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# Culture Clash: An Applied Research Study on Transforming Student Behavioral Culture in a Failing School

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CULTURE CLASH: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY ON TRANSFORMING STUDENT  
BEHAVIORAL CULTURE IN A FAILING SCHOOL

A Dissertation  
presented in fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education  
The University of Mississippi

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## ABSTRACT

This applied research study seeks to transform student behavior at a failing middle school. The need to improve behavior in order to improve academic achievement became evident after desegregating data and listening to community and staff members voice concerns. Using three intervention strategies, group counseling, teaching classroom management training, and pro-social activities, the program sought to decrease the number of discipline referrals written for a targeted group of students and students school-wide. Surveys, discipline data, and observations were used in the study. The findings reveal behavior can be improved when teacher efficacy is enriched, positive activities are provided, social-emotional learning is taught, and relationships are built.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and students:

To my parents and sisters, you are the reason I am able to accomplish anything. Your unselfishness, unwavering support, and love have always been the pillars on which I've stood.

Thank you for enduring whatever endeavor task I choose and always being in my corner.

To my students, you are the reason I go to work every day. You are the reason I want to find a solution to problematic behavior. I want the best for you as a student and as a person. This research is for you.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The Vice President of the United States, Mike Pence, once said, “We cannot do democracy without a heavy dose of civility” (Civility, n.d.). The future of our society hinges on the way our citizenry interacts with one another. How does civility affect our democracy? Civility may result in fewer criminal acts against one another and a safer society. It may also imply honest business dealings and collaboration of multiple minds and personalities. Civility paints a picture of employees from different backgrounds, skills, and paradigms working side by side tolerant of their differences because they recognize each other’s contribution. Where do we teach such civility?

Schools serve as a microcosm for life where students learn to function within boundaries, persevere through failures, work with others, manage conflict, set goals, and be a part of a community. In a study by the non-partisan research organization Public Agenda (Scios, 2004), 93% of the teachers surveyed believed it is the school’s job to prepare students to join society by teaching them to follow the rules. Civility affects our nation as a whole, and it also affects our schools—the very learning grounds for civility. In the same Public Agenda study (Scios, 2004), 97% of the teachers believed good behavior and discipline are two prerequisites to have a successful school. Does this mean a failing school must transform student behavior in order to improve student achievement? Behavior problems disrupt the learning environment

overwhelming teachers and interfering with instruction (Common, 2016). Therefore, learning to self-manage and work with others are vital skills needed not only in adulthood but also for students, especially those in failing rural schools like Harvest Middle, located in the northeast corner of Mississippi.

**Description of the problem.** The central issue of concern of this applied research study is the frequency of negative student behavior at Harvest Middle School. Minor, yet disruptive, behaviors are impacting classroom instruction and affecting student achievement. In addition, the turmoil caused by dysfunctional interpersonal relationships among students causes distractions in the school environment and monopolizes the time of both teachers and administrators. Finally, although there are almost no felonious acts committed, the perception of student behavior has negatively impacted the reputation of Harvest Middle School. Improvement is critical because the school was rated an “F” for the School Year (SY) 2015-2016 and a “D” for the SY 2016-2017 by the state department of education.

Currently, the students hail from two different communities and include a mix of homes with structure and stability to ones where children are raising themselves. According to Jensen (2004), this is important because the complex web of core social relationships early in a child’s life has a major impact on student behavior. Students with secure attachments to a primary caregiver early in life behave better in school. No longer is Harvest school the pride of a small farming community. In 2005, the district combined two K-8 schools, Rome and Harvest, creating one elementary and one middle school. Since consolidation, Harvest is a minority majority, economically disadvantaged, fifth through eighth grade school which educates students mostly from Rome, not Harvest. Only 15% of the students are actually from Harvest. When consolidation of Harvest and Rome was completed, some of the Harvest families secured the

permission from the school board to send students to Smallville, a school located north of Harvest with a predominantly white population and higher achievement scores.

Many of the school's students are transient, withdrawing and re-enrolling frequently. In the 2016-2017 school year, 35% of the total population moved in and out of the school within the year, requiring the staff to acclimate a third of the students to a new environment during the year. Statistics reported on the most recent census illustrate many contributing factors to challenges faced in the Harvest Middle School community (City-data.com, 2017; Affordable Housing Online, 2017). Renters make up 68% of Rome's residents which explains some of the transiency. Rome's population was 3,060 in 2014 with an estimated household income of \$23,083 in 2015. Only 26% of Rome citizens over 15 years of age are married meaning most students live in single parent homes, and many students do not live with the biological parent. Harvest has a population of just over 1200, residents and the median household income is \$35,000. More importantly, 97% of Harvest Middle School's student population receives free or reduced meals. Jensen (2004) suggests children from poverty face unique challenges not faced by those from more affluent homes. They face emotional and social challenges, life stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. The combination of these factors present daunting obstacles both socially and academically for students.

In addition to these challenges, parents in low-income houses tend to be overworked and overstressed leaving little time to be involved in the school lives of their children. In a U.S. Department of Health study (Jensen, 2004), low-income parents were 23% less likely to be involved in three or more school activities on a regular basis than parents above the poverty line (Jensen, 2004). At Harvest, few parents volunteer or are involved physically on campus. On an average parent information night, only 10% of the parents attend. Many of the parents are

working long hours to make ends meet, which means children are unable to participate in after school activities and are left at home to fend for themselves. Jensen (2004) says children who are left alone tend to spend less time outside interacting with peers and more time watching television. Without a parent or adult present at home to provide human interaction, children are not able to develop healthy peer relationships which results in long-term socioemotional consequences. We see those consequences daily in student behavior and peer interactions. The students are in constant conflict with one another because they have not been taught by a caregiver how to appropriately interact with others.

If the parents cannot be involved, are there other mentors to fill those roles and establish relationships? Currently, the Harvest community is present on the campus. Local pastors, the mayor, former teachers, and students support events and make regular stops on campus. One Harvest church supplies weekend food bags for 25 students each week. Presently, the Rome community members are rarely involved on campus. In addition, many of the behavioral issues on campus stem from students who live in one particular area of the Rome community. Since the elementary school is in Rome, it is natural for the Rome families to invest in the elementary school nearby rather than the middle school in Harvest. Conversely, the lack of Rome involvement is critical to the school mainly because of the age of the students. The pre-teen years are critical in the life of an adolescent. During the time when children are developing values, identities, and motivations, few role models or mentors from their own community. In fact, in 2017, the Mississippi Department of Education's Office of School Improvement mandated efforts be made by the Harvest administrators to engage the Rome stakeholders.

The school is small and conducive to developing positive relationships with students and effectively managing behavior. Size and student-teacher ratios are ideal. The school enrollment

hovers around 280 students with class sizes of 12 to 15 students each. The staff is comprised of 28 certified teachers, four assistants, one academic coach, one counselor, a principal, and assistant principal.

Harvest empowered grade-level teams to do everything from making and changing student schedules to handling discipline issues within the grade. Each grade-level has a representative on the leadership team; however, the school structures needed to provide stability are a work in progress. The organization collapsed a few years ago when the principal died mid-year, and the leadership of multiple principals and assistant principals followed. Teachers were frustrated because the school lacked discipline, routines, and structure. Academic achievement plummeted, teacher morale was at an all-time low and the reputation of the school continued to be one of chaos. Two years ago, we established professional learning communities, and changes were made to the schedule to create an intervention period for every student. We established daily routines and enforced discipline, but as a whole, structure to improve student behavior is still the area in need of most growth. Instructional and classroom management consultants were hired through Title I funds and teacher turnover has subsided. In 2016-2017, only one new teacher was added.

**Justification of the problem.** Teachers felt they could not improve achievement because student misbehavior disrupted instruction. Although there had been a decrease over the previous few years, discipline was still a major issue. At times, teachers were focused more on controlling the classroom, motivating students, and solving interpersonal and personal conflicts instead of high quality instruction. Unfortunately, many students who received discipline referrals verbally expressed to administrators they had little self-respect or respect of others. According to Jensen (2004), those attitudes may exist because the students lacked strong,

secure adult relationships early in life. Additionally, students were aware that the school received an F rating; therefore, students had low expectations for themselves and the school. In 2015-2016, the school earned only 217 points out of a possible 700. In 2016-2017, the school increased by 89 points for a rating of 305, nonetheless, earned a level “D” which was still the lowest performing middle school in the district.

According to the Ministry of Education in Guyana (Common, 2016), there are four common behavior problems in a classroom. Those are sensory processing disorder, aggressive student behavior, inappropriate language, and inattentive students. The same is true at Harvest where 80% percent of discipline referrals are directly related to lack of conformity to structure within a classroom or conflicts with other students. From August until March of the 2016-2017 school year, 390 infractions were recorded. These do not include times when students were only counseled by an administrator (See Table 1).

Table 1

*Discipline Infractions By Grade, Harvest Middle, SY 2016-2017*

Grade	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
Total	36	195	43	116
Male	36	129	25	67
Female	1	66	18	47

The behavioral issues directly affected student achievement. The average class in sixth grade was 14 points behind the district on the latest common assessment in both English and math. When comparing common assessment data of sixth graders at Harvest and sixth graders in the district, Harvest students scored an average of 21 points below the district in math and 7 points below in English. However, the seventh grade scored an average of 12 points above the district in math and only 4 points below in ELA. The culture on the seventh grade hallway, teacher routines, discipline rate, and parental involvement was much different than the sixth grade which suggests culture, discipline, and involvement affects student achievement. Additionally, it was easy to see the need for male mentors on campus. The majority of discipline infractions were committed by males. These numbers were not unique to Harvest. West Virginia's Department of Education studied the impact of discipline referrals on academic performance and found students with one or more discipline referrals showed a 40% deficiency gap in math proficiency compared with students with no discipline referrals (Whisman & Hammer, 2015). Students with two to four discipline referrals were nearly three times more likely to score below proficiency. If a student was suspended either in school or out of school, the gap widened even more. As discipline referrals increased, academic performance plummeted.

Although there was a new positive behavior intervention program at Harvest, it was reward-based, and not focused on teaching appropriate behavior and character education.

Additionally, there was no parent training program. The parents of students needed the most help did not attend events. Instead, students who performed well usually had parents who were actively involved.



**Audience.** Teachers, students, parents, community members, and administrators served as the audience for this study. This work was intended to provide insight into how the measures implemented may impact student culture and achievement. Improving interpersonal relationships improved instruction because disruptions are limited. Based on the data mentioned above, when the classroom environment was conducive to learning and free of disruption, achievement improved. Likewise, the more parents and community members involved as role models and positive support personnel, the more we were able to reinforce the rules of civility accepted in society. Buy-in from our parents and community members was critical as they were the ones who echoed our motivation. Students feel more secure knowing adults deeply care about their lives and success. Again, as this stakeholder group became involved, they became partners and emphasized the same rules at home. A parenting test or parenting manual are not requirements before leaving a hospital with a newborn baby. Instead, parenting occurs the best way one knows how. Parenting skills are a conglomeration of their own rearing and any research or observations parents have done on their own. For our parents, an extra support or opportunity for conversations on raising strong, young adults not only improved our school culture but also the culture of many of our homes. Faculty members no longer felt as though they are forcing square pegs into round holes by asking students to conform to a structured environment. Both environments of a student's life became structured and healthier emotionally when a concerted effort to transform school culture was initiated. As students graduate, we will produce a workforce equipped with the social skills to work collaboratively with others to build a better product and build stronger families as parents themselves.

Additionally, this applied research study implemented research based practices which may be replicated in similar situations by educational leaders and practitioners. The study was

targeted to collaboratively set goals and objectives, implement a plan, inspect the plan throughout the duration, evaluate the plan, and revise as needed. The ongoing process was one where stakeholders engaged as professional learning communities and continued to gather data, research, implement, and improve the organization's capacity to identify and solve problems.

The lack of civility was affecting student behavior which was hindering student achievement at Harvest. The vision of Harvest Middle School is to ensure every student's academic, social, and emotional growth. By empowering parents, involving community members, and training teachers, student behavior was transformed and student achievement improved. When students are equipped with these skills, civility recovers and democracy has hope.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied research study was to transform the student behavior at Harvest Middle School. The research process began with a description of the problem at Harvest and a justification of the need to conduct the research. A review of literature revealing possible causes and solutions is presented in Chapter II. Through a collaborative approach with faculty, community members, parents, and students, an action plan was developed, implemented and evaluated. The team of stakeholders developed a set of qualitative and quantitative questions designed to create the goals and structures of the evaluation. A team developed and implemented a plan of improvement for student behavior. The final step was to assess the achievement of program goals and the development of the organization's capacity to engage in continuous improvement. The research commenced with the implementation of the action plan in Spring semester 2018 and the evaluation of the action plan in December 2018.

