useful when there is a need to examine the context of a case in order to get a deeper understanding of the situation and what it means to those involved (Merriam, 1998). In order to paint a complete, in-depth picture of the cases being examined, this study involves semi-structured, individual interviews and focus group interviews. It also entails the study of physical artifacts and the use of questionnaires to gather baseline data and background information. Stake's (2005) approach to the multicase study—utilizing within and cross-case analysis—helps guide this research.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Practical Significance**

Merriam explained that “insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (1998, p. 19). By studying the processes by which principals aim to bring about the successful implementation of school-wide PBIS in elementary schools in North Carolina, this study will offer valuable insight to those schools who wish to achieve the same levels of success. As Shulman (1983) argued, case studies of exemplary sites can provide practitioners with operational details of successful practices. This study will not only identify the actions that bring about successful implementation of the program, but it will also shed light on the thoughts that led to those actions. For the inexperienced principal and the veteran administrator alike, I hope to provide somewhat of a synopsis on lessons learned and promising practices for implementing PBIS. Effective

principal behaviors, implementation strategies, and keys to sustaining the program offer practical insight, but they also inform the literature on PBIS as well.

### **Theoretical Significance**

The research on the PBIS program that addresses principal behaviors, implementation, and keys to sustaining the program largely approach these concepts from a *what* standpoint rather than a *how* standpoint, which is often the case with research on school improvement, principal leadership, and implementation (Donmoyer, 1985; Fullan, 1982; 1985; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). It is not sufficient to just study the *what* of leadership; “an in-depth analysis of the practice of school leaders is necessary to render an account of *how* school leadership works” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, p. 23). For example, there are directives pertaining to what a principal has to do if they want to implement the program, but there is a lack of information about how the principal is supposed to accomplish the tasks at hand. This study will contribute to the knowledge base on PBIS by (a) clarifying *how* principals go about successfully implementing the *what* and (b) using the sensemaking theory to illuminate why—examining how their actions and beliefs are tied to their thoughts and feelings. Going beyond the training guidelines to describe the stories of how principals involved in the day-to-day activities of the PBIS program make it work should provide a more in-depth understanding about implementing PBIS that is largely overlooked in the literature. Moreover, according to Dimmock and O’Donoghue (1997), examining:

The why and how principals do what they do, the problems and dilemmas experienced in performing their work and how they set about solving or coping with

such problems...holds considerable promise for contributing to the reshaping and improving of training programmes aimed at preparing better administrators. (p. 19)

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study consists of two case studies, and thus the findings are not generalizable to all schools. School cultures differ in tangible and intangible ways. Leadership factors, teacher perspectives, and differences in the student population can and do often determine (directly or indirectly) the successful implementation of initiatives undertaken. As Fullan (1999) noted:

Transferability is complex [because] successful reforms in one place are partly a function of good ideas, and largely a function of the *conditions* under which the ideas flourished. Successful innovations...fail to be replicated because the wrong thing is being replicated—the reform itself, instead of the conditions which spawned its success. (p. 64)

Additionally, case study methods such as interviews reflect the perceptions of the participants, not necessarily reality (Weick, 1995). Even with the sensemaker, it is less about what is true and accurate and more about what is possible. Further, there is a reliance on participants' recall and their willingness to speak candidly. Equally important, interviewer effects may cause the respondent to feel the need "to bring the occasion off in a way that demonstrates his or her competence" (Dingwall, 1997, p. 59), producing data that has been constructed rather than experienced.

Finally, focus group interviews rely on the assumption that participants get along well with one another and are comfortable expressing their views in a group setting (Morgan, 1998). To the extent that this is not the case, another limitation of this study is created.

Building a rapport with participants and ensuring confidentiality will help minimize these limitations and increase the degree to which they feel comfortable describing their true thoughts, feelings, and experiences with PBIS in their school.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Implementation Inventory.* An assessment used by schools to evaluate the level of implementation of school-wide positive behavior support (Horner et al., 2009).

*Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).* Also referred to as Positive Behavior Support (PBS), School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), and School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), PBIS is “focused on the design of environments that promote desired behaviors and minimize the development and support of problem behaviors” (Sailor, 2009, p. 4).

*Sensemaking.* The making sense of situations, circumstances, and events in order to determine the best course of action (Weick, 1995).

*School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET).* A research instrument used as a “direct observation index of the extent to which a school is implementing SWPBS primary tier prevention practices” (Horner et al., 2009, p. 136).

### **Chapter Summary and Overview of Study**

Chapter 1 presented an overview of this study. Specifically, it defined PBIS and briefly described its history of implementation in North Carolina. The chapter related the purpose of this study and research questions, and it presented a brief synopsis of the theoretical frameworks informing this study and the methods used. Finally, the practical and theoretical significance of the study and its limitations were discussed, and key terms were defined.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the PBIS program and its essential components. It provides an in-depth view of the literature informing this study, and it concludes with a synopsis of case study research. Chapter 3 describes the research methods for the study along with a justification for the research design. It also outlines the recruitment and selection processes for participants. Lastly, Chapter 3 explains the data collection process and procedures for analysis and concludes with a researcher subjectivity statement.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of the schools involved in this study and presents the findings by questions, themes, participants and sites. A within-case analysis of each school is presented, followed by a cross-case analysis of the two sites. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the key findings, followed by Implications and Limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with directions for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter begins with a synopsis of the PBIS program, followed by an overview of principals and change efforts. The importance of the principal in the implementation of the PBIS program is also discussed. Sensemaking and its use by principals in decision-making is addressed, and the chapter concludes with an overview of case study research.

#### **The PBIS Program**

##### **Overview and Origin**

PBIS is a systems approach aimed at teaching social behaviors, reducing disciplinary infractions resulting in suspensions and expulsions, and creating safe and orderly schools with the objective of increasing the academic performance of students (Irwin & Algozzine, 2005). In the PBIS framework, school-wide behavioral expectations are created and articulated, and students are given incentives for meeting those expectations. Positive behavior is rewarded within a management system that also encourages the use of data for decision-making (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009).

In much of the early literature, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is referred to as Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS and SW-PBS). SWPBS focuses on implementing the program at the universal, school-wide level—the first of the three tiers of intervention. SWPBS is distinguishable from the secondary and tertiary tiers of intervention in that the secondary level focuses on targeted interventions for students who are at risk for developing problem behaviors, and the third level or tertiary tier offers intensive systems of support for individual students (Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, & Leaf, 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Muscott et al.,

2004; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). However, the term SWPBS is often used interchangeably with the term *PBS* to denote an all-inclusive model. *PBS* became universally known as PBIS throughout the United States after a letter written by the Public Broadcasting Service (“*PBS*”) threatened legal action based on trademark infringement (M. E. Mangum, personal communication, May 12, 2010).

According to Dunlap, Carr, Horner, Zarcone, and Schwartz, “PB[I]S emerged in the mid-1980s in response to (a) escalating concerns over the use of aversive procedures and (b) the desire to produce more meaningful and sustainable outcomes in complex community settings” (2008, p. 683). Although strides were being made involving treating people with disabilities and severe behavioral disorders, many of the successes involved punishment type stimuli such as electric shock (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009). During this same time period, there was growing discontent with state institutions used to house the “mentally retarded,” and there was an overriding theme of “emancipation, with the American civil rights movement as a driver” (p. 6). These conflicts resulted in calls to find socially acceptable methods to deal with the severe behaviors of persons in community-based settings such as schools. There was a desire for a “scientifically grounded technology of nonaversive behavioral intervention [and] PB[I]S became the name associated with research and practice dedicated to development of this technology” (p. 8).

Spawned by findings that came out of a national research and training center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, PBIS has its roots in applied behavior analysis (ABA), which is based on the assumption that human behavior can change. It relies on behavioral, cognitive, biophysical, social, developmental, and environmental psychology to develop empirically proven intervention practices (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009).

Although it was an approach first used with severely disabled persons, “it was extended through controlled research with students with emotional and behavioral disorders and severe emotional disturbances, young children with disabilities, as well as with numerous other populations of individuals with behavioral challenges” (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009, pp. 10-11). PBIS has evolved over the past decade as a multi-tiered model with expanded purposes, and its features and components have also expanded and evolved. Much of the literature on PBIS focuses on the core features of the program, its effectiveness, and its implementation and program fidelity in various environments.

### **Core Features**

There are different definitions of PBIS and its core features; however the definitions have similar elements. According to Carr and colleagues, “PBS is an applied science that uses educational methods to expand an individual’s behavior repertoire and systems change methods to redesign an individual’s living environment to first enhance the individual’s quality of life and, second, to minimize his or her problem behavior” (2002, p. 4). Further, according to Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, and Sugai (2009):

Positive behavior support is a technology with four core, defining features: (a) application of research-validated behavioral science; (b) integration of multiple intervention elements to provide ecologically valid, practical support; (c) commitment to substantive, durable lifestyle outcomes; and (d) implementation of support within organizational systems that facilitate sustained effects. (p. 4)

Generally, PBIS aims to modify the school environment by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive changes in staff and student behaviors (Bradshaw, Koth,

Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). Systems may include such components as reinforcement and data management, and procedures may include such mechanisms as office referrals and training.

According to Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, and Leaf (2009), there are seven critical features that schools implementing the program should be aware of: (1) the formation and functioning of a collaborative PBIS team, (2) technical assistance from a behavioral support coach, (3) clearly defining expectations for positive student behavior, (4) defining behavioral expectations which are taught to all students, (5) development of a school-wide system for rewarding students exhibiting expected behaviors, (6) creation of an agreed upon system for responding to behavioral violations, and (7) development of a formal system for collecting, analyzing, and using disciplinary data.

**Three tiers of intervention.** PBIS seeks to enhance a school's ability to prevent disruptive behavior by creating and sustaining a school-wide universal level of primary supports, a secondary level of targeted interventions for students who are at risk for developing problem behaviors, and intensive tertiary systems of support for individual students (Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, & Leaf, 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Muscott et al., 2004; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). The three-tiered support system "follows a public health approach whereby two levels of targeted and indicated programs are implemented to complement the universal school-wide components of the model" (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009, p. 101).

The primary prevention tier involves creating and articulating school-wide behavior goals and expectations, monitoring student behavior, and rewarding those students who meet the expectations in the classroom and non-classroom setting. Faculty members are highly involved in implementing the practices, measuring the behavior of students, and using

collected data to inform decision-making. The secondary level of support is primarily designed for students at-risk of developing problematic behaviors and who could benefit from low-intensity interventions. At the tertiary level, individualized interventions which often involve family and community interventions are put in place for students at high-risk of developing problematic behaviors (Horner et al., 2009; Muscott et al., 2004; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010).

### **Program Effectiveness**

PBIS has been endorsed and disseminated by the U.S. Department of Education and many states' departments of education. It is currently operating in over 9,000 schools in over 44 states in the United States, as well as operating in several countries around the world (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). It has been implemented at the pre-school, elementary, middle, junior high and high school levels with varying degrees of success.

The PBIS initiative began in North Carolina during the 2000-2001 school year as part of the North Carolina State Improvement Program funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) when North Carolina received a grant for personnel development and system change. Seven reading centers were proposed along with one mathematics center, and one behavioral support center. Oak Grove Elementary in Durham Public Schools was chosen as the pilot for the behavioral support center. At the time of initial implementation, Oak Grove Elementary had 960 students, predominantly African-American, with approximately 40% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch.

According to an evaluation report released by Irwin and Algozzine (2005):

The goals of the Positive Behavioral Support Center [were] to: 1) demonstrate the use of a screening procedure to identify emergent risk factors in children, 2) provide in-

service training on a school-wide basis aimed at the prevention of emerging behavioral difficulties, 3) use a school-wide proactive approach in the teaching of social and interpersonal skills, 4) establish a three-tier model of prevention activities on a school-wide basis, intervention activities for identified at-risk children, and targeted interventions for seriously involved children, and 5) provide a setting that Durham Public Schools, other interested school systems and institutes of higher education can use as a demonstration site for pre-service and in-service training.

(p. 5)

Oak Grove Elementary quickly experienced a reduction in suspensions, dropping from 109 students suspended for a total of 149 days in 2000-2001 to 51 students suspended for a total of 109 days in 2001-2002 (Irwin & Algozzine, 2005). It also experienced a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals (ODRs) during that same time period, dropping from 993 to 702, a decrease of almost 30%. Because of the success of PBIS at Oak Grove, Durham Public Schools decided to adopt the program system-wide in 2002-2003. The following academic year, the program was adopted by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools district officials convened a task force to look at programs that supported student behavior, reduced class time spent on negative behaviors, and reduced suspensions and referrals to the exceptional children's program. In reviewing their findings, "Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) consistently emerged as a powerful evidence-based practice" (p. 8).

Since that time, most of the school districts in North Carolina began implementing the PBIS program in at least one school. In a 2009-2010 evaluation report released in January 2011, 100 of the state's 115 districts had some level of participation in the program initiative,

for a total of 909 schools (Reynolds, 2011). The effectiveness of the program and its impact has been shown in both the number of schools that have chosen to adopt it and the gains made by those schools (Irwin & Algozzine, 2005; 2008; Reynolds, Irwin, & Algozzine, 2009; Reynolds, 2011). Schools implementing the program have lower ODRs than national averages and have shown a decrease in the number of suspensions over the past five years. Moreover, “more PBIS schools with suspension rates below the state average had above average performance composites (greater than 74), and met expected growth, high growth, and AYP [Annual Yearly Progress] targets” (Reynolds, 2011, p. 6).

Schools that had achieved PBIS exemplar status did better than other PBIS schools and other non-PBIS schools in the state (Reynolds, 2011). For example, while schools implementing the program averaged 15% lower suspension rates compared to other non-PBIS schools in NC, “suspension rates at exemplar schools were half the state rate” (p. 5). Exemplar schools also performed better academically than the state average, and “95% of PBIS exemplar schools met expected growth targets” (p. 6).

### **Measuring PBIS Implementation Fidelity**

Whether any program is successful or not in achieving its desired outcomes has a great deal to do with implementation fidelity. Practices and processes must be implemented in terms of program guidelines, and they must be sustained over time (Barrett, Bradshaw, & Lewis-Palmer, 2008; Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth & Leaf, 2009). There are at least four tools traditionally utilized in measuring implementation fidelity of the PBIS program: the *School-wide Evaluation Tool* (SET; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001), the *Team Implementation Checklist* (TIC; Sugai, Horner, & Lewis-Palmer, 2001), the *Effective Behavior Support Survey* (EBS; Sugai, Horner, & Todd, 2000), and the *Implementation*

*Phases Inventory* (IPI; Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth & Leaf, 2009). While all instruments have been determined to be valid and reliable, the SET is used to evaluate the PBIS program in schools in North Carolina.

The SET “is a direct observation index of the extent to which a school is implementing PBIS primary tier prevention practices” (Horner et al., 2009, p. 136). It is generally administered by an outside observer such as a district or regional coordinator who has been trained to assess schools by use of the instrument. It “consists of 29 items organized into...seven subscales that represent the seven key features of PBIS: Expectations Defined, Behavioral Expectations Taught, System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations, System for Responding to Behavioral Violations, Monitoring and Evaluation, Management, and District-Level Support” (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010, p. 137).

Each SET item is scored on a 3-point scale ranging from a score of zero, which means not implemented, to a score of two, which represents full implementation. Each subscale is represented by a percentage (from 0% to 100%), and higher scores indicate greater fidelity of PBIS (Horner et al., 2004; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001). The seven subscale scores are generally averaged to get an overall SET score, and “an 80% on both the overall SET summary score and the Behavioral Expectations Taught subscale is indicative of high levels of program implementation fidelity” (Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, & Leaf, 2009, p. 146).

The SET is “a valid, reliable measure that can be used to assess the impact of school-wide training and technical assistance efforts” (Horner et. al, 2004, p. 3); however, it is only capable of measuring the ocular components of PBIS implementation—what was done and what still needs to be done. Comprised primarily of yes or no questions, it does not measure

or account for how implementation was carried out or identify the specific strategies used by principals to ensure implementation of PBIS components. Nor does it describe *how* or *why* the actions of principals were influenced by the way they made sense of PBIS and the implementation process. Garnering that information requires more exploration than what can be ascertained through a quantitative tool such as the SET.

Evaluation of the PBIS program during the first few years of implementation in North Carolina relied on data submitted by the schools, and it was not until the 2006-2007 school year that regional coordinators and trainers began evaluating schools using the SET instrument as a formal evaluation system (Irwin & Algozzine, 2008). While the SET is an annual assessment conducted by outside evaluators, the TIC is an internal, on-going document used by PBIS committees within the school to monitor their progress. Other assessment tools such as the Implementation Inventory, the ODR spreadsheet, and school safety surveys are also used to monitor the effectiveness of PBIS programs. The Implementation Inventory, in particular, “yields fidelity of implementation data across the full PBIS continuum of behavior support” (Reynolds, 2011, p. 4).

Further, the use of the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) has made it easier for schools to monitor their efforts through the direct use of discipline data. SWIS is a web-based program available to all school levels across the United States, including schools in North Carolina, and it “...provides school personnel with accurate, timely, and useful information for making decisions about PBS systems and discipline events” (Reynolds, Irwin, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 15). As discipline data is entered into the system, the program graphs and calculates the information, providing easy-to-read visuals identifying problem areas and behaviors.

## **PBIS Program Recognition**

To recognize schools that were successfully implementing the PBIS program and to provide documented models for others, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction created the School Recognition Program which began with the 2007-2008 school year (Reynolds, 2011). Schools applying for recognition had to document and provide evidence of continued administrator participation, an active PBIS team and in-school coach, and implementation progress.

Three levels of recognition were created: PBIS Green Ribbon Schools, PBIS Banner Schools, and PBIS Exemplar Schools (Reynolds, 2011). To be recognized as an exemplar school, schools must complete the requirements for green ribbon schools and banner schools and complete all of the PBIS program training modules. They must also score at least a level 3 on the Implementation Inventory and 95% total on the SET. Further, schools who achieve exemplar status must have “at least 2 consecutive years of required behavioral, attendance, and academic data [which] shows improvement, and they have documented at least one additional data element that they are tracking as a team” (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). In the 2009-2010 evaluation report of PBIS schools in North Carolina, the number of schools earning green ribbon status had increased from 46 in 2007 to 85 in 2010. During the same time period, the number of banner schools increased from 8 to 96, and the number of exemplar schools increased from 14 to 56 (Reynolds, 2011).