The central phenomenon of this applied research study was student behavior. Conversations with teachers, parents, and students first helped identify their perceptions, expectations, and understanding of appropriate school behavior, the norms at home, and the role of an adult in the lives of the students to provide a baseline and the team began developing an action plan. Pre and post surveys, trend data of school discipline referrals with the primary focus on the graduating cohorts of 2023, 2024, and 2025 served as quantitative data collected for the study. Each nine weeks, student referrals were charted along with students' academic progress on STAR, snapshot assessments, and MAP assessments in ELA for the 2018 and 2019 school years. Each nine weeks, group counseling was administered by the school counselor. Entry and exit surveys were completed to measure self-perceptions in behavior management after a nine weeks of the counseling group. Several students in counseling also used a behavior management chart. Surveys determining perceptions of student behavior and school climate were administered to measure if the action plan is affecting school attitudes and perceptions.

To develop a plan, teachers, students, and administration had group discussions to review data and develop possible solutions and motivations to transform the student behavior. Regular meetings, ongoing observations, and consistent analyses of student achievement and discipline data throughout the year ensured a continuous monitoring of the program's progress and amendments, as necessary. Finally, post surveys were administered to determine the effectiveness of the program on stakeholder perceptions of student behavior.

The goals of this applied research study aimed to improve student behavior at Harvest Middle School through a collaborative approach. The process of planning, implementation, and evaluation was central to not only addressing the problem at hand but also providing an opportunity for stakeholders to engage in solving problems for the purpose of continuous

improvement. Building a culture of organizational learning was most important in this study. Empowering stakeholders to identify a problem, set goals, and accomplish goals, transformed the overall learning culture to one of problem-solving, risk taking, and continuous improvement.

### **Research Questions**

Two different sets of guiding questions were used in this process. Achievement and discipline data were examined before developing an action plan. Those sets of data led to preliminary questions needed to collaboratively develop an action plan. The first question examined how student behavior affects learning in the classroom. The second question explored existing research and processes used to successfully improve student behavior. The third question focused on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes successfully aided in the change of behavior. The final questions explored if shared beliefs and desires of students, parents, and teachers could be used to set goals and to collaboratively engage in the research process.

The goals of this action plan sought to implement teaching social-emotional learning strategies through group counseling and the Positive Action program along with creating positive and engaging after-school activities to improve student achievement by improving student behavior. Additionally, this applied research study aimed to improve the capacity of the organization to effectively apply the school improvement cycle of diagnosing a problem, setting goals, developing a plan, and evaluating the progress. The following research questions were used to evaluate the action plan:

1. Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
2. Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?

3. Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
4. What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
5. Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
6. Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school wide?

### **Conclusion**

This applied research study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides the reader with a problem identified based on discipline and achievement data combined with conversations among staff members at Harvest Middle School. The remaining chapters of this action research study are dedicated to presenting relevant research, describing the development and implementation of the action plan, presenting the data, and analyzing the findings. Chapter two provides studies which reveal how problematic behavior affects achievement and possible reasons for disruptive conduct. The chapter then presents proactive measures a school can take to address student behavior. After reviewing the research, existing school data, and possible solutions, the collaborative team developed an action plan. Chapter three further discusses the development and implementation of the action plan. Chapter four details findings of the research questions based on the program evaluation. The concluding chapter seeks to analyze the findings and determines implications of the plan and assesses the school's organizational capacity to engage in the improvement cycle for future problems identified within the school.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

It is middle school; students should know how to act. Many teachers make this assumption but according to McIntosh, et al. (2008), educators must teach behavior if they want to teach the academics. The following research review supports a substantial argument that there is a robust relationship between poor behavior and poor academic achievement (McIntosh, et al, 2008; Patalya, 2015).

Harvest Middle School, the site for the present study, is a fifth through eighth grade middle school comprised of 280 students who all receive free and reduced meals. The 2015-2016 school year Mississippi accountability results categorized Harvest as an “F” rated school. When interviewing teachers, most expressed behavior as the primary obstacle to effective instruction and student learning. This applied research study focused on improving student behavior.

This chapter begins with research findings which indicate student misbehavior can negatively impact student achievement. Next, the chapter outlines types and possible causes of adolescent misbehaviors. The educational literature shows one must first understand the student before prescribing specific measures to address behaviors and identifies relationships as the cornerstone to improving student behavior to address behavior.

The chapter presents research-based improvement strategies which proactively address behavior. Information about conflict resolution is explored as peer to peer conflict is often the

source of many interpersonal issues among students. The proactive measures section then explores intrapersonal strategies such as behavior contracts and character education. Finally, a specific character education program, Positive Action, is examined as a possible whole school approach to improving student behavior.

### **Impact of Student Behavior**

To what degree does student behavior impact student achievement? Was student behavior a localized problem within Harvest Middle School? This review of literature indicates student behavior as a notable problem impacting academic performance.

In a study in the Pacific Northwest, the discipline referrals of 330 eighth-grade students were analyzed to predict academic performance of their ninth-grade year. Using Grade Point Average (GPA) as a measure, there was evidence of a direct correlation between a higher number of behavioral issues and lower achievement. Students who had zero to one referrals as an eighth-grader held a stable GPA their ninth-grade year. Students with two or more referral averaged a drop in GPA from fall to spring semester. Those with six or more discipline referrals as ninth-graders earned a 1.18 GPA in the fall which fell to 0.82 in the spring. The study showed a significant linkage between behavior and academic achievement although it did not show a reciprocal relationship of lower performance predicting poor behavior (McIntosh et al, 2008).

Similarly, Patalay (2015) conducted a study of 5400 children ages eight to 11 years in English primary schools (Grades 4, 5, 6). At the end of grade six, students took a “SAT” or achievement test. The children who showed disruptive behaviors in middle childhood performed poorly on math, literacy, and science tests when compared with students without disruptive behaviors. Each student was analyzed in key stage one (age 7) and key stage two (age 11). From stage one to stage two, 59% of students who had high levels of discipline issues met

growth targets. Students with no discipline issues met targets at a rate of 77%. However, only 51% of students whose behavior declined between the stages only met their goals (Patalay, 2015). Thus, it appears that a decline in a student's behavior is as academically detrimental as a consistent pattern of misbehavior.

The impact of student behavior on academic achievement in the state of Wisconsin was analyzed. More than 48,000 students were suspended during the 2010-2011 school year. The goal of the study was to assess whether a reduction in suspension would affect achievement scores. Wisconsin based their study on research which examined 300 schools in Virginia and found a direct correlation between high suspensions and increased dropout rates. The Wisconsin study showed by reducing suspension rates by 5%; there would be a 5% growth in math scores and 3.5 in reading (Ford, 2013).

Patalay's (2015) English study concluded that in a classroom of 25-30 students, four students had problematic behaviors which impacted the culture of learning for all. His justification suggests disruption makes it difficult for other students to learn and teachers to teach. If a teacher is spending a considerable amount of time dealing with misbehavior instead of bell-to-bell instruction, non-disruptive students will miss important instruction. The effect is detrimental for both the misbehaving student and the innocent student in the next desk (Ford, 2013). A 2010 study suggests disruptive students can lower an entire class's scores (Thompson, 2017). Additionally, some students who do not usually misbehave may do so to fit in as a form of peer pressure (Ford, 2013).

How does the disruptive behavior in a classroom affect the school as a whole? A positive culture is related to school performance. When order, respect, and accountability are the norm, achievement is likely to increase. One cannot build a strong school culture if there are numerous



disruptions (Ford, 2013). If increased student discipline rates affect morale and climate of a school, student achievement will suffer. Educational leaders often sanction strict law and order in a school as a requirement for academic achievement. Those rigid routines are not real world applicable and a far cry from the normalcy of the lives of many students who exhibit discipline behaviors. However, while the body of literature does value routines and rituals, those rituals are not rooted in compliant behavior but rather by building a culture of collaboration, empowerment, and reflection.

### **Causes of Student Misbehavior**

The research varies as to the root causes of problematic student behaviors. Mental health issues such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD are often touted as a reason because symptoms include inattention and impulsivity (Ford, 2013; Barriga et al., 2002). Other traits such as aggression, antisocial behavior, anxiety, negativity, and depressive disorders might lead to low achievement (Barriga, et al., 2002). Thus, blaming behavior alone may cause one to miss the root of the problem. Some researchers have found no links between the traits and low achievement; however, the quality of social relationships can be a predictor of academic achievement. On the other hand, when studying 41 boys and 17 girls sent to alternative school, Barriga et al. (2002) found the main behaviors leading to poor achievement were inattention (not hyperactivity) and delinquent behaviors, not social behavior. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between genders but more so between economic levels. Sam Wang and Sandra Aamodt's work, "Welcome to Your Child's Brain" lists impulse control as one of the best predictors of academic success (Thompson, n.d.).

Miller et al. (2002) suggests teachers believe lack of parental involvement and home circumstances adversely affect student academic outcomes. Interviews with parents reveal an

agreement concerning difficult home lives but attribute some misbehavior to pupils' perceived fairness of the teacher as equally important.

**Importance of relationships.** Before a program or strategy is implemented to address student misbehavior, the research suggests relationships must be the foundation of improving student behavioral culture. Students who do not see organizational rules such as walking in a straight line as a necessity of academic benefit begin to rebel against what they deem as “schooling” (Hess, 2016). If they feel they are being judged academically based on behaviors, they may become non-compliant. According to Hess (2016), the non-compliant students who understand “schooling,” lack any real relationship or connection with adults. Can the building of those relationships decrease discipline, improve the climate, and result in increased student achievement? Lounsbury (n.d.) suggests formal teaching is necessary for the educational process, but perhaps the most important part of the teacher’s day is the informal, unplanned moments where students and teachers interact. Within the classroom, these interactions may be subtle reminders, questions that gently probe, or responses to off-topic questions. The walks to a club or next class with a student and the conversation that ensues connect students to the school and the teacher. Even interactions outside of school, how one dresses, and how teachers treat others are all monumental and what Lounsbury (n.d) calls “wayside teaching.” Similarly, Powell (n.d) says, “We teach who we are.” Wayside Teaching is about building relationships with students in and outside of the classroom. These relationships will lead to higher achievement.

Brown-Wright and Tyler (2010) notes that students perform better, relate to peers better, and tend to feel more positive towards school when they “form close relationships with teachers” (p. 128). Additionally, a triangular partnership between the parents, teacher, and student can be used to effectively curb student misbehavior if used in a proactive manner (Miller et al., 2002).

Therefore, parental support via committees or teacher-parent communication must be examined as a method to improve student behavior.

**Understanding the student.** Learning and understanding the student is key to improving culture. Inlay (2008) describes five reluctant learners. Each is reluctant for reasons varying from external factors, such as over-bearing parents or changing family structures due to divorce to internal factors manifesting as behavioral issues because of low self-esteem or the need to impress peers. Some students display behavioral issues. Inlay (2008) asks in which environment humans learn best, especially reluctant learners. According to Adler, humans need to feel significant and connected. The principal of 315 students at River Middle School in Napa Valley School District drives four practices to engage students. Students make choices, build relationships, have a voice, and feel needed. Two times per year, students lead conferences for parents explaining what they have learned. Students engage in “clearings,” mediation conversations with adults to improve conflict resolution strategies. Eighth-grade students mentor younger students resulting in empowered students. After engaging in the strategies, each of the five reluctant learners mentioned in the beginning are now flourishing as productive and engaged learners (Inlay, 2008). Students become engaged when they become empowered.

**Home-school dissonance.** Brown-Wright and Tyler (2010) suggest we have a population of students who are not thriving in American schools because 52% of African American males who leave school before graduating have been incarcerated by the time they reach their thirties. Brown-Wright and Tyler (2010) posit students experience home-school dissonance. Dissonance is a disharmonious clashing between two different factions. For example, if the student’s home culture is drastically different than the teacher’s cultural

expectations in the classroom and the student feels the tension or feels judged, there is home-school dissonance.

To study the impact of home-school dissonance, research was conducted in two randomly selected majority African American high schools in low-income, urban areas. Of the total sample of students, nearly 74% qualified for free/reduced meals. The total sample population included 344 students, 63% of whom were female and 64% were high school juniors. Forty percent of the participants were at least 17 years or older. Comparatively, the study sample included 80 African American high school juniors with an average age of 16.9 years. The average GPA was 2.84, only slightly less than the 2.98 of the total sample. The free-reduced rate was seven percent higher for the studied group. Various instruments were used to measure the different factors. One factor the study examined was self-determination theory's academic motivation—the reasons or motives behind behaviors linked to schooling. According to Brown-Wright and Tyler (2010), motivation is divided into three categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Humans are intrinsically motivated for one of three reasons: knowledge, accomplishment, or stimulation. Extrinsic motivation is based on one's reasoning to self-regulate. Do they do so because they want to obtain or avoid something, feel expected to behave in a certain way, or because they have internalized behavior based on external influences?

Findings of the study indicated the level of home-school dissonance was a predictor of negative psychological and academic outcomes (Brown-Wright and Tyler, 2010). According to this study, when an African American male high school junior feels his context outside of school drastically differs from the norms, values, and beliefs inside of school, he is less likely to be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated or value academic honesty. He is more probable to

become disruptive in the classroom. He may also perform or avoid a task in class based on if he feels smart enough to accomplish the goal (Brown-Wright and Tyler, 2010).