## **Principals and Change**

The importance of the school-level principal to the success of change and reform efforts, such as PBIS, is a concept that has been studied in depth over the past few decades. During the effective schools movement, for example, researchers sought to find elementary

schools that successfully educated all children regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background and identify the common characteristics of these effective schools. The five core features of these schools (referred to as the Correlates of Effective Schools) included strong instructional leadership (Lezotte; 2009). This research has been expanded over time and instructional leadership has remained a core component. As Edmonds explained: “There may be schools out there that have strong instructional leaders, but are not yet effective; however, we have never yet found an effective school that did not have a strong instructional leader as the principal” (as cited in Lezotte; 2009, p. 8).

More recently, Militello, Rallis, and Goldring (2009) argued that “the leadership of a principal is crucial for school effectiveness, second only to the role of the classroom teacher and the quality of the curriculum” (p. 19). They pointed out that the principal’s role is positioned to reshape a school’s culture, increase achievement, generate strategic solutions, and lead day-to-day implementations. In addition, a U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Education Opportunity identified the principal as the single most influential person in a school:

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal’s leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. (as cited in Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 5)

With the role of the principal being pivotal to a school’s overall effectiveness and success, it follows that the role of the principal is instrumental in change and reform efforts as well.

While it was once thought that change had to come from the superintendent and central office administrators rather than the principal (Griffiths, 1963), principals are now evaluated on their ability to lead change within the school environment. According to the rubric for evaluating North Carolina school executives, the principal is responsible for leading change by articulating a vision and implementing strategies for improvements which result in achievement for all students (North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals Association, 2008).

Further, in a study of ten comprehensive school reform models, Murphy and Datnow (2003) concluded that:

Almost all the literature on school reform, educational change, and school improvement exposes the ‘essential’ or ‘crucial’ role played by the school principal...[they] are the gatekeepers for their schools’ change efforts. They can either ‘open the door’ to reform initiatives or block their entry...Where principals act as ‘catalysts for change’... and have a personal ‘commitment to the project,’... reform designs have a fighting chance to succeed. Absent these, no matter how fervently others may desire change, implementation of an innovation is problematic at best. (p. 265)

Principals are important because they are charged with creating conditions conducive to change. Most often, they are responsible for providing a common vision for change and unifying the staff, creating staff development opportunities centered on the needed change, allocating resources such as time and funding, and instilling leadership in others (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). The principal, through his or her own behaviors and actions related to

change, often impacts how receptive teachers are to change efforts (Fullan, 1982; 1985).

Forward-thinking principals reveal this attitude through their words and their expectations of teachers; where they focus their energies reveals their passions. When change efforts fail, it is often due to the stage set by the principal. As Firestone (1989) pointed out:

Research on principals suggests that those who are more effective in implementing change are more precise in their goals and more assertive in their actions to achieve those goals whether that means aggressively seeking support for change or influencing teachers' choice of instructional goals and methods. (p. 156)

However, change is seldom easy to accomplish and not every principal possesses the skills or knows how to lead change in schools or to lead changing schools. According to Rallis and Goldring (1993), “A school that is truly changing needs a principal who can articulate a vision, provide direction, facilitate those who are working for the change, coordinate the different groups, and balance the various forces impacting schools today” (p. 133). Even principals who are specifically brought in to be change agents may find themselves maintaining the status quo in the face of stiff opposition and complex, rigid cultures. As Williams (2011) noted in her ethnographic study of first year principals, “Since school cultures are deeply woven, historical ways of thinking, acting, and building relationships, they are incredibly resistant to change” (p. 24). Likewise, the change process is unique and unpredictable, and many people do not know how to approach it (Fullan, 1999).

Change within a school relies on the willingness of teachers and other stakeholders to accept and implement the change. In an era of distributed leadership and teacher leaders, this means creating a shared vision for change and motivating the stakeholders, not simply giving commands and expecting others to follow (Heath & Heath, 2010; Rallis & Goldring, 1993).

Getting everyone's buy in can be a difficult task because very seldom will you have 100% agreement; even the PBIS program necessitates buy-in of only 80% (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). In addition, teachers crave autonomy, and any program or initiative that challenges their autonomy has a chance at being rejected (Wagner et al., 2006). Change is also difficult to implement because of the amount of time and oversight it requires; many times new programs are implemented partially, haphazardly, or not at all, even though there may be a perception that they are being fully implemented. With multi-faceted programs, in particular, it is challenging to inspect and oversee every aspect of implementation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). With a program such as PBIS, which is not federally or state funded or mandated and may or may not have the allocation of local funds, principals must really believe that it can work and be willing to put in the effort to make it work at their schools.

### **Principals and PBIS**

Research has shown that the principal is essential to the success of the PBIS program, and his or her leadership in a school that has gained exemplar status is paramount (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; Handler et al., 2007; Sparks, 2007). In fact, the principal's involvement and leadership is one of the components used to measure whether the program is evaluated as successful. Eleven of the 28 questions on the SET are directly tied to actions of principals, and 21 of the 33 interview guide questions are directed at principals, accounting for 58% of the evaluation (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). Without principal leadership and involvement, it would be difficult to get a passing score on the yearly evaluation, let alone obtain exemplar status.

Scholars have made tremendous strides in examining various PBIS implementation efforts and exploring the roles and actions of principals. According to the research, principals are responsible for conducting a needs assessment (formally or informally) to determine the need for the PBIS program in their schools; they have access to relevant data, and their leadership is critical in the use of data for decision-making purposes (Freeman, Smith, & Tieghi-Benet, 2003). In addition, principals must provide the rationale for the program and create a shared vision for change within the school community. Further, principals must gain buy-in from staff, and they must provide ongoing support such as planning, managing conflict, team building, and problem-solving (Fullan, 1985; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Without buy-in and support from the school's faculty and administration, "system change efforts are, at best, likely to occur slowly, and at worst, destined to fail" (Muscott et al., 2004, p. 472).

Principals must also provide resources such as financial allocation, time to meet, and time on the staff meeting agendas (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Muscott et al., 2004). Moreover, they are charged with redesigning the school settings to change adult and student behaviors, visibly supporting and monitoring the features of PBIS, and frequently monitoring and acknowledging staff and students meeting expectations (Handler et al., 2007). In a study examining the implementation and sustainability of PBIS three years after initial training at four public elementary schools, Sparks (2007) suggested that the role of the administrator in implementing and sustaining PBIS should include: (a) the modeling and preparing of events for teaching the behavioral expectations, (b) his or her presence and participation at PBS team meetings, (c) active analysis and discussion with staff regarding

office discipline referral data, and (d) providing time for school staff to collaborate and engage in decision-making regarding the PB[I]S process.

However, despite this extensive research, the question still remains as to *how* principals lead the successful implementation of PBIS and *why*—what thoughts and feelings guide their actions. Additionally, “few studies have obtained the perspectives of PB[I]S stakeholders or team members in schools” (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009, p. 162). By addressing the research questions, this study will advance our understanding of principals’ orientation and sensemaking through their own and other’s descriptions of their leadership, and thus obtain the often overlooked perspectives of team members.

### **Sensemaking in Organizations**

The role of the principal has changed over time, and leadership is no longer a top-down function where the principal is the sole entity in making decisions for his or her school (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; George, White, & Schlaffer, 2007; Grant, 2011; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). It has evolved into a complex position entailing the balance of power with initiative, and those who are successful in this position have certain attributes and effective behaviors that contribute to their success. Grisoni and Beeby (2007) stated, “If leadership is fundamentally about power and power is about the ability to define situations with and for others then the exercise of power becomes the exercise of sense-making” (p. 194).

The nature of sensemaking is a broad concept with many definitions. Grisoni and Beeby (2007) argued that “...sense-making is a core component of leadership that involves the exercise of power through processes of decision-making” (p. 192). Burch, Theoharis, and Rauscher interpret sensemaking as “...how individuals at the school level interpret

reform objectives and act on these views in the context of their decisions and actions” (2010, p. 334). Sackman (1991) pointed out, “sensemaking mechanisms that...include the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are typically used in a given cultural setting” (p. 33). However, Feldman insisted that “sensemaking often does not result in action. It may result in an understanding that action should not be taken or that a better understanding of the event or situation is needed” (1989, p. 20). The very basic definition of sensemaking means to make sense of events and circumstances (Weick, 1995). “How they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects are the central questions for people interested in sensemaking” (p. 4). Further:

To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations....People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe. (p. 15)

There are seven characteristics that Weick (1995) associated with sensemaking that distinguishes it from processes such as understanding and interpretation, and “these... characteristics serve as a rough guideline for inquiry into sensemaking in the sense that they suggest what sensemaking is, how it works, and where it can fail” (p. 18). It is a process that is:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing

6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

### **Identity Construction**

The concept of identity construction is in reference to the one doing the sensemaking. How the various nuances of the sensemaker's personality and self-concept come together to help define and make sense of a situation is a key component of this framework. Weick identified five nuances associated with identity construction:

1. Controlled, intentional sensemaking is triggered by a failure to confirm one's self.
2. Sensemaking occurs in the service of maintaining a consistent, positive self-conception.
3. People learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences.
4. People simultaneously try to shape and react to the environments they face.
5. The idea that sensemaking is self-referential suggests that self, rather than the environment, may be the text in need of interpretation.

In light of these nuances, the way a principal sees their self, how the principal believes they are seen by others, and who the principal is in relation to the organization can affect the way decisions are made and conflicts are resolved during the implementation and maintenance of the PBIS program.

### **Retrospect**

The concept of retrospect refers to the idea that "sensemaking is influenced by what people notice in elapsed events, how far back they look, and how well they remember what they were doing" (Weick, 2001, p. 462). What people experience in the past and learn from

those experiences can shape future decision-making, and sometimes it is only in the looking back that understanding comes. This understanding, which is realized once the event has occurred, may also “provide a basis for how future events may be interpreted” (Molina, 2010, p. 37).

### **Enactive of Sensible Environments**

Enactment is one of the components of sensemaking that is associated with the “activity of ‘making’ that which is sensed” (Weick, 1995, p. 30). This concept relies on the idea that people are a part of their environments, and they often shape these environments through their actions. These environments, in turn, may constrain their actions as well as present opportunities. Rather than being separate, isolated entities, the sensemaker and the environment are intertwined (Weick, 1995).

### **Social**

The social attribute of sensemaking involves the real, imagined, or implied presence of others, the communication that does or does not take place, and the interactions that may or may not occur. It is thinking combined with human interaction and shared environments. Actions are played out with others in mind. According to Burns and Stalker (1961), decisions are made in working organizations “either in the presence of others or with the knowledge that they will have to be implemented, or understood, or approved by others” (p. 118).

### **Ongoing**

This attribute of sensemaking has to do with the fact that sensemaking never begins or ends; it is an ongoing process based on the concept that people are always in the middle of things, and these things are punctuated by events. These punctuations, or interruptions, can

often trigger positive or negative emotional responses in relationships. For example, a change in school leadership can interrupt the implementation of a new school curriculum, thus opening the door for emotions to influence the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

### **Focused on and by Extracted Cues**

Weick (1995) theorized, “Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50). These cues can be viewed as points of references from which the sensemaking emerges. More than just being perceptive, using cues for sensemaking involves “the processes of ‘noticing’ relevant information, ‘bracketing’ this information so that it can be reinterpreted in light of past experiences, and ‘labeling’ the information so that it becomes a meaningful story on which to base responsive actions” (Molina, 2010, p. 37). Context forms the basis for what a cue becomes and how it is interpreted. School principals, for example, may deem the satisfaction of his or her teachers as a cue or point of reference for determining whether or not things are going well in a school.

### **Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy**

Sensemaking is less about what is true and accurate, and more about what is possible based on cues extracted by the sensemaker. Accuracy is not required in the process of sensemaking because what is constructed does not have to make sense; it just needs to be plausible based on the information at hand. The other properties of sensemaking impact whether or not the sensemaking, or story, is plausible. Further, it may vary depending on the position and perspective of the sensemaker. What is plausible for a PBIS committee member

and what is plausible for a school administrator, for example, may differ based on their vantage points.

### **Principals and Sensemaking**

The primary role of sensemaking in and for a school generally falls to the principal due to the sheer nature of the position. It is the leader's responsibility to interpret the environment, develop a response, and make sense of it for others (Bennis, Spreitzer, & Cummings, 2001; Firestone, 1989; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). According to Militello, Rallis, and Goldring:

The principal may well be the only person in the school who is able to see the whole picture—and to make sense of it. Seldom does anyone other than the principal have access to all the varied systems operating more or less independently in the loosely coupled components of the school. (2009, p. 15)

This study will specifically attempt to explicate principals' sensemaking as it relates to the implementation of PBIS. Adopting the views of Burch, Theoharis, and Rauscher (2010) guiding their study of the elementary school principal role in class size reduction, this study seeks to understand "...what categories of thought lie beneath the decisions and actions that principals assume in response to these challenges?" (p. 334). How principals interpret and respond to conditions they have a part in creating within their school environments, for example, is crucial to the act of sensemaking.

### **Factors that Influence Sensemaking**

Other scholars over time have identified factors that directly or indirectly informed the principals' thoughts, influencing their sensemaking and thereby influencing their actions. Coburn (2005) stated that, "action is based on how people notice or select information from

the environment, make meaning of that information, and then act on those interpretations, developing culture, social structures, and routines over time” (p. 478). Factors such as prior knowledge, the social context in which the sensemaker works, the nature of their connections to the policy or reform message, conditions for learning in the school, prior beliefs and experiences of policy implementers, external policy demands, and their individual beliefs and values (Coburn, 2005; Ikemoto, 2007; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011; Spillane et al., 2002) have been shown to influence sensemaking.

### **Case Study Research**

Case study has a long history in qualitative research methods, and it has been used in many different disciplines such as sociology, political theory, education, and psychoanalysis (Willig, 2001). Yin (2003), defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Further, it is the “preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, [and] when the investigator has little control over events....” (p. 1). The focus of a case study is on fully understanding and exploring a particular unit of analysis, and it can take on the form of a single case study or a multiple case study, depending on the purpose and focus of the researcher (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Willig, 2001). Single cases are preferred if the case seems to test existing theory, while multiple cases are preferred when there is a need to explore the replication of a theory (Yin, 1994).

According to Willig (2001), case studies contain: (a) an idiographic perspective, (b) attention to contextual data, (c) triangulation, (d) a temporal element, and (e) a concern with theory. An idiographic perspective is concerned with understanding the particularities of a

case, and paying attention to contextual data “means that the researcher pays attention to the ways in which the various dimensions of the case relate to or interact with its environment” (Willig, 2001, p. 71). Triangulation helps the researcher consider the case from different perspectives by utilizing diverse sources of information in data collection or analysis, and the temporal element constitutes processes that take place over time. A concern with theory, the last feature identified by Willig, refers to the idea that “the exploration of a particular case can generate insights into social or psychological processes, which, in turn, can give rise to theoretical formulations and hypotheses” (p. 71). In this particular case study, the researcher seeks to gain insight into how principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the PBIS program along with its core features and outlined the adoption of the PBIS program in North Carolina. Research on the effectiveness of PBIS and measures of PBIS fidelity were presented. This chapter included an overview of the literature on principals and change and a discussion on the role of the principal in PBIS. An explanation of the need to move beyond the “what” of implementation in order to understand the “how” and “why” was provided as well. In addition, the concept of sensemaking was defined. The chapter concluded with a brief synopsis of case study research. The next chapter presents the research methods for the study and explains the logic of the research design. Details regarding site selection, data collection, and analysis procedures are also explained. The chapter concludes with the researcher’s statement of subjectivity.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to describe the thoughts and actions of principals who have successfully implemented the school-wide PBIS program in elementary schools in North Carolina, helping schools that want to implement the program learn from those who have done it successfully. This study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?
2. How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?

This chapter describes the nature of inquiry for the study, explains the data collection procedures, delineates the procedures for analysis, addresses issues of trustworthiness, and presents the researcher's subjectivity statement.

#### **Research Design**

This study takes on a qualitative, multiple case study research design. Creswell defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (1998, p. 15). A qualitative approach is often selected when there is a topic that needs to be explored, an opportunity to study participants in their natural setting, a need to tell the story from the participants' point of view, and when it corresponds to the nature of the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell,

1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Further, “qualitative research, which is guided by the participant’s or insider’s view, allows for exploration beyond what can be obtained by quantitative methods” (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010, p. 88). Because this study took place within schools and relied on the perspectives of participants to answer the research questions, qualitative design was the appropriate approach to inquiry.

The value of the case study method in research has been touted by scholars over time. Yin defined the case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003, p. 13). Further, it is the “preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, [and] when the investigator has little control over events....” (2003, p. 1) According to Creswell, a case study format should be used to examine a particular “‘case,’ bounded in time or place” and the researcher should “look for contextual material about the setting of the ‘case’” (1998, p. 40). Merriam stated that “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes...in discovery rather than confirmation” (1998, p. 19).

The case study method is appropriate for this study because it allows us to discover the contexts and settings in which the PBIS program was able to flourish. Two schools in a county who are able to repeatedly earn exemplar status is a rare occurrence, and the case study format permits us to delve into the “how” and “why” of this matter. Moreover, how principals utilize sensemaking in implementation decisions regarding the PBIS program provides the contextual material necessary for answering the research questions. The two

schools chosen for this study offered settings in which the program is successful; the interest was in what happens in those settings that make success possible.

There are tangible benefits in studying success stories, and case studies of success stories, in particular, offer a valuable perspective not often seen in the literature. According to Shulman (1983):

One major virtue of a case study is its ability to evoke images of the possible....It is often the goal of policy to pursue the possible, not only to support the probable or frequent. The well-crafted case instantiates the possible, not only documenting that it can be done but also laying out at least one detailed example of how it was organized, developed, and pursued. (p. 495)

Further, “positive examples illustrate the possibility that is masked by the typical case. They raise hope; in fact, only one such case is necessary to indicate that the exceptional is possible” (Firestone, 1989, p. 162). Case studies of exemplar actors or sites is a common approach in education to shed light on how to effectively implement an approach, program, or policy (e.g., Borko, Wolf, Simone, & Uchiyama, 2003; Kelley & Protsik, 1997; Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000). Moreover, careful analysis of such examples can suggest concrete possibilities for improvement. By focusing on two schools that have gained repeated exemplar status recognition for their PBIS programs, this study gives actual examples of what is possible and provides somewhat of a blueprint for others to follow.