### **Proactive Measures**

Research suggests various proactive measures to correct behavior. Colvin (Ford, 2013) created three main goals in correcting problem behaviors. First, the teacher interrupts the problem by engaging the student in expected behaviors. Second, the teacher makes sure the student is exhibiting the correct behavior in future similar situations. Finally, the teacher avoids escalating the situation (Ford, 2013). Other methods reviewed in this literature include teaching conflict resolution through mindfulness, behavior contracts, character education, and the Positive Action program.

**Conflict resolution.** Harvest Middle School's discipline was plagued with interpersonal conflicts among students. Students were not equipped with the emotional skill set to solve problems or handle emotions tied to them. As a result, students were volatile and often lashed out verbally and physically. The following research provides innovative measures to resolve conflict which are being implemented in schools with similar demographics and behavioral issues as Harvest.

Next, a school should research and implement a solid conflict resolution curriculum. There is no quick fix for solving violence. A complicated problem requires a complex solution.

Therefore, conflict resolution must become a school-wide approach. According to Willard (n.d.), most students dislike those who are hurtful and are delighted when someone intervenes in a situation. Schools must make hurtful behavior contrary to the social norm. The "Embrace Civility Initiative" shares three research-based steps to help students embrace civility. First, students and staff need to sign a commitment to embrace civility. Next, notes of

appreciation should be written for and by students and staff. Finally, three acts of kindness must be performed daily by every individual. The student leadership team should also use monthly Saturday programs where students serve the community, make presentations at events, and civility posters and videos to reinforce the program. When improving civility, the school climate improves as well as future citizens are developed (Willard, n.d.).

**Mindfulness.** West Baltimore's Robert W. Coleman Elementary School has done away with detention and suspension (NewsELA, 2016). Instead, Principal Carlillian Thompson sends her 378 students from poor and violent neighborhoods to a calming room. In the calming room, students sit on bean bags and reflect on their behaviors and feelings. They practice deep breathing. The school day starts and ends with 15 minutes of mindfulness. In one month, there were 256 referrals to the mindfulness room.

According to Haupt (n.d), the Holistic Life Foundation in Baltimore teaches mindfulness, a meditation program to help students manage anger, in schools to arm students with life-long coping skills and empathy for others. Meditation rooms are available in schools across the United States. These rooms guide students through breathing and movement exercises. Many rooms allow student ambassadors to coach their peers through the exercises. This practice encourages empathy for fellow students. In Emeryville California, teachers are trained how to share mindfulness in their classrooms. The teachers first become balanced which leads to positive effects on the kids and classroom culture. Some schools begin and end the day with 15 minutes of stillness or meditation.

**Behavior contracts.** Behavior contracts are written agreements between teachers, students, and families. Gajada (2019) suggests listing and enforcing specific behavior expectations through rewards and consequences. Focus on Exceptional Children cite University

of Colorado research which claims a student without a behavior contract may disrupt class up to ten times. Behavior contracts are favorable because they are seen as fair. In 2007, “Psychological Reports” presented research from the University of Cadiz concerning behavior contracts (as cited in Gajada, 2019). When implementing them, a reduction was noted in behaviors such as vandalism, disrespect, refusing to work, and lounging on desks.

**Character education.** Graff (2012) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of teachers’ perceptions and understandings of school character education programs in their school. The study explored how crucial the role of the teacher and the teacher’s understanding of modifying curriculum is to ensure student social and moral growth. She addressed two research questions. First, according to middle and high school teachers, what values are being taught by character education programs in their schools? Second, what are the teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of those programs? The study design was descriptive research of rural public middle and high schools outside of Rochester, NY. Core values, administrative support, and teacher involvement were each described in the research. Forty-five full-time teachers of grades six through twelve were asked to participate. For each grade the number below represents the percentage of teachers per grade: less than 6% taught sixth grade, 17% taught seventh grade, 22% taught eighth grade. The majority of the teachers taught ninth through twelfth grade. A ratio of nearly six to four of the participants was female. The majority of the teachers (55%) were between the ages of 31 and 60.

The collection of data included a two-page, 23 item survey distributed through email and teacher mailboxes. Based on the Character Education Partnership’s 11 principles, the survey was used to identify the program’s core values and assess implementation of those values in the district (Graff, 2012). Respondents were allowed to write in an answer for question one but were

asked to rate other questions using the 5-point Likert-type scale. The researcher used non-probability sampling to select participants. The researcher emailed an explanation of the program, a letter of informed consent, and more questions regarding demographics of the participants.

Graff (2012) reported that only 18 of 45 surveys distributed were returned. The top three core values teachers identified as important were integrity, respect, and responsibility. The respondents agreed mostly that the staff takes ownership of teaching core values in school life. On average, most teachers agreed they taught work-related habits (perseverance, responsible decision-making, and challenge seeking) and social habits including honesty and responsibility. The teachers believed students think the staff is caring; however, one staff member stated the relationship between the teacher and student influenced how respectful each treated the other. Many of the remaining questions were answered with skepticism by two or three respondents. They blamed student attitudes, beliefs, and apathy for any shortcomings of teachers. Overall, the staff and students felt mutual concern and respect for one another.

At the end of the study, Graff (2012) presented the results to the teachers and administrators to better improve the quality of the character education program. Based on the results of the survey, teachers have incorporated core values in grades six through 12 using the character education program. Overall, the study led to an increased push from school counselors to ensure character education is intentionally taught in the classrooms. The counselors determined needs and created an action plan to implement curriculum to address any concerns adequately.

**Positive action.** One method of teaching character education or better termed as Skills for Successful Learning and Living (SSL) is the Positive Action program (Positive Action,



2017). The program is a research-based method a school can use for moral value and character development. When implemented with fidelity, Positive Action teaches youth to respond to multiple dimensions of any situation while emphasizing respect for rules and understanding of social justice. Through daily programs in classroom curriculum kits, the program fosters a student's growth as a productive, good, and contributing citizen. The program is a combination of three elements. The first core element focuses on self-concepts. The next component is a cycle comprised of Thoughts-Feelings-Actions. The final component teaches students to place value on being good and contributing. Many schools across the nation have implemented the Positive Action program and other SSL programs. Allen Petersdorf attributes his rise in achievement scores and change in the overall culture of his California elementary school to the implementation of Positive Action (Flay & Phil, n.d).

**After-school clubs.** Providing positive opportunities for positive social interactions is a characteristic of the Social Development Model (SDM) (Sullivan & Hirschi, 2011). Youth development is comprised of four different conditions. The availability of social interactions, the extent to which they pursue these interactions, skills necessary to engage in them, and support for participation must each be considered when examining social processes and development. By creating opportunities for students to participate in prosocial contexts, students simultaneously begin to engage in a behavioral feedback cycle. As students hone social skills, they are rewarded. The more they are rewarded, the more prosocial beliefs and actions develop because they are reinforced by the participants in the context. Increased academic efficacy and coping skills become byproducts of this loop. Consequently, anti-social contexts also impact student beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, to transform a student whose background consists of antisocial

behaviors, he or she must engage in social contexts which allow youth to garner praise and foster pride. When doing so, a transactional process between skills and praise will manifest.

## **Conclusion**

As stated in chapter one, Harvest Middle School is a school where discipline issues were contributing to poor academic achievement. Many times, leaders try to enforce harsh discipline routines to change behavior. Trying to change policy without changing culture is futile (Reeves, 2006).

The research reflects efforts to improve student behavior in schools and programs across the country. In the northeastern part of the US, mindfulness (NewsELA, 2016) and meditation (Haupt, n.d) are becoming alternatives to punishment for inappropriate behavior. Both are reflective initiatives. Consequently, Townley (1995) suggests not only reflection but intentionally teaching conflict resolution strategies. Students must learn how to work through disagreements instead of lashing out, imploding, or exploding. Willard (n.d) takes it a step further insisting schools should teach civility. Regardless, the literature insists schools must be proactive instead of reactive. Mindfulness, mediation, meditation, and conflict resolution are each reactive and implemented after a problem has occurred. However, teaching civility or character education (Graff, 2012) is more proactive.

Student behavior is a reflection of the culture. If increased student discipline behavioral problems affect morale and climate of a school, student achievement will suffer. Conversely, according to the literature, when students experience a positive and safe climate where they feel valued and understood, discipline will decrease, achievement will increase, and poverty will have little effect. Can these principles be applied to an “F” rated, low-income, small rural school

in northeast Mississippi? Can we improve student behavior by strategic counseling, mindfulness, and Positive Action? This applied research study aimed to do so.

The next chapter discusses the development and implementation of the action plan. Specific interventions the research team used to transform student behavior at Harvest Middle School are detailed along with the methodology used document and analyze each action step.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Methods**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the applied research design and the methods used in this research to address the problem of student behavior at Harvest Middle School. Improving the organization's ability to identify a problem within the school context, to develop a plan for improvement, and to learn through the process serves as the other pillar to this applied study. Beginning with a description of the collaborative process, the first part of the chapter provides insight to the process used to develop the action plan. With improving student behavior as the cornerstone of this project, this section provides an overview of collaborating stakeholders, a review and timeline of the process, existing research guiding the work, and internal data examined to create the action plan.

The full action plan is presented in the second portion of this chapter. The goals of this action plan sought to implement teaching social-emotional learning strategies through group counseling and the Positive Action program along with creating positive and engaging after school activities to improve student achievement by improving student behavior. Additionally, this action research study aimed to improve the capacity of the organization to effectively apply the school improvement cycle of diagnosing a problem, setting goals, developing a plan, and evaluating the progress. The first question examined how student behavior affects learning in the classroom. The second question explored existing research and processes which have been

used to successfully improve student behavior. The third question focused on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes successfully aided in the change of behavior. The final questions explored if shared beliefs and desires of students, parents, and teachers could be used to set goals and to collaboratively engage in the research process.

Each element of the action plan served as a component in an overall blueprint designed to improve student behavior at Harvest. For each element, a description of the systems, participants, timelines, responsible parties, and resources is presented in detail and the measurable goals associated.

The third and final portion of Chapter Three is dedicated to the evaluation of the action plan. Upon completing one year of the action plan, a program evaluation was conducted to analyze goal attainment and the development of the organization's capacity to utilize an applied research method to address problems. For each element, formative assessment were conducted using qualitative and quantitative data. Ultimately, the research questions presented in Chapter One and again in previous portions of this chapters served as the litmus tests for the project and were evaluated using the multiple sources of data and analyzed through the program evaluation process presented in the final portion of this chapter.

The purpose of this applied research study was to transform student behavior at Harvest Middle School. The vision of Harvest Middle School is to ensure every student's academic, social, and emotional growth. Harvest is a fifth through eighth grade middle school in northeast Mississippi. The school is comprised of 280 students who each receive free and reduced meals. In 2015-2016, the school was rated an "F" by the Mississippi Department of Education. In SY 2016-2017, the school improved 89 points to earn a "D" rating. According to Ford's (2013)

study, when proactive measures are taken to decrease suspensions, literacy and math scores improve; therefore, social and emotional growth aids academic growth. The school leadership team met to analyze and disaggregate discipline and achievement data to determine if the majority of students with high numbers of discipline referrals also scored lower on the end of the year state assessment in ELA. If so, what proactive measures could be taken to transform student behavior to improve achievement at Harvest Middle School?

The team decided which student behaviors were disrupting academic achievement the most at Harvest. Three primary behaviors were identified by the team. First, classroom disruptions such as shouting across the room, getting out of one's seat, horse playing, and talking to peers were preventing continuity of instruction. Next, peer-to-peer conflicts at school and outside of school or on social media distracted students. Even if the conflict did not become physical, the unhealthy interpersonal relationships heavily influenced peer interactions which affected the learning environment and school culture. Finally, disrespect and defiance were found to be a source of many referrals. Students refusing to complete work or comply with school and classroom rules are often referred for defiance and their reactions to a teacher's reprimand is often called disrespect. Each time a student disrupted, the teacher stopped instruction to correct.

It is important to note that student behavior at Harvest Middle School is a complex problem requiring a complex set of solutions. While there are prescribed solutions targeted at specific problems, it is impossible for the multi-layered approach to not blur lines and overlap. While one particular approach may aim to address one issue, it may affect another area. Likewise, children are multifaceted as are their behavioral issues. This chapter describes

multiple approaches for multiple causes of student behavior that inevitably intertwined throughout the implementation process.

### **Development and Implementation of the Action Plan**

Since the Mississippi Department of Education identified Harvest Middle School as a Priority School in 2016, all aspects of the school which may affect achievement need to be inspected. When talking with teachers about achievement data or participating in informal conversations after school, the number one reason teachers cited for low test scores was student discipline issues. Therefore, in the summer of 2017 the school principal and academic coach first worked to disaggregate discipline data with the goal of identifying and improving student behavior. When desegregating behavioral referrals from the previous year, all referrals were distributed into four categories: disruption, disrespect, peer-to-peer conflict, and other (weapon, drugs, theft, etc.). Overwhelmingly, disruption and peer-to-peer conflict contributed to nearly two-thirds of the referrals. In many cases, disrespect followed those because the student became disrespectful when reprimanded. However, the focus of this study was to curb disruptive behavior and peer-to-peer conflict.