Multiple case designs are more likely to be stronger and more compelling than single-case designs (Yin, 2003, 2009) because they allow for cross-case analysis and contribute to the extension of theory and direct replication (Gable, 1994; Yin, 2009). With a single case, a researcher is able to identify the conditions in which a particular phenomenon is found;

however, identifying the conditions in more than one case helps the researcher to formulate a more complete theory. For example, under what conditions and in what context are we likely to find elementary schools that have repeatedly earned recognition for their PBIS programs? The two elementary schools chosen for this study have both earned exemplar status over multiple years, and they are in the same county; therefore, similarities between the two sites and the conditions under which they flourished were thought to be possible. Within-case analysis and cross-case analysis also serve to help recognize differences.

Finally, according to Stake (2005), “the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases” (p. vi). This phenomenon is referred to as a “quintain,” and he argues that we better understand the quintain (the whole) by studying and better understanding each individual case (the part) in its natural setting (2005). Stake’s approach to the multicase study will help guide this research.

### **Site Selection**

In order to recruit schools for this study, I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling requires the researcher to think critically about the participants and the study and choose those participants that best demonstrate the process in which they are interested (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In this particular study, I obtained from North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction a list of schools that had achieved exemplar status. I specifically looked for elementary schools who had earned the exemplar distinction within the past two years. By focusing on schools that had been identified as exemplar in the past two years, a reasonable assumption could be made in most cases that the schools had been working on obtaining recognition for some time and were focused on maintaining the exemplar status. They were also more likely to remember the processes and be able to relate

them to the researcher. Further, as an indication of sustainability, I looked for schools that had achieved exemplar status more than once. Distance from the researcher also played a role in site selection—I looked for schools outside of the district where I worked but within two hours of where I lived to make traveling convenient. After narrowing down the list using the first three criteria, I chose two elementary schools.

Elementary schools were preferred for this study because research has shown that younger children are more susceptible to programs targeting behavior than older youth (Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002), and elementary schools, in general, have a higher rate of success implementing the PBIS program than schools at other levels (Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; Muscott et al., 2004). In addition, young children with untreated behavior problems experience problems in socialization, school adjustment, and academic performance. These problems can continue through adolescence and adulthood, but proactive programs such as PBIS can target the behaviors early and possibly make a difference. After carefully considering the aforementioned factors, I reached out to the schools I had identified.

I contacted current principals of exemplar PBIS schools directly by phone and left voice messages providing a brief overview of the study. After no initial response, I followed up with an e-mail detailing the study. They responded by e-mail and phone and expressed their interest in the study and their willingness to participate.

Contacting the former principals was more difficult; I had to use the internet to search for and ascertain their names and current locations. After locating them, I made phone calls to introduce myself and give them an overview of the study. I explained the value of gaining their perspectives, and they also agreed to participate. I emailed copies of the consent forms,

the questionnaires, and the interview questions to all of the principals involved in this study. After they had time to review them, another phone call was made to arrange interview times.

I gathered contextual data about the schools and the district through electronic means such as the school websites, the district's website, and DPI's website. I also gathered information from the study participants themselves through questionnaires.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study included teachers, former principals, and current principals in elementary schools that have been identified as exemplar PBIS models according to standards developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's division of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support. I conducted individual interviews with the principals and focus group interviews with PBIS committee members. All participants signed the necessary consent forms.

Because this study focused on how principals' thoughts and actions influenced the implementation of PBIS, it was imperative to interview principals. While others see the actions of principals, they are not fully aware of principals' thoughts and perceptions; the principals involved were able to offer personal insight into their actions. Only current principals and committee members of the schools were interviewed initially. However, as the data was collected and analyzed, gaps within the study emerged. The programs had been in place for approximately six years, yet insight from the principal perspective provided two years of information at most. Although many of the committee members at both schools had been there since the inception of the program, they could not provide information regarding the thoughts of the principals, only their actions.

Realizing that the answers to the research questions were incomplete, a decision had to be made to either find other exemplar elementary schools whose principals had been there throughout the process or interview the former principals of the schools I had already chosen. I decided upon the latter because I saw it as an opportunity to capture the idea of initiating and sustaining PBIS implementation with principal turnover—another contribution to the literature on PBIS and the principal as a change agent. When a new principal takes the helm of a school, he brings with him his philosophies towards teaching and learning, his past experiences, and his vision for the new environment. Sustaining success with principal turnover in general and PBIS in particular is not frequently discussed in the literature. Although it was not my original intention, I now have a better understanding regarding effectively sustaining a successful PBIS program in this regard. The former principals were able to speak specifically about their contributions, challenges, and thoughts during the early stages of implementation—information that the current principals and committee members could not provide.

I chose to interview committee members to juxtapose their perceptions and interpretations of events with those of the principals. Further, the social aspect of sensemaking has to do with the real or imagined presence of others (Weick, 1995); therefore, interviewing committee members gives insight regarding how the decisions made by principals are implemented, understood, and approved by others. Because PBIS committee members represent different stakeholder groups within the school, the size of the team may vary. Its purpose is to increase the efficiency with which the PBIS goals and objectives are carried out and supported. In addition, the committee is responsible for assessing the school's behavior management practices, developing a school-wide plan, and overseeing,

monitoring, and evaluating all planned objectives and activities developed by the committee (North Carolina's PBS Project, 2011).

Assistant principals participated in the focus group interviews with committee members. While the role of the assistant principal may differ from school to school (Williams, 2011), an assistant principal is oftentimes involved in the day-to-day operations of implementing a program, though not directly responsible for its success. Further, they operate in a leadership capacity without having the full authority of a principal; thus, they may have additional insights into and a better understanding of the principal's decision-making than a PBIS committee member in a non-administrative role.

### **Data Collection**

It is the belief of many scholars that the qualitative researcher should seek to gather extensive material from many sources of information in order to paint a complete, in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The case study method, in particular, "comprises an all-encompassing method—covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (Yin, 2003, p. 14). To that end, this study involved semi-structured, individual interviews and focus group interviews. It also entailed the use of questionnaires and the study of physical artifacts.

### **Individual Interviews**

According to Bogdan and Biklen, "the best-known representatives of qualitative research... are those that employ the techniques of... in-depth interviewing" (2007, p. 2). An individual, semi-structured interview was conducted with each principal to increase his or her level of comfort and willingness to speak freely. The semi-structured interviews with participants allowed them an opportunity to describe their experiences with PBIS (see

Appendix A) in a relaxed environment. In order to make sure that the interview questions captured answers to the research questions, there was a separate interview protocol for principals that required them to tap into aspects of sensemaking (see Appendix B).

The interview questions corresponded to the research questions guiding this study in an effort to address the theories utilized and gain an understanding of the schools' experiences with the program. The interview questions were generated based on the researcher's familiarity with the PBIS program as an in-school PBIS coach and as an elementary school administrator involved with the implementation process. They were revised with the assistance of the dissertation committee for brevity and clarity. Individual interviews with the current principals were conducted first, followed by focus group interviews with the PBIS committee members and then individual interviews with the former principals.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

The use of focus groups as a qualitative research method has gained increasing popularity over the years (Morgan, 1998; Willig, 2001). Group discussions generate data about a particular topic, rather than the participants themselves, and varied experiences and opinions can create a rich, in-depth dialogue in a way that an individual interview does not. I conducted focus group interviews with the PBIS committee members, including assistant principals. By interviewing them as a focus group, I anticipated that they might feel more comfortable speaking openly. Willig (2001) surmised:

The strength of the focus group as a method of data collection lies in its ability to mobilize participants to respond to and comment on one another's contributions. In

this way, statements are challenged, extended, developed...or qualified in ways that generate rich data for the researcher. (p. 29)

Additionally, “you can pursue interpretive questions about ‘how and why’ through group discussions” (Morgan, 1998, p. 97). These types of questions are pursued in this study, and I anticipated that the focus group format would make it easier for participants to recall information.

All interview participants were given a copy of the interview guides and encouraged to ask for clarification of items they did not understand. Further, the researcher had an opportunity to ask follow-up questions in order to expand on a theme or idea or gain further clarification when necessary. All interviews were recorded using digital audio recording devices. Audio recording devices are less invasive than video recorders, and recording the interviews allowed for the use of extensive, descriptive quotes which are commonly found in qualitative studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher in order to aid analysis and ensure the accuracy of information included in the study (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Transcribing the data also allowed the researcher to get better acquainted with the research. Moreover, because the researcher is likely to be more familiar with the terminology than someone who is hired to do the transcribing, the researcher will be able to “fill in places where the tape is of poor quality” (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). Informed consent to record was required of each participant before their involvement began (see Appendices D and E).

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were taken during the interviews, in conjunction with the audio recordings, and immediately following each interview. Williams (2011) points out, “A

qualitative study emerges and evolves from field notes. The researcher looks through their notes to identify common threads or themes and weaves them together to tell a story” (p. 70). As a result of the field notes, audio tapes, and transcripts, a complete picture of events and pertinent information regarding the setting, participants, and interviews materialized.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires (see Appendix C) were used to gather baseline data and background information prior to the interview. Questions directly corresponded to the research questions guiding this study. Additionally, a few questions helped to gather background information about the participants and provide contextual information about the schools. These questions were not used to identify participants by their responses. Rather, they were used to ascertain their knowledge and experiences with the PBIS program.

### **Physical Artifacts**

Because schools have to provide extensive documentation of their PBIS activities in order to be considered for exemplar status, physical artifacts were also gathered. Artifacts included copies of matrices which state PBIS expectations, the PBIS notebook, meeting minutes, staff memos, and other items perceived as relevant to the study. These items were useful in providing additional information to answer the research questions. In addition, they provided documentation of the school’s efforts to implement the program and evidence of progress.

The study of physical artifacts along with the use of interviews, field notes, and questionnaires allowed for data triangulation, defined by Yin as collecting “...information from multiple sources but aimed at corroborating the same fact or phenomenon” (2003, p. 99). Although triangulation can be utilized in the data analysis process as a way to “double-

check results” (Burke, 2009, p. 29), when used during the data collection process, it “...involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).

There were no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study, and all information garnered has been maintained following strict rules of confidentiality. Interview tapes were transcribed and kept in locked and password protected storage, and no names of participants were revealed through oral or written reports. Schools have been assigned pseudonyms, and no compensation was received for participating in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, two stages of analyses were conducted: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. According to Stake (2005), “interactions within and across entities help us recognize the case as an integrated system” (p. 3). Therefore, in the first phase, each case is considered as a comprehensive, contextual unit.

Although data analysis programs are beneficial for handling large amounts of data with speed and efficiency (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), the data were segmented and coded by hand in order to increase the researcher’s familiarity with the data (Merriam, 2009). In the first stage of analysis, all interview transcripts and archival data were read line-by-line to identify themes in the text. I paid particular attention to the what, how, and why of PBIS in exemplar elementary schools—what steps the school took toward implementation, what the challenges were, how they were addressed, and why the principals responded in the manner in which they did. I wanted to fully understand the role of the principal in the program’s implementation.

In the second phase of analysis, I compared the themes across schools to explore differences and similarities between the cases “in order to understand the phenomenon better” (Stake, 2005, p. 6). According to Miles and Huberman, comparing multiple cases helps to “establish the range of generality of a finding or explanation, and at the same time, pin down the conditions under which that finding will occur... [providing] greater explanatory power than a single-case study can deliver” (1984, p. 151). The data were reviewed with the interviewer anticipating the possible need to ask more follow-up questions after each round of interviews to fill obvious gaps or pursue specific leads. Once all the data had been collected, the field notes, recordings, and transcripts were compared and contrasted for accuracy and completeness and then analyzed based on preliminary codes of words and themes. The transcript for each school’s principal was compared and contrasted with that of his or her committee, followed by the juxtaposition of the principal transcripts and the juxtaposition of the committee transcripts. Finally, field notes on physical artifacts were reviewed for additional insight and to verify claims.

### **Trustworthiness**

One of the critical elements of qualitative research is that the readers must be able to trust the researcher and what is revealed during the study. To this end, I used actual quotes to give accurate voice to the views of participants and create rich descriptions. Using actual quotes allows to reader to experience the answers to the interview questions firsthand rather than rely on researcher interpretation.

I also utilized the researcher subjectivity statement, a method used by researchers to clarify and explain any biases that may emerge throughout the process (Creswell, 1998). The subjectivity statement allows the reader to understand who the researcher is in relation to the

research—how feelings, beliefs, and experiences of the researcher come together with the study and the findings. By revealing this information, readers are less likely to look for hidden agendas.

Data triangulation was utilized to corroborate evidence from the interviews, field notes, and artifacts and shed light on perspectives. Triangulation allows us to “see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. 113). Further, triangulation gives credence to the findings and helps the researcher to determine if what she is seeing is actually so.

Finally, I employed the use of critical subjectivity. Critical subjectivity makes the researcher aware of his or her own feelings and thoughts throughout the process. According to Creswell (1998), this “high-quality awareness” enables the researcher to understand his or her psychological and emotional states before, during, and after the research experience (p. 196). As one already familiar with the PBIS implementation process, it was necessary for me to collect and analyze the data from an objective standpoint and present uncompromised findings. Therefore, I did mental self-checks to ensure that I was looking at the information through the eyes of the participants rather than my own personal experiences; judging the programs based on their own merits rather than comparing them to the implementation of other PBIS programs with which I am familiar.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

This is my 18<sup>th</sup> year in the field of education. I taught at the middle school level for four years and at the high school level for five years. I completed my administrative internship at the high school level, and then worked as an assistant principal at the middle school level for one year before becoming an elementary school assistant principal. This is

my fifth year as an assistant principal in a rural county in North Carolina. I also spent three years working as the Education Director of a local non-profit organization. In this capacity, I was responsible for implementing and overseeing programs designed to close the achievement gap in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in the triangle area. I also offered training opportunities and staff development for students, teachers, and community organizations in various counties.

My first experience with the PBIS program was seven years ago at a high school in Durham, North Carolina. The district had hired coaches to work with staff members in certain schools to show them how to effectively respond to students with major behavioral problems, and I saw the principals of PBIS in action. However, it was not until I began working at an elementary school five years ago that I fully began to understand the PBIS program. A group of teachers and an administrator had received training in the three modules of the PBIS program, and the program was being implemented during my first year at the school. A committee was formed, and I eventually became a member of the team. I worked closely with the PBIS chair and committee as the program was implemented, and we discovered ways to make it relevant for our staff and students. During the 2011-2012 school year, I received training in Modules I, II, and III of the PBIS program, and I became the in-school PBIS coach for my elementary school. In an effort to enhance our program, our committee visited two elementary schools that had gained recognition for their success with the PBIS program, and I also visited a high school that has managed to keep the program alive despite excessive principal turnover. We spent time speaking with school administrators and participants about the implementation of their programs, the record-

keeping involved, and the levels of success they had achieved. It was then that I began to wonder why the program succeeded in some schools and floundered in others.

By conducting this research, I hoped to discover what strategies led to the successful implementation and sustaining of the PBIS program in elementary schools. As a point of clarification, the schools chosen for this study are not the same schools I visited with my PBIS committee, nor are they in the same county. Being a school administrator directly involved with the program, I have a vested interest in enhancing the educational environment for the students we serve, and I have seen the potential that the PBIS program offers in this regard. My familiarity with the program as one who has also been involved in its implementation created an opportunity to bond with research participants. Because I could relate in some sense to what they revealed, it made the process of their answering questions easier on both ends.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explained the qualitative approach and multiple case study design that was used to guide this research. The rationale for studying success stories and the reasoning for focusing on exemplar elementary schools was discussed—there was a particular desire to evoke images of the possible, and elementary schools have a higher rate of successfully implementing the PBIS program than other school levels. Purposive sampling was used as a means of recruitment, and phone calls and electronic mail were used to help determine site selection. Participants in this study included current principals, former principals, assistant principals, and PBIS committee members, and data were collected through the use of questionnaires, the study of physical artifacts, and the use of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and kept in locked and password protected storage.

Data analysis incorporated within-case analysis and cross-case analysis to identify and highlight emerging themes. Trustworthiness has been ensured through the use of actual quotes, the researcher subjectivity statement, and critical subjectivity.

The next chapter will present profiles of the schools involved in this study and disaggregate the findings by questions, themes, participants and sites. Findings are separated into two sections: implementing the program (former principals) and sustaining the program (current principals and committees). The sections are arranged by themes, and data in the latter section is also disaggregated by school. Principals were interviewed individually, and committee members took part in focus group interviews. Principals were permitted to discuss their experiences implementing the program in other school settings; however, the responses were weighed in view of their relevance to this study. Committee members were allowed to reflect on and answer the questions based on the actions of all of the principals they have had since the program was first implemented. However, responses pertaining to the current principals are distinguished from responses pertaining to previous principals. The principal's responses were not shared with committee members, nor were committee member responses shared with principals. The findings are presented based on themes that emerged during the interviews and the names of the schools and principals have been changed to ensure confidentiality. PBIS committee members' comments are not linked to individual participants and no names are used.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of this study and the methods used, followed by an overview of Stake's (2005) approach to multiple case studies. The findings are then disaggregated by school and organized by emergent themes associated with each research question. In the within-case analysis of each school, the responses of the former principal are presented to provide insight pertaining to initial implementation. Next, the responses of current principals and committee members provide insight regarding the continued implementation and sustaining of the program. Finally, this chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis of the two sites.

#### **Review of Purpose and Methods**

The purpose of this study was to describe the thoughts and actions of principals who have successfully implemented the school-wide PBIS program in North Carolina elementary schools. The results of this study will allow schools who want to implement the program learn from those who have successfully done it. This study specifically sought to answer:

1. How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?
2. How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?

In order to answer these questions, this study took on a qualitative, multiple case study research design. Data were collected through the use of individual interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires, and field notes. Physical artifacts in the form of public documents were also made available at one of the study sites. The current principals and

PBIS committees were interviewed in separate sessions at their respective school sites, and the former principals were interviewed in separate sessions at their current sites.

The interviews were recorded using audio devices and then transferred to a password-protected computer. As “verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 110), the researcher transcribed each school’s interviews verbatim after the conclusion of the final session. Segments of data indicative of research questions were explored, and the transcripts were compared and contrasted to identify recurring themes in ideas. The data were reviewed multiple times to identify codes within those already identified, similar to what Miles and Huberman refer to as clustering-and-partitioning—clustering data that falls together “so that contrasts between sets of sites on variables of interest can come clearer and partitioning it, or dividing it in new ways” (1984, p. 152).

The two schools chosen for this study, Micah Elementary and Twisdale Elementary, are located in the same school district, a primarily rural area in North Carolina. The PBIS program began as a district initiative approximately six years ago, and they have a district coach that offers implementation assistance to the schools as well as on-going support. A look at the most recent data for PBIS school recognition shows that 59% of the schools in the district received some level of recognition for their PBIS program (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). The two schools chosen for this study have been recognized at the exemplar level more than once.

Although both current principals and PBIS committees provided information about implementing and sustaining the program, there were still gaps pertaining to leadership during the beginning stages of implementation. The principals who were there at the time of

initial implementation, Miss Allen at Micah and Miss Bates at Twisdale, were interviewed in order to close those gaps. For both former principals, the PBIS program began during the first year of their principalships. The superintendent at that time, newly hired, made the implementation of PBIS a district initiative, and teams of people from each school were sent to PBIS training for several days. Both principals spent four years in their respective roles before pursuing other opportunities. They were interviewed in order to gain a better perspective of the foundational processes that took place and contributed to the success of the program in both school environments. A snapshot of the schools' demographics and principals is presented in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1

*School Demographics*

<b>Micah Elementary</b>	<b>Twisdale Elementary</b>
560 students	500 students
50% Caucasian, 27% African-American, 17% Hispanic, less than 1% Chinese, also migrant	60% African-American, 23% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, less than 1% Asian, Indian, and multi-racial
60% Free or reduced lunch	77% Free or reduced lunch
Mr. Cole—current principal	Mrs. Dove—current principal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third principal since PBIS implementation</li> <li>• First-year principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second principal since PBIS implementation</li> <li>• Second year at school</li> <li>• Second principalship</li> </ul>
Miss Allen—former principal	Miss Bates—former principal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal for four years</li> <li>• First year of principalship was 1st year of PBIS implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal for four years</li> <li>• First year of principalship was 1st year of PBIS implementation</li> </ul>

## Findings

### Stake's Approach

Stake's (2005) approach to the multiple case study helped guide analysis. According to Stake, in a multiple case study, "the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases" (p. vi). Stake refers to this phenomenon as a "quintain," and he argues that we better understand the quintain (the whole) by studying and better understanding each individual case (the part) in its natural setting (2005). Each case is treated as a comprehensive case prior to cross-case analysis, and "although the particular details of specific cases may vary, the researcher attempts to build a general explanation that fits the individual cases" (Merriam, 2009, p. 204).

According to Stake (2005), it is better to choose the highly atypical cases because they can help enhance our understanding and give us the best insights into the quintain. Micah and Twisdale Elementary are considered atypical cases. According to the NC PBIS program 2010-2011 Evaluation Report, 1,021 schools in 100 of the state's 115 school districts have the PBIS program. Of these, only 53 schools in 29 counties achieved exemplar status (Reynolds, 2012); approximately 5%. The number of schools that have gained this status more than once is even less; however, Micah and Twisdale are among them. They have repeatedly gained exemplar status and although there are some similarities between them, there are also differences. However, according to Stake, "seldom will it be necessary to resolve contradictory testimony or competing values. Even contradictions may help us understand the quintain" (2005, p. vi).

## **Micah Elementary**

### **School Profile**

Micah Elementary, nestled behind a small neighborhood of tree-lined streets and well-kept homes, has approximately 560 students. Their student population is approximately 50% Caucasian, 27% African-American, 17% Hispanic, and less than 1% Chinese.

Approximately 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Micah also has a substantial migrant student population—students who attend school there for a few years while their parents work in the area and then move on.

The current principal of Micah, Mr. Cole, was a first year principal, and he was the third principal the school had had since it began implementing the PBIS program six years ago. He was first introduced to the PBIS program while working as a high school assistant principal in the same district. He was on the original team for implementing the program at the high school level, and he said that he “became an advocate for it after realizing the significance of the data.” There were eight staff members on the PBIS committee at Micah—two counselors, an instructional coach, the assistant principal, a second grade teacher, a third grade teacher, a fourth grade teacher, and a music teacher. The number of years they had spent as members of the committee ranged from one to six years, and the majority of the participants had been on the committee five or more years (see Table 2 on the next page).

Table 2

*Micah PBIS Committee Profile*

<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Number of years working in school settings</b>	<b>Number of years working in current school</b>	<b>Number of years as a committee member</b>
A	10	5	5
B	9	9	6
C	15	15	6
D	33	6 ½	5
E	12	12	6
F	15	6	1
G	19	19	5
H	1	1	1

The principal at the time of implementation, Miss Allen, had spent twenty years in education prior to getting her first principalship. Micah Elementary was her second principalship, and she spent four years in that role. At the time of implementation, the school district had just hired a new superintendent who promoted the program, and many people had attended several days of training to discover what the program entailed. Already focusing heavily on character and seeking ways to reward students for positive behavior, the PBIS program was viewed as an extension of school practices at that time. The answers she provided during the interview allowed the researcher to get a clearer understanding of her

thoughts and actions—how she contributed to the school’s success during the early stages of implementation and in the next few years following implementation.

### **Implementing the Program**

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

In analyzing the answers to this question, five recurring themes emerged: making it a priority for the school, effectively communicating, having strong committees, having clear expectations, and showcasing positive happenings.

**Making it a Priority.** Miss Allen mentioned, “I tried to keep PB[I]S at the forefront because it impacted every aspect of the school.” Making it a priority for the school meant that they did not focus on other major initiatives at that time—they wanted to try it long enough to see if it would work without having their attention divided in other areas. In addition, an effort was made to ensure that teachers, students, and parents were aware of expectations, and the administrators worked with their PBIS committee to solve problems related to implementing the program. They talked with stakeholders constantly about the program, and they used feedback from stakeholders to refine it as necessary. They also kept stakeholders abreast of the program’s impact, “The PB[I]S team...reported at staff meetings data they uncovered as we processed through the program (such as the drop in the number of...suspensions).” By keeping the program in the forefront of people’s minds and making it a priority, Miss Allen ensured that the initiative did not lose momentum.

**Effective Communication.** Effective communication among all stakeholders was a key component in the implementation of the PBIS program in both school environments, and it was the primary method used by the schools to address the challenge of gaining buy-in.

Miss Allen asserted, “when anything new is implemented you will always have your naysayers—we of course had our share as well. But, as they saw PBS techniques and strategies working, they became more involved in the process.” Through the utilization of effective communication, principals increased buy-in among stakeholders, especially teachers and parents.

Micah Elementary is located in a rural, low-income community, and according to Miss Allen, “parent involvement was not very high and sometimes what was done at school was undone at home.” In response, the school hosted monthly parent workshops during which they fed parents and “tried to get them involved and get them out to see what was going on.” The belief was that the parents would then reiterate the appropriate behaviors at home. Teachers also attended these meetings at Micah, and when they faced low staff morale due to the fact that more teachers would attend than parents, Miss Allen began requiring grade levels to attend rather than every teacher attending. She said she also “communicated with the teachers as often as I could and let them know PBIS was important to me and to us as a school.” Effective communication with all stakeholders was vital during implementation, but strong PBIS committees were crucial.

**Forming Strong Committees.** The principals were responsible for articulating visions, and the PBIS committees helped bring the visions to fruition through regular meetings, problem-solving, and carrying out tasks. For example, the staff members who attended the training became responsible for training the staff as a whole, but once the committees were formed, they became the governing groups for the program. They put in the “legwork” to make it happen—ensuring that copies of the matrices were posted, ensuring that staff members were aware of the initiatives, and ensuring that the rewards and incentives

piece ran smoothly. At Micah, the committee also hosted an ecumenical event for area ministers, asking them to reach out to their congregations to stress the importance of an education and respectful behavior. Without a strong committee, many of these tasks and activities would not have happened.

**Clear Expectations.** Another way that the principals contributed to the success of the exemplar schools was ensuring that expectations were clear. Ensuring clear expectations helped mitigate the implementation challenge of getting stakeholders on one accord. At Micah, they held assemblies to explain to students what appropriate behavior looked like in different areas of the school and what was expected. These assemblies were done on the first day of school at the beginning of the year and at the beginning of a new semester when students returned from holiday breaks. Students were also “given a copy of the matrix explaining expectations for appropriate behaviors throughout the school, and each day, during the daily televised morning announcements, expectations for each area of the school were reviewed” (Miss Allen). Teaching students the expected behaviors made them more cognizant of the rules and behavior improved according to Miss Allen.

**Showcasing Positive Happenings.** Other ways that the principals contributed to the success of the PBIS program included making a big deal of “catching kids being good” and making an effort to “showcase any positive thing that was going on in the classroom.” When students were caught being good, the expected behavior was acknowledged and rewarded publicly. Their names would be turned in to the office and entered into a drawing for a prize. In turn, “good things caught on and other kids would ask about it.” Further, according to Miss Allen, each classroom would have something they would share on the televised morning broadcasts. They took turns showcasing positive events and they made it fun.

Students “being good” evolved into classrooms being good. All of these strategies helped both schools earn exemplar status in the first year following implementation and at the time of this study, in subsequent years as well.

*Research Question 2: How did the principals’ thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

**PBIS makes sense.** Miss Allen’s (Micah) primary thought regarding the program was that, “the principles of PBS make perfect sense.” Subsequently, rather than focusing on multiple objectives, the school made its implementation a priority. She remarked:

The first year of PBS we did not take on a lot of goals or programs so that we could focus our attention to this one important program. Many times in schools, we are so busy dabbling and trying new things that we seldom stay with one thing long enough to see it work.

In order to help this program work, copies of the matrix were distributed to students, staff, and parents. In addition, expectations were reviewed in assemblies, on morning announcements, in parent meetings, and in staff meetings. She commented:

Some kids don’t know how to act respectfully and responsibly unless they are taught to do so. When expectations are taught regularly and students are recognized for appropriate behavior the program does work to improve behavior and the overall learning environment of the school.

As a result, she saw positive changes in all areas throughout the school.

## **Sustaining the Program**

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

During the interviews with the current principal and PBIS committee members at Micah Elementary, several key themes emerged pertaining to how the schools' principals contributed to the gaining of exemplar status (see Table 3 below). As a result, the researcher was better able to understand how the PBIS program was successfully sustained with principal turnover.

Table 3

*Micah RQ1 Principal and Committee Responses*

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<b>Micah Elementary</b>
Reinforcing Expectations
Analyzing data
Strong committee
Effective communication
Collaborated with staff
Making it a priority
Gaining teacher buy-in
Showcasing positive things and celebrating milestones

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The principal and committee all agreed that principals reinforced expectations, analyzed data, and gained teacher buy-in. The principals also collaborated with staff members to find solutions to challenges they faced during implementation.

**Reinforcing Expectations.** Expectations were reinforced with students and staff consistently through various media—direct communication, announcements, and modeling were among them. Mr. Cole stated:

I have to be on the front-line continuously reminding students of the rules and modeling the expectations of PBIS. If they walk down the hall...with hands behind their back, then I also walk with my hands behind my back; it's a good thing for students to see a man come in and...work with a process to help benefit them.

In addition to modeling expectations through his own actions, he and other administrators reinforced expectations by creating and posting the PBIS matrix around the school in areas such as the bathrooms, water fountains, and cafeteria “so the kids could see it all the time.” Expectations were also reinforced by talking about the PBIS expectations during the morning announcements, principals talking with teachers about their efforts to support PBIS, and principals referring to the PBIS matrix—the code of conduct for PBIS schools—when disciplining students. Committee members commented, “administrators did not just suspend students for behavioral infractions; they did a lot of pep talks from the office, mentored students, gave them time to reflect on what could have been different, and utilized a room for time out.” The school also had assemblies at the beginning of the year to model to students what was expected of them.

Clear and direct communication from the schools' principals also served to reinforce expectations with staff members. According to a Micah committee member,

As a staff member, if you were told to do something, you did it. It was just a matter of the principal saying, ‘This is what we’re going to do, and you gotta do it—if you don’t teach it to them, they’re not going to learn it...this is our lifestyle now, this is what we do.’

Regarding Miss Allen, the first principal, committee members stated: “She was a strong leader; she made her presence known and what she expected.” Further, it “wasn’t a question of if we were or were not going to do it, it was how were we going to do it; [yet] in the same turn, she was empathetic toward staff.”

**Analyzing Data.** Analyzing data consisted of identifying problems areas as well as strategies that were working. Mr. Cole said, “I strive to live by the motto that decisions made for the school as a whole should be data-driven.” He surmised, “I could look at the data and let the data share with me what our pros and cons were.” They then made decisions based on what the data revealed. For example, data regarding student rewards were examined to determine whether or not the rewards were successes.

Office discipline referrals were another form of data used to identify problems and areas of focus. The principal and assistant principal both handled discipline matters, but the assistant principal entered it into the system so that the wording was the same. Once the data was pulled, the principal and assistant principal presented it to the staff and helped interpret it. Mr. Cole believed it was important to share the data with teachers because it helped with getting buy-in. He remarked that when the data is shared:

Teachers can see [the benefits of the program] themselves; they don’t have to hear it from anyone else. As they model [the expectations of the program], they can see it

and they can see their children change from day one to where we are now based on the PBIS rules that we have in place.

He acknowledged that, “It’s not easy to just say ‘let’s go by these rules’ because we have different classroom [styles] and personalities, but they realize we need to be on one accord” and the data helps in this regard.

The PBIS committee also determined that analyzing data was one way their principals contributed to the success of their PBIS program. One committee member responded:

[Miss Allen] was a very data-driven leader and I believe that also spawned our exemplar status. I mean, we used our data to determine what worked and what didn’t work and what we needed to fix—that’s why we did the overhaul a couple of years ago....The new system was more universal, there was not as much leeway as before, and it wasn’t as confusing; everything was cut and dry for every single teacher.

**Gaining Teacher Buy-In.** Getting teachers to buy-into the PBIS program was another way that principals contributed to the success of exemplar schools. This was one of the initial challenges faced by the schools. A survey was sent out to the staff during the early stages of implementation to assess staff practices, and buy-in was not yet at 80%, the amount required through implementation of the program (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). One of the ways the principals addressed this challenge was supporting teachers in their efforts to implement the program and reinforce discipline. This took place in a variety of ways: principals were active on the committee, they offered guidance and suggestions, and they were supportive in meetings.

One committee member revealed that a suggestion was made at the initial PBIS training that principals should not be a part of the team because “they wanted it to come from

teachers.” However, they took it upon themselves to bring the principal and assistant principal in because the administrators supported them and that helped. A teacher noted, “when we first started, Miss Allen was there just kinda guiding us but she would let us take the lead and present it to the other staff members.” Other committee members responded saying that “the administrators’ [involvement] has made a difference...if we don’t have their support [we can’t do it]...we need them.” Moreover, according to a committee member:

All principals were a big part of [implementation] so it wasn’t like convincing them that this was what we needed to do—they came in already knowing about it and being a part of it so that made it a lot easier. (Micah Elementary)

The committee also commented, “We’ve had good principals that pushed and supported us at staff meetings and being in almost every single PBIS meeting.” According to Mr. Cole, attending meetings created an “opportunity to sit down and talk and come up with a plan.” While it was one thing to be able to make decisions on items that the committee brought to him, he said it was more beneficial “to actually go in when they’re discussing things and be able to say ‘Hold it, stop right there’ or ‘Yes, I like that.’” In addition, he said, “being present at meetings is just like being present in the classrooms—it shows support and they love to see you.” Attending PBIS meetings and playing an active role in discussions and decisions that were made helped contribute to the success of the school in addition to gaining teacher buy-in.

**Collaborating with Staff.** In order to ensure consistency among staff members with expected behaviors, the principal(s) collaborated with staff members to find solutions to discipline issues. This was another way that the principals contributed to the success of the

school. The committee members stated that the biggest challenge areas were the cafeteria and the playground:

In the cafeteria where there's a lot of people—different personalities in a small area at the same time—it's hard to be consistent, and then the playground—getting people to understand that you can't sit on the bench and talk to your neighbor because you hadn't seen them all day long. As an adult, you've got to monitor....

To address these challenges, the administrators talked to the teachers at opportune moments such as staff meetings. According to the assistant principal:

When you bring it up at a staff meeting—the playground's our biggest issue what can we do about it?—we talk about it...and then we turn it over and say, 'We're not on the playground, you are.' [We] put the responsibility back on them, and having a representative from a lot of different grade levels on this committee helps too because they are out there, and if they're going to walk around then a lot of times the other teachers will too.

Moreover, the principal and assistant principal communicated with staff members regarding discipline and rewards. Discipline data was shared at staff meetings and through e-mails, and teachers were kept informed about which students could not participate in reward activities due to office referrals that may have come from other areas, such as the bus. In other instances, the administrators and teachers needed to come to agreement about who was able to participate in rewards. According to the assistant principal, "If I see the list [of reward participants] and I've been in the classroom and I've seen 'Johnny' [misbehaving], I go to the teacher and say 'Does Johnny really need to be on this list?'" A discussion then ensues, and "it helps with keeping [the process] consistent."

*Research Question 2: How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

Adopting the question of Burch, Theoharis, and Rauscher in their study of the elementary school principal role in class size reduction, this study sought to understand "...what categories of thought lie beneath the decisions and actions that principals assume in response to...challenges?" (2010, p. 334). Because the PBIS committee members could not speak on the inward thoughts of principals, research question two was only posed to principals themselves. However, committee members could speak about their observations of the principal's actions. There were several thoughts about PBIS that informed the principal's actions as determined by the principal himself, the researcher, or the committee members. The researcher took direct and indirect quotes from the principal and triangulated them with the responses of the committee members.

During the interview with the principal of Micah Elementary, Mr. Cole, four key thoughts about the PBIS program emerged. These thoughts have informed his actions throughout the implementation and sustaining of the program and are presented here: "The data will tell me what's good and what's not good," "I have to be on the front-line continuously reminding students of the rules and modeling the expectations of PBIS," "Consistency—that's number one," and the importance of the matrix.

**Data.** Mr. Cole believes in the importance of data being used to drive the decisions that are made within the school. He said, "The data will tell me what's good and what's not good." This is apparent by the school's use of data and record keeping in evaluating the effectiveness of rewards. As stated previously, the number of students who participate in reward incentives is indicative of whether or not the reward is considered a success. In addition, discipline data such as official referral forms to the office were used to identify

areas where problems may be occurring such as the playground, classrooms, or busses. It was also used to identify repeat offenders that may have been in need of additional assistance or interventions, such as what occurs with the secondary and tertiary levels of PBIS.

**Modeling.** Another thought that informed Mr. Cole's actions is his belief, "I have to be on the front-line continuously reminding students of the rules and modeling the expectations of PBIS." This is the onus he placed on himself as the principal, as evidenced by his willingness to acknowledge and reward appropriate behaviors, discuss the reward system with staff members, and attend meetings with the committee. In addition, he exhibited the same behaviors that students were expected to exhibit. If the students were supposed to walk down the hall with their hands behind their back, then he also walked down the hall with his hands behind his back. Further, because he believed he should be a leader for the program, it was his desire to be "more hands-on with PBIS." He said this entailed looking at data more closely and being in all PBIS meetings so that "when they bring info, we can all sit down and talk and come up with a plan...to make sure no child is left behind."