Next, a team was assembled. The leadership team comprised of the principal, assistant principal, academic coach, counselor, PBIS chairperson, and a science teacher used three guiding questions as they began to collaborate. The first question examined how student behavior affects learning in the classroom. The second question explored existing research and processes which have been used to successfully improve student behavior. The third question focused on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes successfully aided in the change of behavior.

Question one guided the leadership team through a series of interviews with teachers and students to gather perspectives of causes and effects of student misbehavior. To address question two, the leadership team decided the literature supported social-emotional learning and a school-wide character education program.

The team began informally collecting data from students and teachers to determine why students misbehave, the impact on student achievement, and possible solutions. The goal was to decrease behavioral incidents by 20% with the identified group and 10% school-wide. Next, the students with the highest number of discipline referrals identified and the number of behavioral referrals were compared to their MAAP performance. If a student received more than three referrals, the student became part of the targeted population. The list was first comprised of seventh graders as most referrals were generated from that cohort of students. Next, grades five and six were analyzed. Students receiving more than three referrals in those grades were added to the targeted population. Additionally, behavioral referrals by each teacher were analyzed and compared to achievement data. Like the research identified in Chapter Two suggested, when a teacher is spending instructional time correcting instead of instructing, content is not covered (Ford, 2013). There was a correlation between high discipline referrals and low performance. Thus, the team was tasked with finding a proactive solution to improving student behavior. Proactive measures are more productive. For example, NewsELA (2016) cites one school as discontinuing suspensions and detentions by utilizing proactive solutions. The next step was to enlarge the team by including the new assistant principal for Harvest, PBIS chair, and school counselor in the project. Together, they collaborated using published research and observations of what appeared to work at Harvest Middle in the past.



Table 3

*Developing the Action Plan*

Action Step	Goal	Timeline	Responsible Party	Resources	Evaluation
Create/Distribute a survey for teachers.	To gather perceptions and attitudes about student behavior, classroom disruptions, and referral worthy behavior.	One week	Research Team	Survey Time to create survey Cost-3 hours =\$120	Survey-Likert scale survey using Qualtrics. Distribute via email to all staff pre and post implementation  (See Appendix for Developing B )
Disaggregate discipline data.	Identify students who need behavioral interventions	One day	Principal Counselor	Discipline data from SAM's	Descriptive Data-Excel Chart including number of referrals and achievement data (See Appendix C)

**Element I—Implementation of Counseling Interventions for Targeted Students**

The first element of this action plan intentionally focused on the student and her/his ability to self-manage. The premise was to transform student behavior by transforming how they approach conflict and understand self-awareness. Using group counseling sessions, students were given an opportunity to understand how and why they react to any given situation. They were then given the knowledge and tools needed to make different behavioral choices. Since

self-management is key, each of the targeted students received a behavior chart as an accountability method for self-regulation and to utilize the skills learned in group counseling. This study addressed the student first, then moved outward to address external factors or motivators.

**Targeted counseling.** After compiling a list of students identified as needing the most immediate attention and social-emotional skill development, the counselor organized group sessions. This element is also explained in Table 3. First, using the disaggregated behavioral referral data mentioned earlier, students with the highest discipline referrals and lowest test scores were identified. The first pool is taken from seventh grade as this cohort produced the most referrals in the past two years. For the first nine weeks, 25 seventh grade students and one sixth grade student met with the counselor each week in a strategically planned group therapy session to work on coping skills and self-management techniques (See Appendix for Counseling Document A). The sessions were based on the Health Choices: A CBT-Based Anger Management Group Curriculum for High School Students (Carchedi, Paul, Lodesky, & Gould, n.d.). The counselor adapted the curriculum to make it more age appropriate. Additionally, she re-typed the session worksheets to make them more visually pleasing for middle school. The original curriculum suggested hassle logs and “For Group Leaders Only” sections. The counselor eliminated those portions. Also, Healthy Choices only requires reviewing the previous week’s lesson. Instead, the counselor reviewed each lesson taught up to that point. Therefore, the student was reminded of all of the previous lessons weekly. This use of repetition was intended to keep all lessons fresh in the student’s mind. Throughout the sessions, discipline referrals were tallied. Pre-and post-surveys were provided (See Appendix for Counseling Document B). Students from grades fifth and sixth followed suit the subsequent nine weeks.

Eighth grade students in SY17-18 did not participate in groups for two reasons. First, the cohort had the least amount of referrals over the last three years, and these students would not be on campus for the fall 2018 implementation of the project. Groups of five to seven students were formed, separated by gender, and met for 65 minutes one time per week during non-core classes. Sessions were preplanned adhering to a lesson plan per week. Topics such as conflict resolution, self-esteem, anger management, coping skills, external circumstances, and impulse control were addressed. Many of these were also addressed in Positive Action. Groups rotated the next nine weeks. Individual counseling based on need continued to take place throughout the year as part of the counselor's normal scope of duty. Students completed a survey before and after participating in the sessions.

**Goal.** The goal of target counseling was to treat the problem not the symptom. If students and the counselor could perform a root cause analysis of their behaviors, then students may become empowered to make different decisions when presented with a different set of tools in the sessions.

**Costs.** The time needed to conduct groups compromised the amount of time allotted for the counselor to perform clerical duties. Therefore, teachers and administrators spent two hours helping file registration documents. Each week, the counselor spent approximately four hours preparing questionnaires, lesson plans, and meeting with students for nearly 30 weeks which in turn cost nearly \$4800.

**Building Capacity.** The counselor and the principal continued to collaborate and research social-emotional learning throughout the process. As practices were deemed unsuccessful, the research team would meet to devise different strategies to teach social-emotional skills.

***Timeline.*** Group counseling began in August 2017 and continued throughout the action plan implementation. Each nine weeks, a new group entered counseling. Though the groups were populated based on the previous year's data, new students were added if the administration saw the need for individual students.

**Behavioral charts.** In addition to counseling, the students were required to sign and adhere to behavior contracts (Gajada, 2019). In those groups, there was a need to teach conflict resolution strategies since the data suggested peer to peer interactions were a source of disturbance. A behavioral chart (see Appendix for Counseling Document C) was introduced and students were rewarded when they achieved a certain number of points. Each Monday morning in the cafeteria, the counselor gave new sheets to the study participants in sixth and seventh grade. Each day, she gave charts to fifth grade students as past experiences have indicated younger students need shorter time spans between desired behavior and reward. Students were given behavior point charts where they were accountable to certain behaviors throughout the day. If a predetermined number of points were achieved, the student earned a reward. Each student received a one or zero per behavioral category for each class. At the end of the class, the teacher evaluated if the student met the target for each behavior that class period. The categories for the behavior charts were based on informal conversations with staff and administrative observations of classes. All students who were identified as targeted participants received behavior charts despite their current status in group sessions. Again, students who began to have a rise in discipline referrals but not identified earlier were given behavior charts. The reasoning is upper elementary and middle school students are in the midst of puberty and self-awareness crisis. Sometimes, those factors can have an adverse effect on students who exhibited positive

behaviors when younger. Discipline referrals for students receiving behavior charts were monitored using the district's student information database and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.

**Goal.** The goal of the behavior chart was to allow students to self-manage within the classroom and readjust behaviors based on immediate feedback while keeping a goal in mind.

**Costs.** The behavior charts were printed and distributed weekly. Monies from Title I purchased paper for the program. Time to create the charts was a minimum; however, checking and rewarding for goal achievement cost both time and cost of the prizes.

**Timeline.** Behavior charts began in August 2017 and continue throughout the action plan implementation. Throughout the project, students could improve behavior to point he or she no longer need a daily behavior chart. Other students requested charts to help self-manage behavior.

## **Element II—Improvement of Teacher Efficacy in Classroom Management**

Classroom management is a skill effective teachers must inevitably master. Classroom teachers write most student discipline referrals. Unfortunately, many discipline referrals are written because the act took place in an unstructured environment or could have been handled differently. The second action step focused on building the staff's capacity to create environments conducive to engaging instruction and appropriate student behavior. This step was vital because the staff member plays a role in motivating a student to choose wisely and addressing student behavior before it becomes problematic. This step addressed the need for more consistency and teacher efficacy in managing the classroom and students' behavior.

**Improving teacher efficacy.** Because consistency is paramount, another goal of this program was to ensure teachers understood what constituted disruptive behavior and were armed with strategies to handle minor issues or prevent minor issues from escalating. It was noted that

some teachers referred students to the office for issues which could be de-escalated given the proper training. De-escalating situations is one of Ford's (2013) three means to deterring student misbehavior. A student cannot feel embarrassed in front of his peers (Ford, 2013). First, all teachers attended classroom management training. The external provider, also referred to as classroom management coach, followed up with the teachers throughout the year. In doing so, the aim was to ensure consistency from classroom to classroom. Teachers were trained in classroom management skills and behavioral escalation techniques at the beginning of the school year during in-service training days and throughout the year during faculty meetings and one-on-one coaching. Classroom management coaches worked with the whole staff and targeted teachers throughout the year. Professional development concerning student engagement techniques, arts integration, and mindfulness were provided throughout the year. The school principal, assistant principal, and external providers identified teachers in need of the most attention for classroom management training. Identification methods were: number of referrals per teacher and observations by coach and administration (see Appendix for Teacher Training A). The classroom management coach worked individually with teachers identified as needing interventions. The coach or administrator first observed the teacher for a class period, then met with the teacher during planning time during which he or she gave strategies and modeled. The teacher then conducted the next class session using the tools and strategies discussed during the meeting. This cycle continued throughout the day and subsequent visits. Administrative support and coaching were also provided as part of an administrator's normal scope of duties.

**Goal.** Classroom management deficits can inflate the number of discipline referrals. By improving classroom management and de-escalation strategies, the variance from classroom to classroom was minimized. The goal was consistency. A referral in one classroom constituted a

referral in every classroom on campus. Additionally, good classroom management techniques allowed classroom instruction to proceed and students remain in class for the instruction.

**Costs.** Classroom management trainer for in-service day and continued support throughout the year cost an estimated \$7800. Student engagement techniques workshop was valued at \$1150. Arts integration costs were included and funded by a Mississippi Arts Commission grant. Time for training was three hours. Mindfulness training was included in the KidSMART training mentioned earlier which cost \$3025. Administration observation, feedback, and coaching costs were calculated by time needed to conduct observations and meet with the teachers.

**Timeline.** Training began in August 2017 and continued throughout the implementation process. During the project, teachers attended two one-week art institutes during the summer and two two-day winter institutes, visited four arts model schools, attended four school staff trainings by Mississippi Arts Commission teaching artists, and invited artists into their classrooms to work with students.

### **Element III—Implementation of Proactive Measures to Improve Student Behavior**

Instead of relying on punishment to address student misbehaviors, measures needed to be taken to encourage students to make positive behavioral choices. This action step details a concerted effort to implement measures which motivated and exposed students to pro-social behaviors. Element I focused on the students. Element II focused on the teachers. Both steps asked the participant to reflect on her/his practice and become self-aware. This action step was more extrinsic. It examined to what degree environmental factors and external motivators affect behavioral choices.

**Positive action.** Character education must be taught according to the teachers. The Positive Action program served as the character education tool in this study. After researching multiple behavior programs presented on What Works.org (Positive Action, 2017) provided by the Mississippi Department of Education, the team concluded Positive Action would be the best fit as a whole-school approach for Harvest Middle. The prescribed program taught to the whole school meaning a whole school approach to character education. Modeling of those behaviors were key (Positive Action, 2017). Positive Action is a program which was implemented in every teacher's first period. The program was a research-based platform to teach positive choices and conflict resolution. The groups also reiterated the necessity of family support. Therefore, a concerted effort was made to build a partnership with parents. During informal conversations with staff members, most felt character education, expected behaviors at school, and academic achievement were valued more if parents are involved. Service learning was suggested as a way to build empathy among students. This particular point was addressed through Positive Action as citizenship and care for others which the third and final element of the program addressed (Positive Action, 2017).

Each grade-level had a PA representative on the program planning team. That teacher was responsible for incorporating the program for the grade. In most cases, the history teacher was responsible for teaching PA curriculum each week. The themes for the week were reiterated during school-wide announcements and woven throughout the school through visual representations, parent communications, and school-wide themes. The team chose to teach PA during history classes because they were not tested and the program taught citizenship and social responsibilities. There was a separate scripted curriculum per grade-level but all followed the same theme. The team met throughout the year to monitor and revise the program as needed.



**Goal.** Positive Action taught students a multi-dimensional approach to teach students respect for fellow citizens and rules (Flay & Phil, n.d.). The goal was to ensure the same character traits and strategies were taught school-wide and a common language used.

**Costs.** The Positive Action program alone cost \$6050 for whole school materials and grade level programs. The webinars accrued a time cost of \$240 for six hours of training. The professional development time costs equaled an estimated \$240 to train staff members.

**Building capacity.** Modeling of appropriate behaviors were key (Positive Action, 2017). The teachers who were struggling with tone issues needed to model appropriate tones just as much as the children. Since the PBIS chair was relieved of the majority of PBIS duties, she and another teacher were assigned as campus leaders for Positive Action. Together, they oversaw the implementation in every classroom across the campus to ensure students understood the school-wide expected behaviors. First, much time was spent learning about the program through webinars and reading instructional materials provided. Next, the teachers served as experts for the school by providing professional development for the program to all classroom teachers on campus.

**Timeline.** Positive Action was purchased in the fall of 2017 but training and implementation did not take place until Spring 2018 and continued throughout the implementation time period. Teachers needed to first learn more about the program and attend tutorials before implementing in their classrooms.

**After-school activities.** When analyzing the seventh grade cohort of students, a steep decline in discipline referrals was noted from sixth grade to seventh grade among students who participated in seventh grade extracurricular activities (see Table 2). For example, the student identified as number nine accumulated 17 referrals in SY 2016-2017 but was only been referred

one time during the first nine weeks of SY 2017-2018 while involved in football after school. Student number 19 is a cheerleader who has no referrals for first nine weeks but had 10 referrals for SY2016-2017. When looking at student performance on the MS Assessment Program or MAP, students with over three referrals in SY 2016-2017 did not score in the proficient range on ELA tests. Student 11 received ten referrals in SY 2016-2017, and by the end of first nine weeks in SY 2017-2018, the student was referred to the office three times; the student was a member of the cheer squad but removed once referrals began accumulating. Student 17 was referred 21 times in SY 2016-2017, involved in no afterschool activities, and received the third most referrals in his cohort in SY 2017-2018 first nine weeks. Likewise, student 16 received 19 discipline referrals in SY 2016-2018, was not involved in afterschool activities, and received five referrals in the first nine weeks. Students numbered 7, 14, and 21 were football players who received three to five referrals during the first nine weeks. Each football player was suspended for one or more games.

Therefore, the principal and assistant principal decided to create afterschool opportunities for all students to be involved with non-academic programs one day a week. The assistant principal enlisted a team of teachers (with one teacher per grade), athletic coaches, and community members to create the after-school program. After-school tutoring was available two days per week during the school year. Each week, a student attended tutoring one day and a high interest club the subsequent day. Clubs were based on student interests' such as athletics, robotics, reading, and acting. Additionally, many of the clubs possessed a performance piece allowing parents to attend.

The after-school tutoring and club program was open to any Harvest student. All students stayed for tutoring on Tuesday to be eligible to stay for clubs on Thursday. The

exception was those students who scored proficient or advanced on state tests and were performing well in the classroom. The teachers identified these students who scored adequately on the tests and did not need to stay for tutoring on Monday. If the eligible student decided to stay on Tuesday, he or she was provided enrichment opportunities instead of remedial tutoring. Otherwise, those students attended clubs only. After one hour, the school provided transportation home. Mondays were reserved for academic tutoring. All ELA and math teachers stayed on Tuesdays. Students reported to their ELA or math teacher. Beforehand, the ELA and math teacher coordinated to divide students based on student needs. If a student needed both, she or he attended 30 minutes in each subject area. It was important to note that these sessions were targeted to reinforce classroom instruction and provide a safety net for students. Remediation and skill recovery were addressed during an intervention period each day. Thursday clubs were interest-based and facilitated by the remaining faculty members. Students signed up for a club each rotation and remained with choice for the four weeks. At the end of the four weeks, a culmination project or activity was provided for parents. Following the conclusion of the four-week rotation, the students choose their next club or remain with the same for another four weeks. Per district policy, each faculty member was required to stay one day each week for professional development or staff meetings. The principal moved those meetings to planning time so that teachers had the one hour available for the after-school program. All teachers served after-school activities at least one day per week. Because the school received school improvement funds, the principal allocated funding to pay each teacher \$24 per hour.

The purpose for including every teacher was two-fold. First, ELA and math teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses best. The extra hour allowed them time to work with their students for an additional hour and address any needs noticed during regular

instruction. The other benefit to teacher-directed clubs was it provided an opportunity for students to build relationships with teachers outside of the classroom. It also allowed teachers who may not work directly with one another during a normal school day to collaborate and work together during the afternoons in a non-threatening and relaxed club time. In doing so, the morale of teachers was expected to improve. A discipline issue during the program hour eliminated a student from participation for two weeks after the first warning. If any student caused continued disruption, he or she was disqualified a student from participation in all after-school activities.

**Goal.** The goal of these days as to build upon the success recognized in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade cohort for those involved in an after-school activity. By including a performance piece, students had a goal towards which they can work and value the practice process. Also, since many of the students lived in low-income and high crime neighborhoods, the after-school opportunities provided a safe, positive environment for students after school enabling them to avoid potentially harmful situations.

**Costs.** The after-school program provided transportation home with an estimated cost of \$2250 to pay bus drivers. The teachers received compensation for after-school tutoring and clubs totaling nearly \$15,000. Finally, an estimated time cost of \$640 for 16 hours of after school performance events was considered. Each was paid for by School Improvement Grant monies provided by MDE.

**Timeline.** After-school activities begin Spring semester 2018. Activities continued minimally during Fall semester 2018 because many of the students in seventh and eight grade participated in school-based athletics. Clubs and tutoring were offered but sporadically.

***Building Capacity.*** Teachers taught their grade level and subject area for tutoring. The clubs were assigned based on teacher expertise and preference. Therefore, little time for building capacity was needed for this portion.

### **Formative Assessments**

The administration, counselor, PBIS chair, academic coach, and leadership team monitored and examined all findings, survey results, quarterly achievement/discipline data, and feedback were monitored and examined by. Of course, throughout the year, the benchmark and state assessments of the students targeted were monitored along with the discipline data. The study concluded by examining the discipline and achievement data after post surveys and interventions to determine if the number of student referrals decreased and if student achievement improved.

Due to the dynamic nature of leadership, it was the researcher's responsibility as the principal to be responsive to feedback and formative assessments. Doing so warranted changes in the plan. No significant changes were required; therefore, there was no need to secure IRB approval for any amendments.

### **Program Goals**

The primary goal of this project was to determine whether an intentional attempt to teach social-emotional skills to groups and the whole school, provide teacher training in effective classroom management, and offer positive extra-curricular activities improved student behavior. Through group counseling and behavioral goals with the counselor and the Positive Action program taught school-wide, students learned skills to self-monitor, become independent thinkers, and understand success takes time and effort. An additional goal of this action research study aimed to enhance the capacity of the organization to efficiently apply the science of school

improvement by diagnosing a problem, setting goals, developing a plan, and evaluating the progress. Hopefully, the study provides an additional report within the body of research concerning student behavior and achievement as well as aiding other practitioners in using applied research to study, learn from, and solve problems within school contexts. The table below presents the counseling plan. Each step begins with a goal. The table then explains the amount of time needed to complete the step, the person responsible and time required for the person to implement the action step. Resources and documentation needed to implement and evaluate the step are listed in the final two columns.

## Element I—Implementation of Counseling Interventions for Targeted Students

Table 4

### *Counseling Plan*

Action Step	Goals	Timeline	Person Responsible	Resource	Evaluation
Counselor organizes and meets with groups of students who have high numbers of discipline referrals.	Begin teaching social-emotional skills to students.	9 weeks	Counselor 4 hours per week x 30 weeks  2 hours per week for preparation	Pre/post questionnaire for students, lesson plans	Survey (see Appendix for Counseling Document A).  Document analysis of Schedule/Log of meetings with students (see Appendix for Counseling Documents B1-B8).
Implement behavior charts.	Students will self-manage to earn points.	12 months	Counselor Teachers will be responsible for evaluating behavior and awarding points.	Behavior charts (see Appendix for Counseling Document C).	Descriptive Data Monitor discipline referrals for each student on a behavior chart in Excel (see Appendix C).

## Element II—Improvement of Teacher Efficacy in Classroom Management

Table 5  
*Teacher Training Plan*

Action Step	Goals	Timeline	Person Responsible	Resource Budget	Evaluation
Train teachers in classroom management skills and behavioral de-escalation.	To increase teacher efficacy and ensure classroom management skills.	First of year	External providers	Title I funding	Survey distributed via email to all participants.
		Ongoing	Principal Assistant Principal	\$1200 one day \$1150 one day	(see Appendix for Teacher Training Document B)
Monitor and support practices throughout the year.	To maintain consistency across the school for valid referral data	Ongoing	External provider- Classroom management coaches, Principal Assistant Principal, Academic Coach	\$1200 per day for support for struggling teachers x7 days= \$8400 Time Cost 180 Administration observation hours	Document analysis of observation notes.  Survey Feedback using Qualtrics survey provided by management coach. (see Appendix for Teacher Training Document C)  Descriptive Data Monitor number of discipline referrals per teacher and reason. Excel spread sheet (see Appendix for Teacher Training Document C)



### Element III—Implementation of Proactive Measures to Improve Student Behavior

Table 6

*Positive Action Plan*

Action Step	Goals	Timeline	Person Responsible	Resource	Evaluation
Purchase Positive Action.	Implement a research-based program.	Fall 2017	Principal	Title I Funding \$6050	Purchase order.
Train PA Chairpersons to be site managers of the program.	Ensure two experts on campus to implement program.	Ongoing	Principal, Assistant Principal	Positive Action Webinar 6 hours	Document analysis of meeting minutes. Observation of implementation.
Train teachers in Positive Action. character education.	To ensure consistency from classroom to classroom. To teach character education school-wide and improve school climate.	January 2018	PA Chairpersons	Training materials (included in price)  3 hours during PD	Document Analysis of meeting minutes.
One teacher per grade-level implement PA during their class period one day per week.	Every student in the grade is exposed to PA by the same teacher. Consistency of implementation for the grade level.	February 2018	One teacher per grade level  PA Chairpersons	Cost 5 hours per grade level 20 hours x 30 weeks	Document analysis of Observations Lesson plans, photographs of halls, observation notes.  Survey Process evaluation distributed via email to all teachers.(see Appendix for Pro-Active Document A).

Focus on Conflict Resolution Strategies	Reduce the number of peer to peer disputes.	March 2018- ongoing	Grade level teachers	Included in cost of PA	Document Analysis/Observations  Sample lesson plan  Descriptive Statistics Reduction in peer conflict referrals. Recorded in Excel spreadsheet (see Appendix for Pro- Active Document B).
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Table 7  
*After-school Program Plan*

Action Step	Goals	Timeline	Person Responsible	Resource	Evaluation
Create an after-school tutoring/club team.	Offer positive opportunities for children for constructive time after school instead of walking the neighborhood after school.	12 months	Assistant Principal	Teachers-leaders of clubs	Survey using Qualtrics distributed to parents, teachers, and students. (see Appendix for Proactive Document A,B,C).
	Build relationships with teachers.			Materials for clubs	
	Establish opportunities for students to participate in interest based clubs.			Transportation for after-school tutoring/clubs 30 1-hour meetings plus 1-hour transportation by bus 60 hours Paid for by grant.	Descriptive Statistics  (see Appendix C)
				Pay teachers/drivers-\$15000- paid for by Title I.	Participation data for students receiving behavior charts (see Appendix C).
Offer parent events for students to showcase skills or projects learned in clubs	One per month	Spring 2018	Teachers Assistant Principal	Schedule dates	Document analysis of sign-in sheets.
		Fall 2018		Send flyers, all calls, social media posts. 3 hours	
				2 hours per event =16 hours	

## **Total Cost**

The total time cost required for this project was 1077 hours. Certified staff hours (870 x \$25 per hour = \$21,750) combined with administrative hours (213 x \$40 per hour \$8,520) accounted for a monetary time cost of \$30,270. Only \$21,750 was used counted as actual costs because administrators could not receive a stipend for the clubs. Actual costs for the program were covered through multiple grants (Title I, Toyota, and School Improvement Grant funds).

## **Program Evaluation**

The following section describes how the researchers evaluated the program's effectiveness and implementation. This applied research project had a two-fold purpose: improve student behavior at Harvest Middle School and build capacity within the organization to implement change using the improvement process. A set of research questions guided the evaluative process. This section begins with the research design followed by a detailed description of the participants. Next, evaluation components are described with justification for each and how each were used to evaluate the plan. Since this is a Dissertation in Practice, the researcher's background and role in the project should be taken into consideration and discussed after instruments. Next, the procedures are explained step by step. The chapter concludes with a data analysis plan.

**Research design.** This applied research concurrently employs qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis to study the central phenomenon of student behavior. Using program evaluation, the team assessed the effectiveness of the elements included in the study. Qualitative methods were relevant to this project because they explored participants' perceptions of counseling, pro-social behavior, and classroom management interventions. Quantitative methods generated descriptive data to monitor and analyze student

discipline referral numbers and academic achievement. Using both qualitative and quantitative data enabled the researcher to triangulate data sources and provide a comprehensive analysis in this study of student behavior. These multiple sources of data provided information to explore not only what happened to student behavior, but also how the specific elements and action steps influenced student behavior which impacts academic achievement. The purpose of this applied research study was to transform the student behavior at Harvest Middle School.