**Consistency.** Mr. Cole also thought the most meaningful aspect of the PBIS program was consistency:

Consistency—that's number one. There's a set of guidelines that the faculty should be on one accord about, and then your students are on the same accord. It doesn't matter what classroom the student is in, there are certain rules we all go by; we all speak the same language.

He added that it is very important for children at the elementary age to see continuity from room to room. He commented, "Certain things need to be consistent, otherwise, we're going to confuse the child. Confusion may increase...misbehaviors and the number of referrals,

and with that, we're losing instructional time." With this belief in mind, Mr. Cole spent time talking to students and staff to help ensure that everyone was on one accord.

**The Matrix.** The "certain rules" that they all went by were encompassed in the matrix. The matrix could be found printed in the student agendas, posted in the hallways and bathrooms, and hung in the principal's office. He said, "If they have a question about something, it's in the matrix; if they come to my office with an issue, I refer them to the matrix—are you complying with what's in the matrix?" When he acknowledged positive student behaviors, it was based on the rules within the matrix such as: "I see what you're doing; I like the fact that you're walking down the hall following rules; thank you for picking up that piece of paper; thank you for opening the door and being respectful." All school rules fell within the matrix, and it was used in conjunction with discipline policies developed by the school board.

### **Twisdale Elementary**

Twisdale Elementary, a bright spot hidden on a side road in a rural area, has approximately 500 students. They have a diverse student population comprised of approximately 23% Caucasian, 60% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian, Indian students, and multi-racial students; 77% of whom are on free or reduced lunch. The current principal of Twisdale Elementary, Mrs. Dove, had been a principal for six years. This was her second year as principal of Twisdale, and she is the second principal the school has had since it first implemented the PBIS program six years ago. She was first introduced to the PBIS program while serving as the principal at another school, a low-performing school in the same district with a high number of discipline referrals. Her interest in the program was sparked by a desire to improve the dynamics of her former school.

There were nine staff members on the PBIS committee at Twisdale Elementary—a counselor, an English as a second language teacher, a physical education teacher, the assistant principal, and representatives from grades kindergarten through fifth. The numbers of years they had spent as members of the committee ranged from one year to six years, and the majority of the participants had been on the committee for only one year (See Table 4). The principal at the time of initial PBIS implementation, Miss Bates, spent four years as the principal of that school. Her first year there was the first year of full implementation of the PBIS program, also the same year that the district hired a new superintendent.

Table 4

*Twisdale PBIS Committee Profile*

<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Number of years working in school settings</b>	<b>Number of years working in current school</b>	<b>Number of years as a committee member</b>
A	21	5	1
B	6	5	4
C	15	1	1
D	12	2	6
E	8	2	2
F	23	14	1
G	24	4	4
H	7	7	1
I	8	3	1
J	25	15	2

## **Implementing the Program**

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

In answering this question, recurring themes surfaced: daily monitoring, effectively communicating, forming strong committees, and having clear expectations.

**Daily Monitoring.** Miss Bates acknowledged, “I believe my support and monitoring of the program made it successful at [Twisdale], [but] I certainly did not do it alone...I had a dynamic team chairperson and team members....” As a self-proclaimed “very hands-on administrator,” she was present at all PBIS meetings and daily monitoring consisted of daily walk-throughs in the classroom and around the school. She noted, “Through daily walk-throughs and interaction with staff, I made notes about what was effective and what was not.” These practices not only guided her actions in implementing and sustaining the program, they demonstrated her visible support of the program, and they helped her realize if what she did was right. She said, “Daily monitoring and feedback guided me.” It also helped her build a relationship with her committee; she added, “we always discussed all challenges as a team and agreed on how to approach solving them.”

**Effective Communication.** Discussing all challenges as a team and coming to an agreement was one example of effective communication between Miss Bates and her committee, but effective communication among all stakeholders was also key in the implementation of the PBIS program. It was used to convey and reinforce expectations, and it was one of the methods used to convey and increase buy-in, even amongst administrators. Miss Bates (Twisdale) remarked, “Administrative buy-in was...critical. Oftentimes, staff members will focus on what they know is important to their administrators, so all

administrators were always present for all PBIS meetings.” This non-verbal communication conveyed commitment from the administrators, but Miss Bates worked to get the commitment of the teachers as well. She also noted that:

We had a dynamic PBIS team chair that went above and beyond in order to ensure that the expectations of the PBIS program were clearly articulated to all stakeholders. The team was comprised of someone from each grade level. Therefore, we had a good system of communication.

Without a good system of communication, it would have been difficult to have a strong program or a strong committee.

**Forming Strong Committees.** Miss Bates ensured that she had a strong PBIS committee and noted, “The make-up of our PBIS team was critical in the successful implementation.” The committee trained other staff members, helped formulate the expectations and the PBIS matrix, made sure the matrix was posted, managed the rewards and incentives, and addressed issues that surfaced within the school environment. Miss Bates shared that she was an active member of the committee, and they “had a dynamic team chairperson and team members who were not members in name only, but took ownership of making the initiative a success.” Knowing that the committee would take ownership of the program made it easier for Miss Bates to trust that they would do what needed to be done to ensure its success, not because she told them to, but because they also had a vested interest in it. Having strong committees has made a difference throughout the program’s existence in both school environments, and it was a clear contribution to the program.

**Clear Expectations.** At Twisdale, they spent time ensuring that expectations were not only clear for students, but clear for staff members as well. Miss Bates conducted

frequent walk-throughs and spent a great deal of time talking with teachers making certain that “expectations were implemented with fidelity school wide.” She said, “We spent a lot of time during the first two years of implementation making sure we, as the adults in the building, knew exactly what we expected and what each expectation looked like in action.” The PBIS committee helped in this regard by monitoring what was expected. However, having clear expectations did not ensure that the expectations would be followed. As with any school, students may know the rules and choose not to follow them. For Twisdale, the PBIS program itself is what made the difference. According to Miss Bates:

The PBIS program changed the culture of the school from one that focused on negative consequences for not following the behavior expectations to one focused on rewarding the students that were meeting those expectations. This shift in focus encouraged all students to strive to be recognized through our PBIS incentives.

*Research Question 2: How did the principals’ thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

**Belief in PBIS.** The primary thought that influenced Miss Bates’ actions at Twisdale Elementary was, “I am a true believer in PBIS.” She believed in the program; therefore, she was hands-on in its implementation and made sure that the PBIS committee was strong. She commented:

Oftentimes, schools struggle to focus on academics because so much time is spent on managing behavior. Having a strong PBIS program in place that teaches the behavior expectations, as well as social skills lessons, helped to minimize behavior issues.

All administrators attended every meeting, and she talked to teachers to discern what was working and what was not. Once the behavior issues were minimized, the school was able to

focus on instruction. She noted, “the true power of the program is seen when the school begins to focus on the instructional program and how to engage students in their learning.”

### **Sustaining the Program**

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

The responses for the first research question are presented collectively in Table 5 below. Key themes emerged, and the researcher gained added insight into implementing and sustaining the PBIS program.

Table 5

*Twisdale RQ1 Principal and Committee Responses*

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<b>Twisdale Elementary</b>
Reinforcing Expectations
Sharing data
Creating a strong committee
Effective communication
Supporting staff
Daily monitoring
Celebrating successes
Advocating for the program

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Mrs. Dove, the current principal, shared that the role she believes principals play in contributing to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools includes advocating for the

program and ensuring that the PBIS committee is strong. The team shared this belief, and they also believed the principals' sharing data, celebrating successes, and reinforcing expectations among students and staff contributed to their success. Lastly, they mentioned that the principals' support of staff members played a major role in the success of their elementary school.

**Advocating for the program.** Mrs. Dove advocated for the program through her words and actions. She stated:

I have to make sure that teachers see me modeling it and that they truly know that I believe in the program, so [I do that by] being involved, being visible, and making sure I'm modeling expectations right along with the others. If students and staff look at you and don't see that you are truly supporting the program then they tend to take the same attitude that you have.

Further, she made sure that school stakeholders are aware of the program. She said: "We have agendas that go out and I made sure the matrix and expectations were printed on it." In addition:

Anytime I met with stakeholders, I talked about the program and the expectations of it, and I made sure we did a pep rally or something like that at the beginning of the year for the kids, modeling correct and incorrect behaviors and reinforcing it as often as needed. (Mrs. Dove)

**Sharing Data and Celebrating Successes.** Committee members said that Mrs. Dove "makes sure team the meets on a monthly basis and makes sure that we are well-informed about discipline and how the system is working." She showed her staff how to do discipline referrals and how to track them. She also showed them how the number of disciplinary

referrals had reduced since the program was implemented. When they identified areas that had improved, she said she, “made sure some of the successes were celebrated early so they could see the benefits of the program and that it really worked.” She asserted, “PBIS principles say it takes at least 3-5 years—[but really] anything that you do when you’re dealing with growth and data—takes 3-5 years to prove that it’s working and it’s sustainable....” By celebrating the successes along the way, the staff was encouraged rather than discouraged. In addition, she chose teacher leaders that were doing a great job with the program to speak about it and share ideas about what was working for them.

**Creating a Strong Committee.** Creating a strong team was an integral part of the role that principals played in helping their schools achieve exemplar status; principals relied on committee members to help problem-solve and bring the vision of implementation to fruition. Mrs. Dove credited the members of her team for their part in helping Twisdale gain exemplar status. She said, “They were doing it before I got here, and I have to contribute some of that to the team members that guided the program and have taken it underneath their wings and have ensured that it is a success.”

The current members of the PBIS committee at Twisdale were hand-picked by Mrs. Dove, and they represent the school’s stakeholders. She commented that she chose the members of the PBIS committee “through observations, evaluations, and looking for those teachers that were nurturing and passionate.” Because the committee is involved with finding the best ways to implement and sustain the program, she added, “I went with who I thought would be better to make those decisions...who will take the program and run with it.”

The team worked well together, and they met on a regular basis. According to one committee member, “we meet every month to look at what’s working and what’s not to keep students engaged in positive behavior.” Mrs. Dove noted:

A lot of paperwork, documentation, and surveys help you get to exemplar status, [so you] have to make sure that the team is meeting on a regular basis; each doing their part to make sure all components are done and submitted in a timely manner.

Yet, Mrs. Dove does not just wait for them to report back to her; she is an active member of the committee, “planning and making decisions along with the team that’s going to benefit all students” (Mrs. Dove). Her presence does not necessarily drive the decision-making process however. She commented:

I have a strong team; strong enough to make decisions even if I wasn’t involved or couldn’t be in a meeting. The members of the team nurture it; they are passionate about what they do and what we provide our kids.

A committee member noted, “the principal ensures that we meet on a regular basis to keep it an active program; you can start something and not stay abreast of it, but with the meetings and the rewards systems that we do on a regular basis—I think that’s a plus.” Strong leadership on the committee was another reason the team was strong. According to the committee members:

The chairman...is committed... and goes above and beyond. She...is a very strong and proactive teacher and she helps drive the incentive piece [of the program], and the principal really supports her in that—making sure that she has what she needs to go out and get it done.

They added that, “the original chairperson of the committee was also the same way; she had that same fire and spirit about her to really get this going, and she was very instrumental in it.” That was crucial to them because:

Administrators can’t do it all and you have to have someone who is on fire for it. If it wasn’t for that fire in some of the staff, then it wouldn’t be as good of a program as it is; it just shows that teachers are very important in implementation.

**Reinforcing Expectations.** Reinforcing expectations was identified by the committee as one of the roles that their principals played in contributing to the success of their exemplar school. Faculty and staff were made aware of the expectations for supporting the program on a regular basis and through various mediums. According to a committee member:

It’s a part of the introduction piece of working here; it’s a piece of your job, it’s not an option. If you’re going to work here you need to get on board and get it down.

It’s an expectation and the children are taught that from the very beginning too, from the first day of school. Rules are posted around the school, and all parents are aware of what’s going on with the PBIS system.

Presentations were given at the beginning of the school year on workdays, “emphasizing over and over that everybody has to buy into it and do it or it doesn’t work.” The committee member added that, “That is still true; every teacher—we all have to have kinda like the same expectations...” Mrs. Dove modeled the expectations, and she said that, “in some ways staff participation was non-negotiable.”

Expectations were also reinforced with students. Getting students to buy into the program came as a result of making sure parents were aware of the program, making sure the

matrix was printed in the student agendas, talking about the program and its expectations with stakeholders, and having a pep rally for students in which appropriate behaviors were modeled. In addition, “they hear it daily. On morning announcements, it’s said everyday; positive behavior is always reinforced” (committee member).

Being consistent was one of the expectations that was reinforced. One committee member revealed that prior to PBIS, “there was a lot of inconsistency in the school; each teacher had his or her own rules and expectations, and we were looking for ways to carry them throughout the school.” With PBIS, all school rules fall within the matrix, and they revised their discipline referral form to reflect the matrix. They also created another matrix to determine which consequence went with which infraction so that there would also be consistency with consequences. Mrs. Dove noted, “teachers being consistent in what they remind the kids of and reinforce daily has helped this school...rules are taught all the time and the expectations don’t change; the rules are clear, precise, and to the point.” In order to enhance consistency, the matrix is revisited on a regular basis. According to a committee member:

The difficulty lies in making sure that the words mean the same thing to all of us—your definition of a fight or your definition of disrespect might be different from mine. The consistency and the expectations have to be very close to make sure that we are following what we feel like is important for discipline and rewards.

Mrs. Dove mentioned that they also have to revisit the incentives because “it becomes old and [students] become accustomed to the rewards; we have to keep them motivated and encouraged to do the right thing.”

**Showing Support.** Twisdale’s principals were supportive of the program and the staff as a whole. One of the committee members mentioned Mrs. Dove in particular:

Mrs. Dove has supported PBIS since she became principal. We met over the summer numerous times before her first year at [Twisdale] so we could continue to have a strong PBIS team. She sent us last year to the state PBIS meeting so that we could receive our banner as well as network with other exemplar schools.

She supported their fundraising efforts, and she supported them in finding effective ways to address discipline issues. For example, Mrs. Dove would allow a teacher who is struggling with discipline to visit the classroom of a teacher who is doing a good job in order to see how that teacher manages the program in his or her classroom. Further, because it is a district initiative, she could call the district coach to help teachers who struggle. According to a committee member, “[The district coach] can visit the classroom and help us implement those behavior management pieces that we may struggle with and help get support as to how to use those pieces effectively and reward students.”

Further, according to a committee member, the principal had no problem letting them be in control of their rewards and consequences:

We’re the ones that are in the classroom with the children every day. We see the behaviors and if we see that the rewards and the consequences aren’t working, we bring it up, and we say, ‘Hey, this isn’t working’ and they are always willing to listen and to let us offer suggestions to change it.

When discipline issues did arise, a committee member noted, “they were handled immediately and appropriately. We were always backed up and supported by our administrators.” The committee also noted that the administrative team would try to come up

with solutions to take back to the committee, and “even if we have to make changes on a grade level, we can do that—leadership will help with finding solutions for that.” However, the administrators were not expected to have all the answers; they would problem-solve with the team as well. As a committee member explained, “It helps when admin is willing to say, ‘We need your help because we can’t think of anything else’—everyone has to have buy-in.”

*Research Question 2: How did the principals’ thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

During the interview with the principal of Twisdale Elementary, several key thoughts about the PBIS program emerged. These thoughts were narrowed down to three primary beliefs to which actions could be linked: “I have seen PBIS in the works and know that it’s proven to work,” “You have to have buy-in from the team perspective as well,” and “[As principal], you have the final say in whatever goes on in your school.”

**PBIS Works.** When Mrs. Dove was first introduced to the PBIS program, she was eager for something that would make a difference. She said, “I just felt like if anything [could] assist me in improving the dynamics of the school, the perspective of the school, then I was on board; so, I had to be the cheerleader from the beginning.” For this reason, she actively promoted and advocated for the PBIS program. She shared information with stakeholders, solicited sponsors for rewards, built the program up through school events, and met with the committee on a regular basis.

As a result, PBIS did assist her in improving the dynamics of the school—the number of discipline referrals was reduced and the school was able to come out of school improvement. As a result, she is now able to say, “I have seen PBIS in the works and know that it’s proven to work.” Because she believed the program worked, she advocated for it, ensured that the PBIS committee was strong, and strived to keep students motivated.

**Buy-In.** When asked about what guided her decisions, she said, “First of all, it’s not my decision even though I am the leader of this school, but you do have to have buy-in from the team perspective as well.” Because she believed she had to have buy-in from the team perspective, she communicated with staff members and the PBIS committee to solve problems. She asked for suggestions and she requested their feedback. For example, the school had a situation in which a lot of students were misbehaving on the bus. Mrs. Dove explained:

“I took the concern back to the PBIS team to make a decision that was going to benefit all students. We came up with different rewards and incentives, and almost every two months we had to tweak it and come up with something new. And finally after everything that the team had done—talked with other schools, googled things to see what other people were doing—we just felt like we had exhausted all of our resources and we didn’t know what else to do with that bus, but I finally made the decision to switch bus drivers....”

Together, the principal and the committee collaborated on issues that arose during the process of implementing and sustaining the PBIS program. Her reliance on the committee also tied into her belief that she had to have a strong committee that could take the program and run with it. For this reason, she personally chose the teachers and school representatives for the committee rather than letting them volunteer.

**The Principal has the Final Say.** The third primary thought that informed Mrs. Dove’s actions was the belief that, “[As principal], you have the final say in whatever goes on in your school.” Although she consulted with others, she had to be able to make tough decisions when necessary, such as with the scenario above. She expounded,

Anytime I make a decision, the guiding force behind my decision is what's going to be best for my students....you're just not going to please everybody with every decision that you make. If you are a people pleaser, it's gonna bother you. If you feel like, 'I'm gonna offend somebody and I have to try to make everybody happy,' it's gonna bother you, but every decision I make is guided by what's going to be best for my students.

She went on to add:

And I do, don't get me wrong, I do have several committees and everything I do present [to them] is with the intention of team effort or a team decision...but there are some things that are just non-negotiable, and when they can't agree on something, that's when I have to come in and make the final decision.

When asked about how she knows that she is making the right decision, she said it is a matter of divine intervention and God giving her that sense of peace. She said, "If I don't have that sense of peace it worries me...and I've had some decisions where I was at peace with it and not everybody agreed with it, but I stood strong behind it."

### **Cross-case Analysis**

This section contains a cross-comparison of the two schools chosen for this study, Micah Elementary and Twisdale Elementary. The findings were compiled in an effort to better identify specific attributes of principals in exemplar elementary schools. According to Stake (1995), "Data source triangulation is an effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances" (p. 113).

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

As presented in Table 6 on the next page, there were recurring themes across the schools that were revealed by the data. Principals contributed to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools by reinforcing expectations, ensuring that their PBIS committees were strong, using data in decision-making, communicating effectively with stakeholders, and celebrating milestones and successes.

Table 6

*Cross-case RQ1: Principal and Committee Responses*

<b>Micah Elementary</b>	<b>Twisdale Elementary</b>
Making it a priority	
Effective communication	Effective communication
Strong committee	Creating a strong committee
Reinforcing Expectations	Reinforcing Expectations
Showcasing positive things and celebrating milestones	Celebrating successes
Analyzing and sharing data	Analyzing and sharing data
Gaining teacher buy-in	
Collaborating with staff members to find solutions to issues	
	Advocating for the program
	Supporting staff
	Daily monitoring

**Similarities**

Themes that overwhelmingly dominated the data from both schools include clear expectations, strong PBIS committees, and the use of data for decision-making. Ensuring that the expectations were clear encompassed directly communicating expectations, modeling expectations, and reinforcing the expectations as necessary. At Micah, they held assemblies to explain to students what appropriate behavior looked like in different areas of

the school and what was expected. Students were also “given a copy of the matrix explaining expectations for appropriate behaviors throughout the school and each day, during the daily televised morning announcements, expectations for each area of the school were reviewed” (Miss Allen). Teaching students the expected behaviors made them more cognizant of the rules, and expectations and behavior improved according to Miss Allen.

At Twisdale, they spent time ensuring that expectations were clear for staff members. Miss Bates conducted frequent walk-throughs and spent a great deal of time talking with teachers making certain that “expectations were implemented with fidelity school wide.” She said, “we spent a lot of time during the first two years of implementation making sure we as the adults in the building knew exactly what we expected and what each expectation looked like in action.” The PBIS committee helped in this regard by monitoring what was expected.

A Strong PBIS committee was another theme that heavily appeared in the data, and this encompasses collaborating with staff members. The principals were active members of the committees and they were present at most meetings. They regularly collaborated with staff members to find solutions to problems they faced, including reviewing and refining the reward systems to make it less daunting for staff and more effective for students. According to a committee member, “we had to start figuring out how to make these kids want to be good for themselves, not just for a prize, not just for us, but for their life and their livelihood...” Another member added, “you can’t just throw in the towel because something doesn’t work.” As a result, the committee contacted other PBIS schools to get suggestions, they tweaked ideas to make it work for their school, and they persisted in seeking effective

strategies. However, they cautioned, “you can’t just try something new every year because then you won’t have any consistency.”

The principals ensured that committees were comprised of stakeholder representatives and as one principal put it, “who could take the program and run with it.”

When asked what the exemplar status meant for their school and staff, one school replied,

It means we’ve worked hard...the status is a great honor but I don’t think it really changes what we do every day; all we do is send in what we do. The status hasn’t made us do it any better or any worse, we just do what we do.

Leaders of the committees were strong and driven, and the principals supported them in their efforts to secure resources for the program, revamp the program, and keep the program and committee active. When the program appeared to getting stagnant, they revisited the reward incentives to make it more exciting for students:

They don’t know what’s coming at the end of the 6 weeks...we know because we plan it out at the beginning of the year, but they don’t know if they’re working for pizza and doughnuts or a flea market they can go shop at or an outside playground and ice cream...they just know they’re working for something good. (Committee member)

However, no matter how good the committee may be, they cannot accomplish their goals without a supportive and committed principal. As one member noted, “We can’t do it without them; we need them.”

Analyzing and sharing data was another theme that reoccurred in the study. Data was shared with staff members and solicited from staff members in faculty meetings and through electronic mail and face-to-face interactions. Schools also used surveys to solicit feedback

from students, staff, and parents, and this data was used to guide the decision-making. One committee member remarked, “Miss Allen [Micah’s former principal], was a very data-driven leader and I believe that also spawned our exemplar status. We used our data to determine what worked and what didn’t work and what we needed to do.”

Mr. Cole analyzed the data surrounding reward events to determine the interest level of the students. By looking at reward data, they could eliminate reward efforts that were unsuccessful and enhance the rewards that motivated students. At Twisdale, data was shared in an effort to identify problem areas and also to reassure staff members that the school was moving in the right direction. Further, administrators and teachers shared data regarding discipline referrals. According to an administrator,

Students who are [written up] can’t be rewarded; admin communicates this to teachers and sends out a list of who can’t go [to reward functions] due to office referrals. We tell them, ‘from your class these kids can’t go, regardless of the behavior in your classroom because they have broken a school rule.’ It’s a lot to keep up with, but that’s how we do it.

Relying on data helped the schools determine the best course of action for the situations they faced.

### **Idiosyncrasies**

Themes that reoccurred within each school but not across schools included making the program a priority, gaining stakeholder buy-in, collaborating with staff on finding solutions, advocating for the program, supporting the staff, and monitoring the implementation of the program with fidelity. Although, this is not to say that these actions did not also take place in the other school environment. On the contrary, many of these

themes were mentioned in the interviews with committee members and principals; however, they were not actions or contributions overwhelmingly identified in their responses.

Collaborating with staff on finding solutions to discipline issues was a major theme that surfaced at Micah Elementary. The administrators regularly engaged the staff in conversations pertaining to discipline and other issues while in staff meetings and in PBIS meetings. Together, they problem-solved to find solutions that could be readily carried out and that everyone supported. Rather than telling teachers what they had to do, administrators presented the problems and they asked them for solutions. For example, when discipline issues kept happening on the playground, administrators put the responsibility back on the teachers saying, “we’re not on the playground, you are.” Further, when the data revealed that many of the at-risk students were African-American males, a decision was made to invite other African-American males in as motivational speakers and mentors. In this manner, a partnership between administration and staff was nurtured; having a successful school was everyone’s responsibility.

At Twisdale, advocating for the program was a dominant theme. One principal said that it was her role to “to advocate for it: I have to make sure that teachers see me modeling and that they truly know that I believe in the program. [I do that by] being involved and being visible, modeling expectations along with the others.” She also advocated for the program by “sending letters to community partners and businesses asking them to donate to PBIS.” Moreover, to enhance buy-in among staff, she sporadically rewarded teachers for their efforts. To advocate for the program with students and increase their buy-in, they surveyed student council members and allowed them to have a voice in the reward

incentives. The chairman of the committee also advocated for the program, and the principal supported her in her efforts to visit businesses and solicit partnerships.

*Research question 2: How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

The findings for the second research question were gleaned from the principals' responses. This question was not posed to committee members due to their inability to attest to the thoughts of their principals; however, the committee members' responses regarding the actions of the principals were considered. Both current principals, Mr. Cole and Mrs. Dove, revealed several thoughts regarding the PBIS program during the interviews. The former principals, Miss Allen and Miss Bates, each relayed one primary thought. The thoughts to which direct actions could be linked are presented on the next page in Table 7. These perceptions are aligned with their actions in Table 8 on page 96.

Table 7

*Cross-case Analysis RQ 2: Thoughts informing actions*

Micah Principals	Twisdale Principals
“The data will tell me what’s good and what’s not good.”	“I have seen PBIS in the works and know that it’s proven to work.”
“I have to be on the front-line continuously reminding students of the rules and modeling the expectations of PBIS.”	“You have to have buy-in from the team perspective as well.”
“Consistency—that’s number one.”	“You have the final say in whatever goes on in your school.”
“If they have a question about something, it’s in the matrix....”	“I am a true believer in PBIS.”
“The principles of PBIS make perfect sense.”	

Table 8

*Cross-case Analysis: Thoughts and actions aligned*

Perceptions	Actions
Principles of PBIS make sense and belief in its outcome	Made implementation a priority Distributed copies of the matrices Reviewed and reinforced expectations Hands-on implementing Ensuring strong committees Attending meetings
Principals must model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations	Staff members, students, parents, community Acknowledging appropriate behaviors Attending meetings Collaborating with staff Exhibiting behaviors
Student and staff buy-in is essential	Collaborating with staff to find solutions Supporting staff with implementation Being a cheerleader for the program
Data collection methods enhance decision-making	Shared data with staff Effectiveness of rewards; Participation in events Discipline data Identify specific students
Principals are responsible for the program's success	Being confident in decisions made Doing what is best for students Inspecting what was expected
Consistency was important	Revising referral form and referring to matrix when disciplining students Posting the matrix Communication with staff members Revisiting matrix and incentives

The second research question seeks to tap into aspects of sensemaking as identified by Weick (1995). Sensemaking is a process that is:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

These attributes directly or indirectly informed the principals' thoughts and influenced their actions. "Action is based on how people notice or select information from the environment, make meaning of that information, and then act on those interpretations, developing culture, social structures, and routines over time (Coburn, 2005, p. 478). This study focused on how principals made meaning, or sense, of the information they noticed within their respective environments. According to Militello, Rallis, and Goldring:

The principal may well be the only person in the school who is able to see the whole picture—and to make sense of it. Seldom does anyone other than the principal have access to all the varied systems operating more or less independently in the loosely coupled components of the school. (2009, p. 15)

All of the attributes of sensemaking, on some level, influenced the actions of the principals given that, "sense-making underscores that people generate what they interpret" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 733). Although the interpretation does not have to be accurate, it must be

plausible. This section reviews the attributes of sensemaking and how these attributes were manifested in the actions of the principals.

**Enactive of Sensible Environment.** Implementing the PBIS program was a district initiative so the principals were expected to implement the program and they had to rely on the teachers to do so. They were placed in a position Spillane et al. (2002), refer to as mid-level management:

...They face major political challenges because their position in the organizational hierarchy focuses their work in at least two directions. On one hand, school leaders are street-level workers dependent on and responsible to their local community stakeholders and the district office for implementing school policy [and] on the other hand, school leaders depend on other street-level workers—classroom teachers—for the successful implementation of these policies. (p. 734)

These are the environments in which they operate; environments which may constrain their actions as well as present opportunities. Because they have been charged with implementing the program, it is an opportunity to improve their schools with the assistance, support and resources of the district's central office. However, just saying that the central office wants a program implemented will not bring about successful implementation.

There is still the charge of getting buy-in from the teachers and helping them see the benefits of the program. While some aspects have to be considered non-negotiable as stated before, teachers are licensed professionals who demand at least a modicum of autonomy in their classrooms. To expect them to do something solely because they are told is to ignore the social aspect of sensemaking; decisions must be made with the awareness that they will be implemented, understood, or approved by others. For this reason, Micah did not take on a

lot of new programs when they began implementing the program; they wanted to be able to focus on PBIS long enough to see it work. Miss Allen knew that focusing on more than one major initiative could frustrate the staff and result in a tense working environment.

**Social.** This aspect of sensemaking takes into account that decision are made in working organizations “either in the presence of others or with the knowledge that they will have to be implemented, or understood, or approved by others” (Burns & Stalker, 1961, p. 118). Consequently, all administrators made sure that the expectations were clear. Copies of the matrices were widely distributed and expectations were reviewed in staff meetings, parent meetings, community meetings, assemblies, and on morning announcements.

Moreover, both current principals walked into situations where the schools and teachers had already experienced levels of success with regard to the PBIS program. Micah and Twisdale Elementary had previously gained exemplar status and knew to a certain extent what that entailed. Mrs. Dove stated, “They were doing it before I got here, and I have to contribute some of that to the team members that guided the program and have taken it underneath their wings and have ensured that it is a success.” Likewise, Mr. Cole stated:

It’s a validation of the quality of teachers that are here and the job they do on a daily basis; I don’t take credit for it, I put the credit where it belongs—to the people in the trenches, and that’s the teachers. Not only are the teachers doing a good job, the students are doing their part.

Further, both schools had PBIS committees that were committed to the program and cared about the students. A committee member at Micah Elementary shared a moment that especially touched her. She said:

The last time we had our reward, I was taking a group out on the playground and it was a second or third grader that was in that group. It was a little girl and she looked at me and said, “I just love PBIS, I worked so hard this six weeks to be able to participate in this...” [And] I thought—how wonderful is that. It was nothing for us to do, but it meant so much. And if it means that much to one child, it’s worth it. Both schools had already experienced levels of success, and neither principal wanted to make decisions or take actions that would hinder their school’s progress; their desire was to “keep a good thing going.”

**Retrospect.** Rather than a comparison, the multiple case study offers a look at the quintain (exemplar elementary PBIS schools) in multiple situations (Stake, 2005). Therefore, the responses provided by the participants offer a better understanding of the *why* for the entire group of cases rather than for each individual case. In retrospect, both current principals had already experienced a level of success with PBIS at previous schools, so they knew the potential of the program. These past experiences shaped the decisions they made in their present environments.

For Mr. Cole, it was the data. He stated that he saw the usefulness of it at the high school level and yet even at the elementary level, “The data will still tell me what’s good and what’s not good.” Further, because it was he, the assistant principal in the previous school that was highly involved in the program, his current assistant principal is also a major part of the PBIS program. Yet, it is his desire as the principal to be more involved with the committee and present at all meetings.

For Mrs. Dove, it was the fact that she had “seen PBIS in the works and know that it’s proven to work.” It had made a difference in her previous school to the extent that the

discipline referrals shrank and the academic performance of students improved. Because she had experienced the success firsthand, she was a willing advocate for the program and took great strides to ensure its sustainability at Twisdale Elementary.

**Grounded in Identity Construction.** The way a principal sees their self and how the principal believes they are seen by others can affect the way decisions are made and conflicts are resolved. Miss Allen said she sought to gain buy-in from the teachers by letting them know that the program was important to her and to them as a school. She also said, “I tried to model what I asked them to do...they knew that I wouldn’t ask them to do something that I wouldn’t do” (Micah). This sensemaking thought pattern is representative of what Weick (1995) would consider to be maintaining a consistent, positive self-conception. Had Miss Allen been wrong in her estimation, it may have affected her self-conception as well as her relationship with staff members.

Mr. Cole felt that he needed to “be on the front-line continuously reminding students of the rules and modeling the expectations of PBIS.” He also made mention that it was good for students to see “a man come in and continue to work with a process...” As with most elementary schools, there are very few men who work at Micah Elementary. Moreover, the previous principals had all been females. Add to that scenario that he is a first-year principal who had only been in that position for eight months at the time of the interview and his previous experience was at the high school level. Not only does a first-year principal spend a lot of time developing relationships and building trust amongst staff members (Williams, 2011), in this instance, he also needed to adjust to the differences in students, curriculum, and routines between the high school level and the elementary level.

Given these circumstances, in line with the identity construction component of sensemaking, Mr. Cole sought to maintain a positive self-conception as he simultaneously shaped and reacted to the new environment. He was still in a stage of proving himself in his new position, and he had to be aware of how others saw him and who he was in relation to the organization if he was to have a chance at being an effective leader.

For Mrs. Dove, the scenario is different; she had already proven herself as a school leader. She was only an assistant principal for two years before becoming a principal, and her principalship was so effective that she was able to bring a low-performing school out of school improvement. This was her second year at Twisdale Elementary, and she was confident in her abilities. She spoke about making decisions and standing by them even though others may not have agreed, having the final say in whatever went on in the school, the fact that she would not do anything differently and hand-picking the current members of the PBIS committee to make sure that they would “nurture the program and run with it.” Yet, she was also in a position to shape and react to her environment as well as maintain a consistent, positive self-image. Because she had proven herself as a school leader thus far, it would have been easy for her to adopt a dictatorial leadership style; however, she said, “You have to have buy-in from the team perspective as well,” and she regularly sought their input.

**Focused on and by extracted cues.** According to Weick, “Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (1995, p. 50). These cues can be viewed as points of references from which the sensemaking emerges. All of the principals used extracted cues to make decisions regarding the PBIS program, and different cues were used at different times.

Miss Bates (Twisdale) did daily walk-throughs and talked with the teachers on a daily basis. She used the feedback they provided to discern what was working and what was not working. Based on this information, they made decisions that would enhance the program for students and staff. One of the cues Mr. Cole used was the data from the reward events to determine whether or not students were respondent to the program. Mrs. Dove used student council to decide what students wanted and the type of things the students wanted to see. Miss Allen saw low staff morale at parent meetings as a cue that the meeting requirements needed to be altered.

All of the principals used conversations with their staff members as extracted cues. Whether in PBIS meetings or staff meetings, the teachers regularly communicated their thoughts about the program to the principals and collaborated with them to find solutions to problems they faced. However, while most school leaders use cues in the process of sensemaking, context can determine how cues are interpreted.

**Ongoing.** Sensemaking, for the sensemaker, never ends. It is an ongoing process punctuated by events. Fully implementing the PBIS program can take three to five years, and because of the nature of the program, the level of implementation may vary. School leaders have to constantly evaluate the program for effectiveness, ensure that buy-in remains at least at 80%, and ensure that teachers are consistent in handling behaviors. Further, schools that wish to be considered for recognition by the Department of Public Instruction must subject themselves to an outside evaluation every year. The process involves providing data documentation, completing an implementation inventory, and subjecting students and staff to unannounced interviews. For an opportunity to be recognized at the exemplar status level, schools must also provide data for additional areas of focus and present a PowerPoint

presentation. In light of these nuances, school leaders must continuously make meaning of and respond to the events that take place in the school environment. Revamping and tweaking the program, discovering new ways to keep it going, and discovering ways to keep students engaged were common occurrences at both schools throughout the inception of the program.

**Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy.** Sensemaking does not have to be true and accurate; it just has to be possible based on cues extracted by the sensemaker. Further, the previous properties of sensemaking impact whether or not the sensemaking, or story, is plausible. While it is common knowledge that the role principals play in the implementation of the PBIS program can affect its success, it may be less clear which specific role that is. Mr. Cole believed that the most important thing that he did was rewarding students and acknowledging their behavior, while Miss Allen felt that the most important thing she did was institute the morning broadcasts that showcased the positive things going on in the classrooms. Mrs. Dove thought that being visible and being a part of the team was most important, and Miss Bates said, “The most important thing I did was being present at all the meetings and being an active member of the committee.” As they all look back on their experiences in retrospect, their beliefs are entirely plausible.