### **Participants.**

*Students.* According to the Mississippi Department of Education's criteria, Harvest is labeled 100% economically disadvantaged. Students were primarily from one rural area and one small urban community. Students were fifth through eighth graders who attended elementary school at one feeder school. After completing eighth grade, students from Harvest join students from another middle school and convene as ninth graders at an area high school.

One important factor to consider is the negative attitudes and perceptions towards the Harvest students. The adults and students from the other middle school express feelings of discontentment that their students must unite with the Harvest students in the ninth grade. In a recent consolidation effort, the district superintendent tried to consolidate both middle schools into one but was unable due to the public outcry from the other community. Harvest students and families are keenly aware of these feelings and experience inferiority feelings.

The student population was comprised of 86% Black, 13% White, and less than 1% Hispanic. As of Spring semester 2018, there were 243 regular education students of whom nearly 70 receive special education services. There were 17 additional students in self-contained classes who did not participate in the study. The student-teacher ratio was listed as 16-to-1. The population was listed as tentative because Harvest has a transiency rate of nearly 40%. Within

any year, the school may enroll or withdraw nearly one-third of the students. Most students are from one-parent homes or under the care of a relative.

When comparing discipline data by neighborhoods, two distinct areas populate with the most discipline. The neighborhoods are rent subsidized and the site for illicit drug use and some gang activity. On any given afternoon, one could drive through most of the neighborhoods in Rome and witness unsupervised children walking the streets all afternoon and until late evening. Rome is the lower income community where 85% of Harvest students live and is the site of the elementary school students attend before enrolling at Harvest Middle. Seven students were car riders while the rest are transported by bus home. Many of the students' lives are interwoven. They were at home together, rode the same bus, and were in the same classrooms. Some share the same father, others the same mother. Nearly 10% of the students' parents were incarcerated. Some students have experienced incarceration, or a sibling has.

Unlike the urban community just described, the students from the Harvest (rural) community tend to be from wealthier, middle class families with strong familial structures. This group accounted for the least amount of discipline referrals. Additionally, this community was very active in the schools through churches, city hall, volunteers, and civic organizations. Sports were a priority for the students. In SY 2017-2018, Harvest won the middle school area football championship and was runner up in boys' basketball. Grade levels were separated by building. Each grade usually enrolls around 60 students. Again, enrollment fluctuated due to the elevated transiency rate.

Although all students were involved in the behavioral improvement process, the targeted students were identified as those with more than three discipline referrals in fifth through seventh grade. Eighth graders were not studied as they moved to ninth grade mid-study.

**Teachers.** Only three teachers were from the same communities as the students. The other staff members drove from distances up to one hour to teach at Harvest. Teacher retention improved drastically over the last three years, so there were no first-year teachers on the campus. Because Harvest had drawn much acclaim and publicity for innovative programs the last few years, veteran teachers applied and overlooked low achievement scores and a reputation of student misbehavior. The pool of applicants strengthened dramatically. The staff was nearly equal racially Black and White. There was at least one male teacher per grade-level. Each grade has one teacher per subject; each teacher only planned for one subject area and an intervention period. Teachers were scheduled for common planning time while students went to an elective. During this time, teachers discussed academic and behavioral matters. Together as a team, they were encouraged to problem solve in the hallway before submitting an issue to the administrators.

**Research team.** The research team was composed of a counselor, assistant principal, principal, academic coach and two teachers. The counselor was a White female in her first year as a middle school counselor. She served seven years as vocational counselor prior to Harvest. The assistant principal was a Black female in her first year as an administrator. She previously served as a classroom teacher for two years at Harvest and seven years at the feeder school. Therefore, she was familiar with the families and students. The principal was a White female in her first year as lead principal and third year of administrative work. She served in the classroom for twelve years at a large middle school while serving as an administrative intern her last three years there. The Positive Action teachers were the two females to whom the students responded most. One was the school special education director and teacher; while the other was an eighth-grade science teacher. Both worked with students in extracurricular activities including

basketball, cheer, dance, and choir. Additionally, both worked previously at the feeder school and, consequently, know the students and families of Harvest.

***Researcher's background.*** The researcher in this study was a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi while also serving as the full-time principal at Harvest. She was in her mid 30's, White, and middle-class. She was appointed principal after serving two years under the school's first Black principal. He was the initial leader to begin reshaping behavioral expectations at Harvest. This study builds on the work he began in 2013. As the first White full-time female principal, she encountered some opposition for leading a majority Black school. In the two years as assistant principal, she received much publicity for working with the Harvest community, businesses, and grant partners to secure funding for innovative opportunities for students. Because so much positive publicity was directed to Harvest for the first time, she earned the trust of many Black leaders and families in the community. She also had a connection with the greater Black community as her father served as the County and Juvenile Court Judge for the area and was perceived as a friend to Black constituents. She used that familial connection to advocate on the part of many families and grandparents in dire circumstances thus earning their trust. However, despite such efforts, there remained a group of citizens who refused to accept a White female as a leader of a majority Black middle school. She would be naive not to consider the cultural ramifications when making important decisions concerning academics and discipline. Additionally, when she hired a first-year Black female assistant principal, some citizens were satisfied while others felt two females could not be effective disciplinarians. Therefore, she created a team of administrators including coaches who also live in the community who administer the corporal punishment and aid in the discipline. This both created a distributed leadership atmosphere and strengthened the discipline measures.



**Data collection and instruments.** This section will detail the data collection methods and instruments used in the program evaluation process. The research questions guided the development and selection of these methods and instruments. The first question examines how student behavior affects learning in the classroom. The next question focuses on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes successfully aided in the change of behavior. The final questions explore if shared beliefs and desires of students, parents, and teachers were used to set goals and to work collaboratively in the research process.

The following research questions were used to evaluate the action plan:

1. Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
2. Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
3. Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
4. What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
5. Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
6. Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

***Descriptive data.*** Throughout the implementation of the action plan, the research team collected data for the targeted students. This data indicated whether or not behavioral referrals decreased for targeted students who attend counseling and after-school programs. The descriptive data revealed if changes occurred in targeted students' achievement. Using an Excel spreadsheet throughout the process, the team tracked the following per student: discipline

referral count, achievement on each benchmark and end of the year test, assignment of behavior chart, peer to peer referral count, participation in group therapy, participation in organized team sports, and participation in after-school clubs (see Appendix C). Targeted students were those with three or more discipline referrals in SY 2016-2017 and SY 2017-2018. Because Harvest is a school with elevated transiency rate, nearly 40% in SY2016-2017, the roster changed based on enrollment. As the year progressed, some students were added based on an unexpected increase in referrals. The principal, assistant principal and counselor monitored the information. Each was able to enter data pertaining to their scope of duties and roles. The document was created during the summer of 2017 as a means to develop a proactive plan to address student behavior. IRB approved consent forms were signed by guardians were secured for every participant. All electronic documentation were shared among the principal, assistant principal, counselor, and academic coach using Google Drive, and only they were able to view and edit. Measures within the Google Drive platform were enabled to ensure the security of this document. The school district employs additional security measures to protect all Google accounts.

***Surveys.*** Surveys served as the main evaluation tool for this study. All surveys were based on a Likert scale with many having open-ended questions for additional information. The researcher developed all surveys except the counselor survey (see Appendix for Counseling Document A) based on similar surveys. The counselor walked the students through each question making sure the student understands what the question asks. The original curriculum suggested a “screening interview” and hassle log. The counselor eliminated these portions because each was time-consuming and more difficult to complete for middle schoolers. Though similar in theme to others, all surveys (see Appendix) were original and developed specifically to

meet the needs of this project. IRB approved consent forms for surveys were secured for every staff member, parent, and student.

*School Climate.* Climate surveys (see Appendix B) were administered to all staff members. The purpose of this survey was to gather teachers' perceptions of the school climate. Questions were specifically developed to gather perception of student behavior, classroom management, and possible proactive solutions. These surveys were created in Qualtrics using a Likert scale and open-ended questions; the principal distributed the surveys by email to all staff members. Climate survey results were anonymous.

*Counseling.* Pre-and post-counseling surveys (see Counseling Document A) were administered to participating students before and after group sessions. The surveys were administered by the counselor, completed on paper by the students, and results were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. The survey was intended to examine the student's perception of his/her own ability to use self-control and conflict resolution strategies before and after the counseling sessions. The counselor was the person responsible for survey data entry.

*Teacher training.* Teachers had the opportunity to evaluate the training and provide feedback to improve the training process and address teachers' perceived needs (see Appendix for Teacher Training B). The surveys were developed in Qualtrics and sent via email by the principal or assistant principal. This survey was anonymous. The classroom management coach also provided feedback of the training, observations, and coaching sessions (see Appendix for Teacher Training C). The teacher training survey was used to assess to what degree the teacher valued the training and felt empowered to utilize its content.

*Positive Action.* A process evaluation was administered to evaluate the Positive Action portion of the action plan. The evaluation was completed using a Qualtrics survey emailed to

teachers. In order to assess if the PA initiative, it was important to gather teachers' perceptions of its benefits and limitations, ease of implementation, and mode of implementation.

*After-school clubs.* Surveys for students, teachers, and parents were administered at the end of the program. Students and teachers accessed the survey electronically. All students had access to a computer on site and completed surveys during school hours. Teachers received the survey via email. Surveys were sent to parents using the email system. Participants had one week to complete the survey. Afterwards, the academic coach and principal tallied results. These surveys examined each stakeholder group's perceptions of the program and their insights to the different facets of the program. The questions were designed to address the perceived impact on behavioral choices and assess the structural elements of the program.

***Observations.*** The principal, assistant principal, and academic coach conducted classroom observations. The three observed the same classrooms at the beginning in order to calibrate their findings. They agreed on what to identify and how the implementation of effective classroom management should look. Classroom observations were within the normal scope of duties for administrators. During these observations, the administrator looked specifically at classroom management techniques taught in the trainings, as well as, general management techniques such as tone of voice, de-escalation, routines, and evidence of teacher-student relationships. Observations varied in length with most being five minute walk-throughs. At least two observations were 30 minutes, and those observations were reserved for teachers with the highest referral rate. All observations were written in the form of field notes and kept in a teacher observation binder.

***Document analysis.*** All documents, meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, observations, etc. were kept in the principal's office and labeled accordingly. The binder was kept in a filing

cabinet inaccessible to students. Meeting agendas and sign-in sheets remained accessible to the public upon request. Observations were not; they were shared with the teacher, administration, and management coach. The leadership team developed meeting agendas based on the objectives and goals of the meeting. Meeting handouts were also kept. Leadership team members carefully analyzed classroom observations for patterns of behavior as they related to classroom management techniques taught in the various trainings. The other documents, meeting agendas and sign-in sheets were analyzed for content pertaining to the study and personnel in trainings and meetings. When looking at the descriptive data, the researcher identified if the teacher attended the training and the observer could cite evidence of the taught skills being implemented in the classroom.

**Procedures.** Upon approval of this prospectus by the committee and graduate school and the approval required by the Internal Review Board, this applied research study commenced. First, the teachers received the school climate survey (see Appendix B). Next, the descriptive data portion began by ensuring the appropriate students were identified as targeted participants. Since it was the principal's job to improve school discipline, the seventh-grade students began groups during the fall of SY 2017-2018. Behavior groups with newly identified students in grades five through seven began the group process. The counselor monitored attendance to group. All students identified as having a propensity for behavioral issues were given behavior charts (see Appendix for Counseling Document C) throughout the process. The counselor both distributed and calculated those. Each teacher awarded a student one or zero points per category per class period. Every student had a specific goal to meet. The descriptive data collection began to be entered every nine weeks including referral count, type, achievement scores, and after-school participation rate.

All teachers were trained during school in-service days in the fall of 2017 for classroom management skills. Because classroom management training was conducted throughout the year, teachers completed the satisfaction survey after each (see Appendix for Teacher Training A). All teachers were entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed for high referral counts. Those with high numbers became the focus of the classroom management coach. He or she observed, coached, and gave feedback using the survey (see Appendix for Teacher Training Document B2). Meanwhile, the administrators continued to observe, coach, and give feedback to teachers. Feedback was documented and collected in a binder containing each teacher's observations.

Implementation of Positive Action training was documented by sign-in notes and agendas. Sample lesson plans for PA were collected as evidence. Proof of implementation through classroom observations, hallway displays, and morning announcements featuring PA themes were gathered through paper documentation and photographs. All members of the research team gathered this evidence.

The final proactive portion of the project involved after-school clubs. The assistant principal formed a planning team to create effective after-school clubs. Using School Improvement Grant monies, the principal allotted \$15,000 to pay staff members for after school tutoring. Every staff member was required to stay one day per district policy for professional development. The principal reassigned that time to take place during common planning so the afternoon would be free. Time sheets were kept for both payment and document analysis. Tuesdays were dedicated to ELA and math tutoring with those respective teachers. Each grade level teacher taught his or her grade level student. The tutorial sessions were recaps of the lessons for the week and/or previews of the upcoming lessons. Thursdays were reserved for interest-based clubs. All students were transported home by one of three buses. After receiving

guardian consent, the addresses were entered into a spreadsheet. The school transportation director coordinated three different routes to ensure all students had transportation home.