Moreover, Mr. Cole believed that consistency was the most meaningful component of PBIS—ensuring that everyone was complying with the matrix. Compliance was also important at Twisdale Elementary. As a committee member at Twisdale stated, “Sometimes we have to revisit the matrix every so often because the difficulty lies in making sure that the words mean the same thing to all of us.” Mr. Cole’s belief that consistency with the matrix was most important is plausible based on his ability to look back on events when the matrix

was or was not used, how teachers understand the need to refer to the matrix for disciplinary issues, cues that the matrix is effective, whether or not he was able to shape the environment, and how his personality and self-concept were able to come together in such a way that he can trust what he is sensing.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a review of the purpose of this study along with the research questions and the methods used. Profiles of the schools chosen, Twisdale Elementary and Micah Elementary (pseudonyms), were shared and the findings for each research question were presented by school. The findings for each school were presented as a within-case analysis. They were separated into two sections—Implementing the Program and Sustaining the Program and organized by emergent themes. Findings were then presented as a cross-case analysis of the two sites, disaggregated by research question and organized by emergent theme as well.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study followed by a summary of the key findings. The summary of key findings presents the information as a cross-case analysis of the two sites, compiling all answers provided by respondents but disaggregating them by research question. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are presented, followed by its limitations. The chapter concludes with directions for future research.

#### **Review of the Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to examine the thoughts and actions of principals who had successfully implemented the school-wide PBIS program in North Carolina elementary schools. Specifically, this study examined PBIS elementary schools deemed as exemplar—the highest level of PBIS program recognition—by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). By studying exemplar schools, we get a glimpse of what is possible—not only that it can be done, but “how it was organized, developed, and pursued” (Shulman, 1983, p. 495). As a result, those who aspire to the same level of success can build upon information that explains the factors contributing to success both within and across sites (Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000).

Much of the literature available about the PBIS program discusses the essential components that must be included during implementation and provides step-by-step guidelines for schools who are interested in its implementation. However, there is little information about the specific roles that principals play in contributing to the success of exemplar PBIS sites. Research, for example, indicates that buy-in of the program must be at 80% by faculty and staff (Sugai and Horner, 2004), but it is less clear regarding how to make

this happen. Moreover, current studies provide limited information about how principals use sensemaking to guide the successful implementation of programs in general, (Coburn, 2005) and PBIS specifically. Understanding *how* principals make sense of PBIS and how these thoughts influence their actions in implementing the program in their schools is tantamount to understanding how to successfully implement PBIS.

Therefore, this study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?
2. How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?

In order to answer these questions, this study took on a qualitative, multiple case study research design. Purposive sampling was used to identify two exemplar schools for this study, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals and PBIS committee members. Questionnaires, field notes, and physical artifacts were also gathered and open coding was used to identify themes related to the research questions. Finally, the data were examined using within-case analysis and then cross-case analysis to better understand the phenomenon of exemplar elementary schools.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Stake's (2005) approach to the multiple case study relies on the assumption that we better understand the whole quintain—the collection of cases or phenomenon exhibited in the cases—by studying and better understanding the parts of the quintain. In this particular study, the phenomenon being studied is exemplar elementary schools. Each individual case in its natural setting represents a part, while the two cases together represent the whole. As such, each study was subjected to within-case analysis prior to cross-case analysis. By

studying and juxtaposing the actions and thoughts of the principals in each school, I was better able to understand the role that principals play in exemplar PBIS schools in general. In this manner, I was able to identify conditions worth replicating in other schools seeking the same levels of success.

Although particular details of the cases varied, I attempted to build a general explanation that fit the individual cases. Interestingly, there were more similarities than there were differences, suggesting that the schools shared some common factors that influenced implementation and that there might be specific actions that foster successful implementation of PBIS across different settings.

*Research Question 1: How do principals contribute to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools?*

Reinforcing expectations was the primary way that principals contributed to the success of the schools according to study participants. In fact, this was the only factor that was mentioned by all four respondent categories. Expectations were reinforced with students and staff consistently through various media: direct communication, announcements, and modeling were among them. Both schools had regular assemblies where staff members would demonstrate appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and they reviewed the expectations for each area of the school every morning during announcements. In addition, the PBIS matrix was printed in handbooks for students and posted around the school environment.

Reinforcing expectations was necessary with students as well as adults. At Twisdale, one committee member commented, “It’s a part of the introduction piece of working here; it’s a part of your job. If you’re going to work here you need to get on board and get it

down.” At Micah, the committee hosted an ecumenical event for area ministers and encouraged them to reach out to their congregations and stress the importance of an education and respectful behavior. All of these reinforcement strategies helped both schools earn exemplar status in the first year following implementation and in subsequent years as well.

Principals also contributed to the success of exemplar elementary schools by ensuring that they had strong PBIS committees. These committees were considered strong because they met regularly, collaborated and problem-solved with administrators, advocated for the program and solicited funding, reviewed the matrix and reward systems regularly, and helped carry out the mission and vision of the program. Committee members also nurtured the program, and they were self-sufficient—making decisions even if the principals were not involved in the meetings. Micah’s current principal, Mr. Cole, inherited a PBIS committee that had been in place for some time, and of which the assistant principal was an active member. Mr. Cole did not have to build a strong committee nor revamp it because it was functioning effectively; in agreement, the other respondents pointed out how crucial having strong committees were to their success.

Miss Bates shared that she “had a dynamic team chairperson and team members who were not members in name only, but took ownership of making the initiative a success” (Twisdale). In referencing the team at Twisdale, Mrs. Dove noted:

The members of the team nurture it; [they are] passionate about what they do and what we provide our kids.” She also said that she chose the members of the PBIS committee “through observations, evaluations, and looking for those teachers that

possess the type of character traits that I just shared [nurturing and passionate]; I went with who I thought would be better to make those decisions.

Her committee at that time had a representative for each grade level as well as a counselor, an elective teacher, an ESL representative, and the assistant principal. Micah also had a diverse committee: three grade-level teachers, two counselors, a music teacher, an instructional coach, and the assistant principal. In addition, two of the committee members were also parents of students who attended the school. Having diverse committees helped to ensure that each segment of the population was represented in the decisions that were made.

The former principals, who were new to the schools at the time the PBIS program first began, both revealed that they contributed to the success of the program by making it a priority and being visible. As it is with leadership in general, what is focused on gets done. The PBIS program became the focus area, and for one school, everything else was put on hold so that teachers could firmly grasp the new initiative. The principals also spent a great deal of time being visible in their support of the program through their words and their actions. They also made sure the program was “visible.” They solicited feedback from the teachers and the committees, they talked about the program to students and other stakeholders, they mentioned it daily on the morning announcements, and they held assemblies to review expectations. They also set the stage for the principals who would follow. There was an established commitment to the program and an expectation of success; when new leadership took over, it was easy for them to jump on board and focus on sustainability.

Other ways that principals contributed to the success of exemplar elementary schools, but perhaps to a lesser degree as revealed by this study, include: attending meetings,

showcasing positive happenings within the school environment, analyzing data, advocating for the program, and gaining teacher buy-in. One way the principals were able to gain teacher buy-in was to support teachers in their effort to implement the program and to reinforce discipline. Moreover, supporting staff members included supporting PBIS committee members, so attending the PBIS meetings and playing an active role in discussions and decisions that are made also helped to gain teacher buy-in. Other efforts to support staff members included daily walk-throughs, talking with them to get feedback about the program, and problem-solving collaboratively.

*Research question 2: How did the principals' thoughts about PBIS inform their actions?*

Sensemaking is a process (a) grounded in identity construction, (b) retrospective, (c) enactive of sensible environments, (d) social, (e) ongoing, (f) focused on and by extracted cues, and (g) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). In short, the sensemaker must understand who he is in and of himself and in relation to others, be able to reflect on that which has happened, and consider the environment in which he operates. He must also consider the individuals with whom he operates and be aware that the sensemaking process is on-going, but look for cues that punctuate events.

Concerning PBIS, the four principals perceived various thoughts that undergirded their decisions as they implemented the program. These thoughts were the lenses through which they were able to see the “whole picture,” make sense of it, and then act upon it. The principals in this study propose:

- The principles of PBIS make sense and they believe in its positive outcomes,
- Principals must model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations,
- Student and staff buy-in is essential to the overall success of PBIS,

- Various data collection methods enhance the decision-making process,
- Principals are ultimately responsible for the program's success, and
- Consistency throughout the school is important.

Coupling the principals' thoughts with the elements of sensemaking, we see connections in

Table 9 on the next page.

Table 9

*Principal Perceptions and Sensemaking*

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Elements of Sensemaking</b>
Principles of PBIS make sense and belief in its outcome	Retrospective Focused on and by extracted cues
Principals must model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations	Social Ongoing Identity Construction
Student and staff buy-in is essential	Focused on and by extracted cues Plausibility rather than accuracy Social Enactive of sensible environments
Data collection methods enhance decision-making	Focused on and by extracted cues Plausibility rather than accuracy
Principals are responsible for the program's success	Identity construction Plausibility rather than accuracy On-going
Consistency was important	Social Focused on and by extracted cues Enactive of sensible environments

Perception 1: The principles of PBIS making sense and the belief in its outcome is representative of the retrospective aspect of sensemaking and focused on and by cues. In order for the principals to successfully maneuver the implementation of the PBIS program, these thoughts processes had to be present. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) asserted, “the concept of retrospect suggests that so-called stimuli for action such as diagnoses, plans for implementation, and strategies are as much the products of action as they are prods to action” (p.419). The “diagnosis” was that the program made sense—it was not a quick initiative that they would implement for a year or two until something else came along; it was a program that could and did have a lasting impact on the students, staff, and cultures of the schools. In this manner, it was a prod to action based on interpreted cues—the impetus from the new superintendent, the PBIS training, previous knowledge or experiences with the program, and current experiences with the program.

Perception 2: The idea that principals must model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations found its basis in the attributes social, identity construction, and ongoing. The Social aspects depends on the belief that the PBIS expectations and rewards system must be understood, approved, and carried out by the faculty, staff, students, parents, and community at large. As it has already been noted, many times school stakeholders will focus on what is important to their administrators. If the administrators were not demonstrating and communicating the expectations, it would be unlikely for 80% of the staff to do so; the staff takes its cues from the administration and often adopts the views of administration. However, this is not always the case.

There are educators who consider themselves professionals in their own rights; these educators act upon what they believe and what finds importance in their lives. They may do

as the principal says and not as the principal does, or they may do as the principal does and not as the principal says, or they may do neither. Therefore, the idea that principals must model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations is also rooted in identity construction—who the principals are and how they see themselves in relation to others. These principals saw themselves as leaders. As one principal mentioned, “they knew that I would not ask them to do something that I would not do.” They also knew that school stakeholders, as well as district officials, would look to them for leadership. Further, leadership is not a singular, isolated occurrence; it is on-going. Whether the principal is a novice administrator or a seasoned administrator, one decision or lack thereof can have on-going consequences. In addition, knowing when, where, and how to model, communicate, and reinforce PBIS expectations were on-going processes for the principals.

Perception 3: The thought that stakeholder buy-in was essential to the success of the program was sensemaking triggered by cues, plausibility, social components, and enactive of sensible environments. Focusing on and by extracted cues gives the sensemaker permission to notice and bracket whatever information he or she deems plausible; the sensemaker chooses what information to focus on and decides how it will be interpreted. For example, the principal may have a negative interaction with a parent that indicates her displeasure with a reward her child receives. The principal may interpret this cue to mean that if the parents are not pleased, the students may not participate, and the program will fail. As a result, the principal may decide to change the reward. If this is plausible, then whether or not it is true matters not.

With the social component of sensemaking, actions are played out with others in mind. For example, the principals sought buy-in of the program and its components, so they

made it attractive for the stakeholders. Providing food at parent workshops, appealing to their faith and reaching out to churches, and revising the reward system to make it easier to implement are all indicative of actions being played out with others in mind. Enactive of sensible environments relies on the idea that people are a part of their environments, and they often shape these environments through their actions. Getting buy-in was triggered by this aspect of sensemaking; with this in mind, the principals understood that demonstrating the expected actions would reinforce their expectations and may impact whether others chose to embrace the program or not.

Perception 4: Data being used to enhance decision-making was indicated by cues and impacted by plausibility. The data were the cues that the principals and committees chose to focus on, yet not all data is useful or meaningful. In this regard, the data they chose to focus on such as the number of office discipline referrals or the number of students who attended a reward event are the extracted cues. They looked at the data to determine the effectiveness of the program, the value of reward incentives, and the opinions of stakeholders. However, the data was only useful to the extent that they believed it was accurate or plausible. Implausible data begets skewed results and inaccurate indicators.

Perception 5: Principals being responsible for the program's success is a belief consistent with the identity construction framework, plausibility, and the on-going aspect of sensemaking. Whether this was true or not, this is what they believed. They put the onus on themselves to implement, drive, and oversee the program with the assistance of the committee. Had they believed otherwise, they would have likely left the decision-making up to the committee, they may or may not have been present at the committee meetings, and they may not have put forth as much effort reaching out to the community and other

stakeholders; this would have been left to someone else. This belief taps into principals' perceptions of themselves as leaders within the school environment and within the district. Moreover, because the schools have achieved exemplar status more than once, being successful in this regard was a continual process indicative of the ongoing aspect of sensemaking—sensemaking, for the sensemaker, never ends.

Perception 6: Consistency being important throughout the school is indicative of the social, cues, and sensible environments components of sensemaking. Effective communication and interaction, attributes of social, impacted whether staff members were consistent in their actions. The cues they focused on were the actions and thought processes of faculty and staff members as they implemented the program, and in keeping with enactive of sensible environments—they shaped their environments through their words and actions. One principal said that they spent a lot of time making sure that the adults knew what the expectations looked like, which ties into all three sensemaking components heretofore mentioned.

### **Implications**

Scholars have made substantial progress understanding principals as instructional change agents, and there is also research on sensemaking and its use by organizational leaders. Yet, current studies provide little information about how principals use sensemaking to guide the successful implementation of the PBIS program. This study contributes to the knowledge base on PBIS by (a) clarifying how principals go about successfully implementing and sustaining the PBIS program and (b) using the sensemaking theory to illuminate why—examining how their actions and beliefs are tied to their thoughts and feelings.

## **Theoretical Implications**

While there are good examples of case studies of exemplar sites in educational research, according to Hatch (1998), “Stories about successful and sustained school improvement are rare....” (p. 4). This study provides two detailed examples so that those who aspire to the same level of success can build upon data that explains the factors contributing to success both within and across sites (Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000). Not only is it possible to maintain an effective PBIS program, it is also possible to repeatedly earn exemplar status. Both schools achieved exemplar status prior to their current principals taking the helm, and both schools have maintained that status despite changes in leadership.

Principals do leave schools. They retire, they change schools, they get promotions and some leave education altogether. When this happens, the effects on the school they left behind are sometimes hard to gauge. In this particular study, one of the committee members commented that the new principal came in already knowing about PBIS and “everybody kinda jumped on board.” Had this not been the case, the program may have suffered. Militello, Rallis, and Goldring (2009) argued that “the leadership of a principal is crucial for school effectiveness, second only to the role of the classroom teacher and the quality of the curriculum” (p. 19). With the implementation of the PBIS program, the schools in this study underwent changes in their approaches to discipline issues and their expectations of students. When the former principals left, the schools could have reverted back to former approaches, but this was not the case. Principal turnover did not directly impede the success of the PBIS programs in these schools. However, this is not always the case. When new leadership comes in, schools sometimes suffer; so we need a better understanding of how schools can maintain during times of change. As a matter of fact, Micah Elementary experienced another

change in principals a few months after the interview was conducted—the fourth principal in seven years. Theories need to expound on sustaining successful initiatives in general, and sustaining successful PBIS programs in particular with principal turnover.

Rallis and Goldring (1993) noted, “a school that is truly changing needs a principal who can articulate a vision, provide direction, facilitate those who are working for the change, coordinate the different groups, and balance the various forces impacting schools today” (p. 133). The former principals were able to accomplish these tasks and as a result, the changes lasted beyond the change agents. This study implies that although principals do matter, the conditions they create also matter. Perhaps, the strong PBIS committees played greater roles than what has been heretofore seen in the literature. Other crucial factors to consider are the longevity of teachers within the schools, district support, principals’ belief in the program, and the nature of the program itself. That is, there are several factors at play that could explain why principal turnover did not impede program sustainability. Future research needs to examine what combination of factors is necessary to ensure initiatives flourish during principal turnover.

The theory of sensemaking allowed us to glimpse the ways in which the principals’ thoughts about PBIS informed their actions. The elements of sensemaking most represented by the principals’ thoughts or perceptions were focused on and by cues, social, and plausibility. However, the elements of sensemaking that seemed to be most salient in their actions were the concepts of identity construction, enactive of sensible environment, and social interactions. The absence or limited impact of a specific attribute of the sensemaking theory in this regard does not indicate that it was not in use, rather, that it was not overly or overtly revealed in this study. This suggests that from the time a principal

perceives a thought until the time that thought becomes an action or a decision to not act, more than one aspect of sensemaking is at work. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) argue:

When people confront something unintelligible and ask “what’s the story here?” their question has the force of bringing an event into existence. When people then ask “now what should I do?” this added question has the force of bringing meaning into existence, meaning that they hope is stable enough for them to act into the future [and] continue to act.... (p. 410)

Identity construction directly impacted the actions of the principals, and “the stakes in sensemaking are high when issues of identity are involved. When people face an unsettling difference, that difference often translates into questions...who are we, what are we doing, what matters, and why does it matter” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 416). The former principals were both in their first year at the schools chosen for this study when the implementation of the program came as a district mandate from a new superintendent.

The current principals included a first-year principal and a principal in the second year of her second principalship. Given these disparities, their approaches to implementing and sustaining the program differed; however, they revealed similar ways of thinking. They were all on board with the program, they worked with committees who had bought into the program, and they wanted the program to succeed. The differences that emerged, such as one school hosting an ecumenical event for local ministers, were a result of the context in which they operated rather than who they were as school leaders.

The contexts, enactive of sensible environments in the sensemaking theory, to some degree, dictated their actions. With the program being a district initiative, principals were

held responsible for implementing and sustaining the program; however, they had to rely on the teachers to actually carry out the implementation. It became a collaborative effort, each group dependent upon the other working together to ensure that the program was a success. Teachers were dependent on the principals for their vision, direction, and support and the principals depended on the teachers to embrace the program, reward students, and reinforce expectations. As a result, the principals became active members of the committee, working with them and supporting them to accomplish the goals at hand.

The social aspect of sensemaking came into play in the interactions between the principal, the committee members, and the staff as a whole. Making sure that everyone clearly understood the expectations and sharing the vision with stakeholders and getting their feedback was essential. Moreover, ensuring that teachers were able to focus on implementing the program and that motivation remained high among all stakeholders played directly into the decisions made by principals to make the program a priority. Effective, two-way communication also helped get everyone on one accord and working together helped them stay on one accord.