A letter was sent to every student's guardian asking for permission for the student to stay for clubs. As a requirement, students were required to stay for Tuesday tutorial in order to stay for Thursday's interest club. Attendance was kept each week and checked for Monday attendance. Attendance was also important to ensure the school knew who was on campus during these times. The non-ELA and math teachers conducted the interest clubs. At the beginning of every four-week rotation, students signed up for an interest club. That list was distributed in homeroom and returned to the assistant principal for data entry. After compiling the interest club list, the list was then given to each interest club sponsor. They documented attendance according to the list provided by the assistant principal. From 3:05-4:05, all students remained with the assigned teacher. Snacks were brought to the hallway by an administrator or staff member. The snacks were paid for by a tutoring grant through Toyota, Mississippi which was written in 2015 by the assistant principal who is the current principal in this study. Any discipline issue during tutoring warranted a suspension from the program for two weeks. At the conclusion of the school year and at the end of implementation, student, parent, and teacher surveys (see Appendix for Proactive Documents B 1, 2, 3) were distributed.

**Data analysis.** Data from multiple quantitative and qualitative methods was used to assess the processes and outcome for this applied research study. A number of data collection methods and instruments were utilized and triangulated to address the various research questions and determine if the purpose and aims of this study were met. This section will provide a description of the analysis conducted for each research question and study purpose.

*Identifying behaviors.* Question one asks the research team to determine if the teachers and students were able to identify and justify common student misbehavior. To do so, the team used several pieces of data: school climate surveys, student perception surveys in counseling (Counseling Document A), informal conversations with students and teachers, Swivl reflections, teaching coaching, and teacher referral counts. First, the researcher held informal conversations with teachers to determine what they thought as the most hindering behaviors to student learning. Common phrases and behaviors identified were then used as the foundation for the questions in the school climate survey. The school climate survey was used to confirm if other teachers felt similar. Coaches also observed classrooms and debriefed with the principal. Again, the researcher discussed the observations with the coaches to deem if the same behaviors were identified. By doing so, the researcher was able to address behaviors originated from the experiences of the teacher and coaches and reduced chances of being bias towards certain behaviors. The researcher cross-examined the behaviors with those mentioned in referrals and confirmed the suggested behaviors were those for which most referrals were written. By knowing which behaviors to address, the trainings were focused on managing and preventing those behaviors. Surveys were distributed to teachers via email after each training. These surveys gauged how the teachers perceived the training helped them address the behaviors and asked the coaches how well the teachers were implementing the strategies. The surveys for observers were distributed one time via email to gather an overall picture of implementation of techniques taught in the trainings. Next, the researcher assessed Swivl reflections performed by teachers. Swivl is a recording system which teachers use to film then reflect on their pedagogical practice in the classroom. The teacher then submitted the reflection to the administrator. When reading Swivl reflections, the researcher looked for the same common



behaviors mentioned earlier. Were the teachers able to identify them when they were occurring in the video? Was the teacher able to identify an antecedent to the behavior? The researcher looked for common behaviors mentioned throughout multiple teachers' reflections.

Informal conversations were also held with students when the student was referred to the office and during student leadership meetings. This process was used as a proactive counseling session for the student to help the student identify his behavior and try to discover its root cause. The principal in this project believed discipline was best if combined with proactive counseling to prevent reoccurrence of behaviors. The researcher asked the students to identify and justify their behaviors. If a behavior was mentioned more than twice, the researcher noted it. Common themes arose such as impulsivity, anger, and intrapersonal issues. Those same behaviors were addressed during counseling sessions. The researcher examined each question concerning how well the students perceived they could self-manage impulsivity, anger, interpersonal conflict.

*Stakeholder Involvement.* Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved? The answer to this question required descriptive statistics and analysis of documents. First, did students accept an afterschool program as an activity in which they wanted to be involved? The attendance rate among targeted students was analyzed. If over 50% of targeted students attended the program, the program was considered endorsed by students and parents. The researcher determined how many of the total targeted students participated in afterschool clubs. For example, if 17 students were targeted and 11 students chose to participate, the participation rate was 65%. The same process was used for the counseling program.

Additionally, the participation rate of students who participated in both counseling and afterschool activities was determined. The purpose was to determine if students involved in afterschool activities received less discipline referrals.

Next, teacher participation was analyzed. The research team considered teacher attitudes towards staying after school for an additional hour. Most teachers in the school chose to participate in the after-school program. The team also listened for conversations by students and staff concerning after-school programs. When after-school clubs were canceled, many students and teachers expressed disappointment. The team considered this as a sign of support for the program. Surveys for the after-school programs were distributed to teachers and students via email at the conclusion of the study. Parents completed the survey using a link sent by the Blackboard Connect messaging system. The team identified the responses of the survey that were most common and seemed to be a similar perception for all three groups. Other answers and outliers were also taken into consideration because they represented the feelings of stakeholders. Open-ended questions on the surveys were used for qualitative analysis and were inspected for common language, similar suggestions, similar complaints, and any outlier ideas. The responses were then categorized and narrowed (See Chapter IV).

Support for behavior charts was measured by the success rate of targeted students able to meet their goals weekly. If students did not lose the behavior chart during the week and worked towards the number of points to reach his or her goal, buy-in was confirmed. The counselor also checked to ensure all teachers were marking behavior charts daily and holding students accountable for behaviors in the classroom. The administration monitored the number of referrals students with behavior charts received.

Did teachers and students believe Positive Action was a worthy project on which he or she should spend instructional time? Implementation was monitored through observations. Surveys for teachers were sent via email. The research team considered the number of individuals who felt similar on the same questions and carefully examined the open-ended

questions for suggestions and honest feedback. The number of teachers and grade-levels participating at the end of the project was also considered when determining if the staff endorsed the program.

***Program successes.*** Identifying the areas of the program deemed successful served as the basis for question three. Each area was analyzed using the surveys, observations, and informal conversations, participation numbers, and referral counts. The answer to this question required descriptive statistics and analysis of documents. The attendance rate among targeted students was analyzed for participation. The team also listened to students' and staff members' conversations concerning after-school programs. If students talked positively about the program and positively about and with teachers, the program was successful. The researcher intentionally observed teacher-student interactions and talked with them informally to gauge if relationships improved and attitudes towards one-another changed. The research team then monitored referral numbers for all students and targeted students, comparing the number of referrals for targeted students participating in the clubs to those who chose not to join the programs offered. If the targeted students who participated in after-school clubs received less referrals than before the project, this portion of the project was deemed successful. Each cohort was examined separately. A detailed description of how referrals were analyzed throughout the project is provided in the discussion about referrals (below).

Behavior chart success was measured by the number of targeted students who were able to consistently meet their goals. The administration monitored the number of referrals students with behavior charts received. Additionally, the number of students requesting behavior charts to help self-manage behavior was considered because many of those students were not originally targeted. However, because the project took place in a school, student needs were a priority;

therefore, some students were given behavior charts upon request because they saw their peers were successful with the charts.

Teacher training was assessed by a combination of surveys, teacher referral numbers, observations, and Swivl reflections. Teachers who were identified as having the most troublesome classroom management issues were chosen for intervention. The number of referrals written before and after training was documented. Those teachers' Swivl reflections were closely monitored for an increased awareness of problematic behavior and solutions implemented to address them. If the teacher was able to identify and begin to resolve the issues by implementing strategies taught in training, the trainings were considered successful. The trainer surveys were used to affirm if techniques were being implemented. Administrator observations were also used to detect if the strategies taught in trainings were used in classrooms across campus. They were also scanned to identify any reoccurring problems noted by the observers. If some arose, those problems were addressed through further training and coaching. Significant findings are reported in Chapter IV.

To assess the counseling portion of the project, surveys and referral numbers were used. Similar to the after-school program, the number of referrals targeted students who participated in counseling was compared to the number of referrals they received before counseling. The number of referrals received were also compared the number of referrals issued to students who were targeted but did not participate in counseling. Each cohort is documented separately. Student surveys were also distributed via email to each student after completing the counseling coursework. The survey assessed the students' perceived abilities to handle conflict differently when confronted the next time. The purpose was to measure if students would use strategies

learned in counseling sessions to manage anger, emotions, and impulsivity. Findings are discussed in Chapter IV.

For Positive Action, teacher surveys and observations served as measurement instruments. Answers to the survey questions, especially the open-ended questions, provided the research team with teacher perceptions of the program. Classroom observations also were used to inspect if PA was being used. Finally, informal conversations concerning PA were held with students. The researcher asked the students specific questions about the program. If the student could discuss PA, the program was being implemented. If the student had not heard of PA, the researcher surmised the program was not being taught in that student's grade.

***Limitations.*** Question four required the project to consider limitations to successful implementation. This was addressed in the open-ended feedback portions of surveys, informal conversations, observations. Surveys provided the participants an opportunity answer open ended questions. Those questions were geared to garner suggestions and honest feedback from the stakeholder. Feedback was reviewed, analyzed, coded, and recorded as needed for the findings portion in Chapter IV. As the program progressed, the counselor and team discussed behavior charts with the teachers and revised as needed. The targeted student lists were amended based on needs presented and student transiency. Evolving student lists may have affected data. Moreover, the research team reflected on the overall process throughout the study by holding various meetings with the school leadership team, student leadership team, PBIS team, parents, central office staff, and various educational consultants. Those conversations produced suggestions and revisions needed. The minutes were documented for the formal meetings. Because this applied research study took place in a school setting, the principal (researcher) felt it necessary to identify and address limitations within her control. Some limitations such as

maturation and transiency could only be identified and were outside the researcher's control. Limitations are presented in Chapters IV and V.

*Number of referrals.* First, each targeted student was given a code for participation in after-school clubs, counseling, neither, and both. The total number of referrals for targeted students who participated in after-school clubs was tallied for each the third and fourth nine weeks. Those two numbers were added to create a total for the Spring semester. The referral total for the Fall semester was also reported. Those numbers were used to determine if there was a decrease from the Spring semester to the Fall semester for students who participated in clubs. The researcher also determined how many of the individual students were able decrease the number of referral they received from the beginning of the project to the end. A student who received less referrals counted as one unit. So, if seven of 17 targeted students received less referrals, those numbers were reported as targeted students who were able to decrease their referral numbers after being involved in after-school clubs. The same procedure was followed to examine the effects of counseling. Finally, quantitative data was calculated to answer questions five and six. Did the targeted population decrease by 20% the number of referrals received? Did the number decrease by 10% school-wide? The referral numbers were kept and analyzed using the descriptive data document. Referral counts were documented for each semester of the project. They were divided by student cohort. The researcher divided the Spring semester by third and fourth nine weeks then compared the total number of referrals. For example, targeted students in cohort 2025 received 34 total referrals third nine weeks and 24 referrals fourth nine weeks. Therefore, there was a decrease of 29.41% as the program began implementation. Next, the total number of referrals for the Spring semester was calculated. Using the aforementioned example, the total number of referrals for cohort 2025 targeted students in the Spring semester

would be 58. The researcher then calculated the total number of referrals for the Fall semester and compared them to the Spring semester total. In the example above, cohort 2025 received 45 referrals Fall semester which means there was a decrease of 22.41% between the spring and fall for cohort 2025. Question five asked if there was at least a 20% decrease in discipline referrals for targeted students. Cohort 2025 met that goal. The same procedure was used to evaluate if there was a 10% decrease in referrals for the entire student body. The targeted students were included in the school-wide total. The Spring semester was also subdivided into third and fourth nine weeks to determine increase or decrease. Then, the total number of referrals received in the Spring were compared to the total received in the fall to determine if the project met its goal of decreasing discipline referrals by 10% school-wide.

Collectively, these data pieces were analyzed by the research team to assess the program's effectiveness. Was there an improvement in discipline, morale, and achievement? As an organization, were the teachers and stakeholders involved in meaningful ways so that the overall culture improved. Using the pre-and-post implementation discipline rates, and teacher perception survey the team determined if the program achieved its original goal. This study was not solely concerned with quantitative results but was equally focused on improving the ability of the organization to grow and learn together for the betterment of the entire school community.