### **Practical Implications**

Why does the PBIS program thrive in some environments and falter in others? Research says that many times it is due to the critical role played by the principal; he is the game-changing element and can directly impact the success of efforts to change based on his efforts and actions directly related to the change (Fullan, 1982). This study has highlighted behaviors exhibited by principals within exemplar elementary schools in an effort to assist schools that wish to achieve the same levels of success. As Shulman (1983) argued, case

studies of exemplary sites can provide practitioners with operational details of successful practices.

Implementing and sustaining the PBIS program and receiving recognition as an exemplar school goes beyond what may be found in the School-wide Positive Behavior Support Implementers' Blueprint and Self-Assessment manual (Sugai & Horner, 2004). The blueprint provides information about what must be done to implement the program, but it provides little information regarding how it must be done. It requires more than choosing a team, creating a matrix, getting at least 80% of the staff to buy-in, motivating students to participate, and monitoring systems. It requires leadership that understands the nuances of program implementation and sustainability.

The SET, the evaluation tool for the PBIS program, clearly measures the program in seven key areas: (a) expectations defined, (b) behavioral expectations taught, (c) on-going system for rewarding behavioral expectations, (d) responding to behavioral violations, (e) monitoring and decision-making, (f) management, and (g) district-level support (Horner et al., 2004). Yet, we find little in the literature that instructs principals and committees on how to accomplish these tasks; this study provides examples of how principals were able to address each key area (see Table 10 on the next page).

Table 10

*Examples of SET Components*

<b>SET Components</b>	<b>How Demonstrated?</b>
Expectations defined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worked collaboratively with their committees and staff to define and disseminate</li> </ul>
Behavioral expectations taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assemblies</li> <li>• morning announcements</li> <li>• parent and stakeholder meetings</li> <li>• posted in key areas around the schools</li> <li>• printed in the student handbooks</li> <li>• classroom lessons</li> </ul>
On-going system for rewarding behavioral expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• created by principals and committee</li> <li>• revamped and revised as necessary</li> <li>• analyzed reward data and solicited feedback</li> <li>• implemented by all staff members</li> </ul>
Responding to behavioral violations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organized and established system</li> <li>• referral forms coincided with PBIS matrix and district code of conduct</li> <li>• staff knew consequences and rewards were going to be enforced</li> <li>• data was entered and analyzed</li> </ul>
Monitoring and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collected and shared data with staff</li> <li>• regular walk-throughs and interaction</li> <li>• sharing information at staff meetings</li> </ul>
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• made it a priority</li> <li>• administrators at PBIS trainings</li> <li>• established systems</li> </ul>
District-level support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• district coach hired by superintendent</li> <li>• visited the classrooms</li> <li>• modeled how to implement the behavior management pieces</li> </ul>

This study revealed that expectations were defined as a result of principals working collaboratively with their PBIS committee members and staff members. As a result of PBIS training and regular committee meetings, the schools were able to create a list of expected behavior that formed the basis of their programs. These behavioral expectations were taught to students and staff through assemblies, morning announcements, staff meetings, parent meetings, stakeholders meetings, and by posting the expectations in key areas around the schools. On-going systems for rewarding behavioral expectations were created by the principals and committee members, and these systems were revamped and revised as necessary. If the rewards failed to motivate students, they were revised. If they were too cumbersome or taxing for teachers, they were revised. If they were deemed ineffective, they were revised.

This study also revealed that analyzing reward data and getting feedback from staff members served as cues for whether the reward systems were suitable for the particular school environment or not. The premise behind the positive behavior program is to reinforce positive behaviors while decreasing negative behaviors through acknowledging and rewarding students when they display appropriate behaviors. However, when discipline issues arose and administrators had to respond to behavioral violations, there was an organized and established system. Both schools revised their office disciplinary referral forms to coincide with the PBIS matrix, and this was used in conjunction with the district's code of conduct for students. Administrators referred to the matrix when disciplining students and they gave pep talks in their office in an effort to change the behavior rather than simply punishing the behavior. However, because teachers were doing their part in

implementing the program, they knew their consequences would be enforced if they needed to go to administration with a student.

Moreover, the researcher found that monitoring and decision-making happened through the revision of the referral form to reflect the PBIS matrix, collecting discipline data and creating a system to share it with the staff, and using the data collected to aid decision-making in collaborative sessions. In one school, the principals conducted regular walk-throughs in the classrooms to monitor implementation of the program. They also used feedback from staff members to help determine if the program was moving in the right direction and what needed to be done. Had the principal been the sole entity making decisions, the program may not have achieved the same levels of success.

Further, sustaining the program is easier when the people responsible for it have a vested interest in its success. Because this was a district initiative, part of that responsibility lay with the superintendent. The district took a vested interest in ensuring that the program was implemented and that schools had an opportunity to be successful. A district coach was hired, and she offered support and helped ensure that schools were trained. She visited the classrooms when requested and modeled how to implement the behavior management pieces with which teachers struggled. As a result, 59% of the schools in the district received some level of PBIS recognition, and 75% of those schools were at the elementary level. Of the elementary schools, 38% received exemplar status. School districts that wish to experience similar or greater success with the PBIS program should make an effort to provide its schools with similar support from the district-level.

Not every school in the district reached the same levels of success however. Murphy and Datnow (2003) argued that, “Where principals act as ‘catalysts for change’ ... and have a

personal ‘commitment to the project,’ . . . reform designs have a fighting chance to succeed” (p. 265). In addition to seeking outside help when needed, the principals in this study were recognized for advocating for their programs, making their expectations known, monitoring implementation, achieving stakeholder buy-in, communicating and collaborating with the staff, attending meetings, using data to drive decision-making and being empathetic towards the needs of the staff. These leadership characteristics may not be inherently possessed, but they can be learned. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) argued that, “It is the principal’s leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become” (p. 5). It would be beneficial for districts to provide training and on-going professional development opportunities for principals on implementing and sustaining district initiatives or programs in general, targeting such areas as achieving buy-in, advocating for your program, and forming strong school-based teams.

Further, this study found that principals spent time analyzing and sharing data—valuable processes for decision-making—yet, not all school administrators are familiar with how to effectively use data. Knowing how to gather, disaggregate, interpret, and disseminate data are beneficial skills for anyone in a leadership position. Principal preparation program and school districts would do well to ensure that those who take the leadership helm are knowledgeable in these areas.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although both elementary schools have repeatedly earned exemplar status in recognition of their PBIS programs since implementation was first begun, one of the limitations of this study is the turnover in principals. The current principals were not able to

give personal accounts of the initial challenges of implementation, so the former principals had to be interviewed. Both former principals had since taken other leadership roles in the county, and recalling information from six years ago was not an easy feat. Further, Micah Elementary had another principal in between the former principal and current principal; however, that principal could not be located. Information provided by the PBIS committee members who were there at the onset of implementation helped create more complete pictures of the challenges faced since the inception of the program as well as the strategies employed to address them.

Additionally, case study methods such as interviews reflect the perceptions of the participants, not necessarily reality (Weick, 1995). There is the reliance on the participant's ability to recall information and his or her willingness to speak candidly. At Twisdale Elementary, most of the PBIS committee members were new to the committee, and many of them were not working at Twisdale when implementation began. Therefore, they had to overly rely on two or three members to speak for them. Moreover, an assumption had to be made that the information shared at both sites was an accurate representation of the events that took place during the implementation and sustaining of the PBIS program.

Another limitation of this study is associated with the data collection. Only one school provided the PBIS notebook as a physical artifact, and while it was informative, it could not be used at length for in-depth triangulation. Merriam (1998) stated that, "Several limitations stem from the basic difference between this source and data gleaned from interviews or observations—that most documentary data have not been developed for research purposes. The materials may therefore be incomplete from a research perspective"

(pp. 153-154). Further, Glaser & Strauss (1967) noted that available materials may not “afford a continuity of unfolding events in the kind of detail that the theorist requires” (p. 182) and Guba & Lincoln noted that “Often no one on the project keeps very good notes on processes, few memoranda are generated, and, even more often, the only writing that is done is in response to funders’ requests...” (1981, pp. 234-235). While the researcher was pleased with the amount of documents provided, like Merriam stated, “because they are produced for reasons other than research, they may be fragmentary, they may not fit the conceptual framework of the research, and their authenticity may be difficult to determine” (1998, p. 156).

Finally, another limitation of this study is the lack of transferability of these cases to other environments. Because school environments and cultures vary, leadership is situational; what occurs in one context may not occur in others and what works in one situation may not work in another. As Fullan noted, “Transferability is complex [because] successful reforms in one place are partly a function of good ideas, and largely a function of the *conditions* under which the ideas flourished” (1999, p. 64).

### **Directions for Future Research**

Both PBIS committees played a substantial role in ensuring that the programs were successful. They worked closely with the principals, they documented their activities and sought ways to enhance the program, and they did the necessary legwork to help maintain the program. The leadership of the principals was credited for supporting the committee and staff members, seeking their advice when needed, and modeling and reinforcing expectations. A concept not explored in this study, sensegiving, will help us to better understand the relationship that exists between the two groups of participants and between

the principal and the staff as a whole. According to Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, and Humphries, “Sensegiving involves the leaders providing interpretation to others for the particular issues selected and, on this basis, defining for others a revised conception of the organization” (1999, p. 39). Understanding more about how leaders influence the sensemaking of others with regard to change efforts and how it may be consistent or inconsistent with the leader’s own sensemaking offers greater potential for understanding how change within the school environment occurs.

Another factor that emerged during this study which cannot be ignored is that implementing the PBIS program in these schools was a district initiative. Yet, this mandate alone did not ensure the effective implementation of the program; school leaders can choose to adopt, adapt, ignore, or creatively sabotage the district’s efforts to implement any program. According to Spillane et al. (2002):

School leaders’ sense-making is influenced by the multiple overlapping contexts in which their work is nested. Therefore, schools’ responses to district policies must be understood as a function not only of leaders’ identities but also the multiple contexts in which their sense-making is situated. (p. 755)

More research is needed to understand the sensemaking that occurs when the district rather than individuals schools choose to enact policies. Fifty-nine percent of the schools in the district received official recognition from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for their PBIS programs. What support does the district offer? How does the district go about getting buy-in from principals? Which aspects of the adoption or implementation are mandated? Which aspects are optional? Because implementation is not a top-down effort at the school level, we can surmise that it is not top-down at the district-

level either. Understanding the sensegiving that occurs from district to principal and from principal to teacher will help us better understanding the theory and its impact in successful district and school environments.

Finally, while this study was able to provide us with information regarding principals and change efforts and how they use sensemaking in their decision-making, it was slightly limited by the fact that one principal could not be located. What happened during this principal's tenure and the thoughts and actions of this principal remain unknown. This data could have merely reiterated what the findings revealed or provided additional insight. A change in school leadership can affect the school climate and culture in tangible ways, no matter how seamless the transition appears to be. Future research could delve into the sensemaking that occurs during principal turnover; particularly, the way in which a new principal makes sense of sustaining previously successful initiatives or gives sense to the faculty and staff.

It would also prove enlightening to follow a principal and a school throughout the course of implementing a program. Understanding the ways in which the principal navigates the change process and its impact on the school and staff could assist other school administrators as they take on the role of change agent. The participants would be able to document challenges as they occur and journal their thoughts, providing more insight to the researcher regarding the role of principals and the responses of their constituents.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study focused on two schools that repeatedly won exemplar recognition for their Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs, Twisdale Elementary and Micah Elementary. The purpose of this study was to examine the thoughts and actions of

principals who have successfully implemented the school-wide PBIS program in North Carolina elementary schools, thereby helping schools who want to implement the program learn from those who have done it successfully. This study specifically sought to discover: (a) the role that principals play in contributing to the success of exemplar elementary PBIS schools, and (b) how principals' thoughts about PBIS informed their actions.

This study took on a qualitative, multiple case study research design, and two lines of inquiry informed this study: (a) principals and change efforts and (b) the use of sensemaking in principal decision-making. Stake's (2005) approach to the multicase study helped guide this research. According to Stake, in a multiple case study, "the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases" (p. vi). Data were collected through the use of individual interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires, field notes and physical artifacts. The interviews were recorded using audio devices and the field notes, recordings, and transcripts were juxtaposed for accuracy and completeness and then analyzed and triangulated based on preliminary codes of words and themes.

The findings revealed that the role principals played in contributing to the success of exemplar elementary schools included making PBIS a priority, reinforcing expectations, analyzing data, attending meetings, supporting the staff, effectively communicating and collaborating with stakeholders, and gaining stakeholder buy-in. Principals also spent time advocating for the program, monitoring implementation, supporting staff, showcasing and celebrating milestones and creating strong committees. Further, this study provided explicit examples of how principals go about implementing the PBIS program in areas identified by the SET, the national evaluation tool for the program. Previous literature provided little direction in this regard.

The findings also gave us additional insight into how sensemaking impacts the decision-making of principals. Grisoni and Beeby (2007) stated, “If leadership is fundamentally about power and power is about the ability to define situations with and for others then the exercise of power becomes the exercise of sense-making” (p. 194). This study revealed that although principals experience each of the sensemaking attributes on some level, the principals’ thoughts were most representative of the attributes of sensemaking encompassing social components, plausibility rather than accuracy, and focused on and by cues. However, the attributes most represented in their actions were identity construction, enactive of sensible environments, and social interactions. This indicated that more than one aspect of sensemaking is at work from the time a principal thinks a thought until that thought becomes an action. Given that the sensemaking process is ongoing, the interplay between the various sensemaking constructs determines what actions should be taken, even if it is no action. As Feldman noted, “sensemaking often does not result in action. It may result in an understanding that action should not be taken or that a better understanding of the event or situation is needed” (1989, p. 20).

Practical Implications of this study center on enhanced training programs and professional development opportunities for principals on implementing and sustaining programs and analyzing data, operational details for successful practices, and school districts providing greater support for district initiatives. Theoretical Implications include expounding on sustaining successful initiatives with principal turnover, maintaining momentum during times of change, and the aspects of sensemaking that dominate the change process for principals.

Although previous principals were interviewed, one of the limitations of this study stemmed from the fact that one former principal could not be located, the equivalent of one year's worth of principal perspective data. More research is needed to understand the sensegiving that occurs from district leaders to principals and from principals to teachers. In addition, we can gain more insight from better understanding how sensemaking differs when the district chooses to enact policies rather than schools. Finally, future research could further our understanding of the sensemaking that occurs when new principals seek to sustain previously successful programs.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Please introduce yourselves and share with me your affiliation with PBIS at your school.
2. Could you provide some background information about PBIS in your school?  
What really interested you in implementing PBIS?  
Could you give me an example of how PBIS changed your school?  
Why do you think programs like PBIS are important to your school (faculty, staff, administration and students)?  
How long has it been implemented?
3. Why was the program successful? How did the principal support the successful implementation in your school? Could you provide specific examples? Of these efforts, which was the most important? Why?
4. What challenges were there to implementation? How did the principal address these challenges? Can you provide some examples?
5. Your school received an exemplar rating. What does that rating mean to you?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B

### Principal Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your school.
3. Could you provide some background information about PBIS in your school?  
What really interested you in implementing PBIS?  
Could you give me an example of how PBIS changed your school? Why do you think programs like PBIS are important to your school (faculty, staff, administration and students)?  
How long has it been implemented?  
What do you see as your role in the implementation of PBIS?
4. Why do you believe these tasks are the principal's responsibility? Which of these actions were the most important? Why?
5. Implementing a new program in a school environment can be challenging. What guided your actions about starting and sustaining PBIS? What aspects of the program are most meaningful to you and why?
6. What factors do you believe influenced the successful implementation of PBIS at your school? In which of these contributing factors were you most involved? Why do you believe these factors are important to the successful implementation of PBIS?
7. What challenges were there to implementation? How did you respond to these challenges and why did you respond as you did?

8. What (if anything) would you change about your role involvement with PBIS in your school?
9. Your school received an exemplar rating. What motivated you to achieve exemplar status? What makes you want to sustain exemplar status? What does it mean to you to have an exemplar rating?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Member Questionnaire**

1. What is your professional affiliation? (teacher, administrator, PBIS coach, counselor, etc.)
2. How long have you worked in school settings?
3. How long have you worked in this school?
4. How long have you been a member of the PBIS Committee?
5. What did you know about the PBIS program prior to working at your current school?
6. In which PBIS Modules have you been trained (I, II, and III)?

## APPENDIX D

North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH  
Principal Form

Title of Study: The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina.

Principal Investigator: Monica Headen

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tamara V. Young

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What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of principals in the successful implementation of school-wide PBIS in North Carolina elementary schools.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual, semi-structured, recorded interview. You will also be asked to provide physical artifacts, such as meeting minutes, memos, and the PBIS notebook, and your interview may last 30-45 minutes. Committee members will take part in a focus group interview which is expected to last approximately an hour. The interview will involve participants discussing your actions and involvement with the PBIS program as the school's principal. The interviews will take place within your school over a two week period. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire providing information about your professional background. These questions will not be used to identify you or your responses.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Benefits

By studying the role of principals in the successful implementation of PBIS, I hope to understand what actions principals take to facilitate successful implementation of PBIS, which will allow me to provide insight to those schools who wish to achieve the same levels of success upon implementation.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Interview tapes will be transcribed and kept in locked and password protected storage. Only my faculty dissertation advisory members and I may participate in a review of these transcripts and my initial coding structure to ensure the accuracy of the findings. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation

You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Monica Headen, at mdheaden@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH  
Committee Member/Focus Group Form

Title of Study: The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina.

Principal Investigator: Monica Headen

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tamara V. Young

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What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of principals in the successful implementation of school-wide PBIS in North Carolina elementary schools.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in a semi-structured, focus group interview. The interview will be recorded, and it is expected to last approximately an hour. Participants are asked to respect the confidentiality of the interviews and not share other group members' responses; however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your principal will participate in an individual interview which is expected to last 30-45 minutes. The interviews will take place within your school over a two week period. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire providing information about your professional background. These questions will not be used to identify you or your responses.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Benefits

By studying the role of principals in the successful implementation of PBIS, I hope to understand what actions principals take to facilitate successful implementation of PBIS, which will allow me to provide insight to those schools who wish to achieve the same levels of success upon implementation.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Interview tapes will be transcribed and kept in locked and password protected storage. Only my faculty dissertation advisory members and I may participate in a review of these transcripts and my initial coding structure to ensure the accuracy of the findings. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation

You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Monica Headen, at mdheaden@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_