### **Possible Limitations**

There were several possible limitations to the study. First, maturity from year to year may invalidate data. Maturation seemed to occur most noticeably before seventh grade and before eighth grade. Childish behaviors such as “slapping”, touching another, and other playful but disruptive behaviors decline. Students seemed to be more aware of their surroundings and reputations. Also, when students reach seventh grade, they are eligible to play in schoolwide

sports which often serves as a motivator for positive choices. One way we the team tried to equalize this effect was to offer after school opportunities to fifth and sixth graders through continuing after-school clubs in the fall of 2018. Another issue was the quantity of initiatives. How did we know which had the most effect? Teacher consistency was to be considered. Were teachers enforcing the same behavioral expectations in every classroom? Did the teachers have a similar limit for what they would tolerate before writing a referral? This is why we trained each teacher in classroom management and school-wide expectations. The team dynamics per grade level may impact the student behavior. Each grade level had a team of teachers who served only that grade level. Half-way through the study, the students inherited a new group of teachers because they moved to the next grade and teachers began teaching different subject and grade-levels. The transiency rate was also a factor. Every month, the school withdrew and enrolled up to 10 students. Those students may or may not have changed the dynamics of the classroom. Teacher turnover may have an additional effect. Although substantial turnover was not anticipated, a few teacher changes did occur. One more timing issue was the time of year the study began. Since students were usually on their best behavior at the beginning of the school year, did the results that grading period skew the rest of the project? Finally, the principal changed the schedule during the summer of 2018 to allow for more elective classes to be added for students. This added one more class for the teachers to plan and prepare. It was possible for students to be in an elective class with older or younger students. The above possible limitations were important for consideration when evaluating the project.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this program was deemed successful because the organization grew as a problem-solving agent and student discipline numbers decreased. A positive byproduct was



achievement in student ELA scores and overall climate improvement. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the research team presented an opportunity to examine if the plan worked and more specifically, which elements.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

As described in Chapter III, this applied research project sought to improve student behavior through implementing social-emotional learning strategies while also training teachers in classroom management strategies. Group counseling and the Positive Action program along with creating pro-social activities after-school were combined with an effort to build teacher capacity. One last goal was to improve the organization's ability to identify a problem, develop a plan of action, implement the plan, and evaluate for further improvement. Harvest Middle School is a fifth through eighth grade middle school located in the northeast corner of Mississippi. The school population is identified as 100% economically disadvantaged. Nearly 95% of Harvest students are African-Americans who live in two different communities. The other students are Caucasian and less than one percent Hispanic. Using the research provided in Chapter II, the team decided to use a three-step approach to tackle student behavior. Students with three or more referrals were identified as the targeted population. These students were strategically chosen to undergo interventions based on their behavior records. Social-emotional learning was the first step of the action plan. Targeted students were invited to participate in group counseling sessions for eight weeks, some of whom kept a behavior chart weekly to manage behaviors. All students were offered Positive Action, a character education program provided for the whole school. The next step of the action plan was teacher training. When order, respect, and accountability are the norm, achievement is likely to increase (Ford, 2013).

The plan was to ensure effective and deescalating classroom management techniques were employed in every classroom. All teachers underwent classroom management training but those identified as needing more intensive help were also coached by a trainer and the administrative staff. The final implementation step offered pro-social opportunities through after-school clubs. All students were invited and those student targeted were encouraged to attend. The clubs occurred two days each week. The first day was tutorial based while the second was high-interest clubs. A student was required to attend day one before attending day two.

The researcher collected and desegregated quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. The first question examined how student behavior affects learning in the classroom. The second question explored existing research and processes which have been used to successfully improve student behavior. The third question focused on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes successfully aided in the change of behavior. The next questions explored if shared beliefs and desires of students, parents, and teachers could be used to set goals and to collaboratively engage in the research process.

The research team sought to understand if the implementation strategies decreased the number of referrals for targeted students and the general population. Targeted students were identified as students who received more than three discipline referrals. During the beginning of the study, the students were fifth through seventh graders but because the student ran from spring to fall, those students advanced one grade level during the study. This study will mention three different cohorts of students. Cohort 2025 began the project as fifth graders and concluded during their first semester of sixth grade. Cohort 2024 were sixth graders during the beginning

of implementation and concluded as seventh graders. Cohort 2023 were seventh graders during the spring of 2018 and finished the project as eighth graders.

**Statistical methodology.** Surveys were used as a main evaluation tool for this project. After administering a Likert 5 level scale survey to participants, each question was examined to determine the number of participants who agreed or disagreed. Although the researcher chose to discuss specific questions which contributed to the findings and offered critical understanding of student behavior, all surveys and individual questions can be found in the Appendix section of this paper. Additionally, descriptive data was used to analyze referral numbers between different groups. The number of referrals per cohort was added for a total number for that subgroup. For example, all of the referrals students Cohort 2025 received for the Fall semester in SY 2018 were calculated to find the total number of referrals written for the cohort. The total number of referrals for each cohort in a given time period were used for data analysis.

### **Research Question One**

Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors? Yes, both teachers and students were able to recognize problematic behaviors and possible causes. To determine this, several data pieces were used. First, the referral types were separated by type to classify which behaviors were written as a referral most. Then, teachers examined their own pedagogy and classroom management skills using Swivl. The Swivl reflections by teachers are discussed below. Next, teachers' responses to the school climate survey revealed teachers' thoughts on possible root causes for student misbehavior. Students were also able to express their thoughts about student behavior and possible causes during counseling sessions and informal conversations. Both teachers and students expressed interpersonal conflict as a main source of poor behavioral choices.

**Identifying common misbehaviors.**

**Referral types.** School-wide, the behavioral referrals were separated by behavior type. There were four different categories: disruption, disrespect, and peer to peer conflict. Not included are referrals dealing with weapons, drugs, and other miscellaneous offenses. See Table 8 for a description of referrals by offense and grade for targeted students. The numbers represent the total number of referrals for the cohort. Multiple referrals for the same student are represented. Therefore, some students may not have received a referral for 2018-2019SY; whereas, others may account for multiple.

Table 8

*Decrease of Referrals for Targeted Students from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 SY*

Class of	Disruption	Disrespect	Peer Conflict
2025	47 to 9	21 to 21	27 to 15
2024	59 to 11	19 to 4	39 to 7
2023	12 to 6	30 to 23	37 to 31
Total	118 to 26	70 to 48	103 to 53

**Swivl reflections and teacher coaching.** As a requirement by the principal, the staff must complete video reflections weekly. The process is similar to the National Board for Professional Standards of Teaching video requirement. After reviewing several class periods of footage, several teachers began to identify student misbehaviors. Many suggested lack of routines in the classroom created a chaotic environment resulting in student misbehavior. Others noticed they focused on one group of students more and ignored a whole group. When teachers began to notice students were not engaged, they changed instruction to be more

engaging and strategized to ensure comprehensible input of content. One teacher was willing to share in a faculty meeting how he recognized his pedagogical issues when viewing the video. He was also able to identify small miscellaneous behaviors by students which turned into larger classroom disruptions if not dealt with immediately. He used strategies such as changing seating arrangements, focusing on multiple groups in the room, and using the room space to utilize proximity as a misbehavior deterrent. Both the principal and classroom management coach worked with the teacher. In the Spring semester 2018, this teacher reported 21 incidents in his room. Keep in mind, not every call for an administrator to the room or disruption was documented. In one semester, he had 21 documented referrals. During the same amount of time in the Fall semester of 2018, he only referred seven students to the office resulting in a 66.67% decrease in referrals after self-reflection and teacher coaching. When he was able to identify the misbehaviors, he was able to proactively address them.

The second teacher reported 26 referrals in the Spring semester of 2018. He, too, used Swivl and coaching but referred 28 incidents in the Fall semester of 2018. Although the numbers increased, observations by coaches and administration agreed the classroom was much more controlled and students are learning. Many of the referrals surrounded one particular student who was defiant towards men who try to provide structure and is prescribed medication for an emotional illness. He was the only male teacher on the hallway and the female student behaved with defiance. She was also placed at the alternative school during the semester. Observations reveal there was more structure in the classroom. Weekly, this teacher reflected on his practice and met with coaches. He, too, was able to identify where issues would arise with students and became proactive in handling them. Again, although there was a two referral

increase, not every call to the room or event was recorded the previous year because he was a new teacher at the school learning the discipline process.

***Teacher perceptions.*** Teachers completed a school climate survey after the interventions. Of the 14 teachers who completed the survey (Appendix A), 7.14% of teachers strongly disagreed students possess conflict resolution strategies, while 42.86% agreed. One-half of the teachers surveyed felt students were not able to successfully resolve conflict. Only 28.57% of teachers surveyed agreed students get along well. No teacher strongly agreed with the statement. When asked if students were emotionally healthy, 21.43% strongly disagreed, 42.86% disagreed, 21.43% felt neutral, and 14.29% agreed. Interpersonal relationships seemed to be a key issue for most classroom teachers. All teachers surveyed reported they have heard students make negative remarks towards others students. Consequently, 57.14% agree and 21.43% strongly agree they are effective classroom managers. No teacher reported she or he was a poor classroom manager. Eleven of the 14 teachers surveyed said students knew the classroom routines for their classroom but only three disagreed that all teachers have set classroom routines. One possible problem identified was the tone in which teachers speak with students. When asked if all teachers speak in a positive tone with students, only 35.71% agreed. No teacher strongly agreed. Every teacher surveyed admitted to hearing another teacher make derogatory remarks about students. Table 9 provides the data for several questions and their corresponding percentages.

Table 9

*Teacher Perceptions According to the School Climate Survey*

Skill	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Conflict Resolution skills	7.14%	42.86%	21.43%	21.43%	7.14%
Emotionally healthy students	21.43%	42.86%	21.43%	14.29%	0.00%
Effective classroom manager	0.00%	0.00%	21.43%	57.14%	21.43%
Teachers speak in positive tone	7.14%	21.43%	35.71%	35.71%	0.00%
Teachers speak negatively about students.	0.00%	14.29%	14.29%	50.00%	21.43%
Students speak negatively to others	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%

During informal conversations, many teachers listed students' inability to maintain self-control as another problematic behavior. Students walking around without permission and blurting out answers or random comments were identified as problematic behaviors. Teachers felt students could not focus, did not want to work independently, and had trouble sitting still. They also cited interpersonal conflicts as the sources of classroom disruptions as they characterized the way students talked with staff and peers as rude and disrespectful. One teacher said, "Students are mean to one another."

**Qualitative analysis of informal conversations with students.** When discussing behavioral issues with students, the students revealed a few different reasons behind the behavior. First, many students who are prescribed medicine for hyperactivity and attention



deficits admitted to not taking the medicine because of how it made them feel. Other students disclosed they would act differently in classrooms based on what they perceived the teacher would allow them to “get away with.” When asked why they would not misbehave in teacher A’s room, the reply would often be, “She won’t let me.” Students also offered interpersonal conflicts outside of school and on social media as the basis for peer to peer conflict overflowing into the classroom. During counseling sessions, students cited lack of anger management as a problem. Students were also vocal about behaving appropriately in classrooms where they felt teachers “liked” them or had made an effort to build a relationship. One gripping observation occurred on several occasions when the principal asked the student if he or she understood the content. When admitting they did not, the principal suggested the misbehavior was due to lack of understanding and frustration; therefore, the student misbehaved to avoid feeling dumb and tried to get attention another way. Most students admitted to this being the primary reason for his or her choice to misbehave.

Several students were candid as to the motivation of their actions. When discussing behavioral choices in different teachers’ rooms, students said, “I wouldn’t do that in Mrs. (teacher’s name), she wouldn’t let me. We have to learn in there.” Another student remarked, “He (the teacher) is always picking on me. That teacher doesn’t like me and I don’t like him either.” Other students felt the teacher overreacted, “I was just (getting up to sharpen my pencil, putting my head down, etc.), I don’t know why it’s such a big deal.” Another felt the teacher did not acknowledge him, “I was trying to answer but she wouldn’t call on me so I just started shouting the answer.” Peer relationships were suggested as another reason for poor behavior, “I can’t get along with (student’s name), I told the teacher she better move me somewhere else.”

Finally, students remarked that lack of engagement was the root of their behavioral issues, “It’s boring in there. We talk about the same stuff over and over.”

***Student perceptions.*** During counseling sessions, students often contributed anger management as a catalyst for entering into conflict and receiving a referral. The counselor intentionally sought to help students identify triggers for anger and positive coping strategies. Post counseling surveys (Counseling Document A) revealed 33 of the 54 (61.11%) students would not ignore a situation where he or she was angry at something or with someone. Unfortunately, 34 (60.37%) of the students would agree to try to reduce the anger. When given the option to laugh it off, 34 (60.37%) students agreed to do so. More encouraging, 26 (48.14%) students committed to trying to see the other person’s point of view.

## **Research Question Two**

Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by stakeholders involved? Most initiatives of the action plan were supported by stakeholders. Surveys revealed the after-school program was supported by students, parents, and teachers. According to post-training surveys, teachers and coaches felt most trainings were beneficial and with proper support, the content could be implemented. Participation rates for counseling and after-school programs were also used to gauge student support. Administrator observations revealed Positive Action was not supported by as many teachers as the other strategies as evidenced by limited implementation. The data below explains how each strategy was supported.

**Counseling.** The school counselor is a member of the research team and is passionate about transforming student behavior through providing them with coping strategies. She was part of the planning committee of the action plan and researched counseling programs to best help the students. The lead researcher (principal) and counselor disaggregated data to identify

students who would benefit most from counseling. After identifying the students, the counselor used her knowledge of the students and their schedules to group students together based on convenience and personality. She met with students one afternoon each week for eight weeks. She continued to improve upon the program. She remodeled the counseling room to make it student-friendly. In the room, one can observe various charts, student public commitments, and coping strategies. In addition to group sessions, the counselor set aside time each week to visit classrooms. In those sessions, she taught peer mediation and stress management strategies to all students not just targeted students. To allow time for this, the principal and team committed to help the counselor with normal filing, record requests, and record verification duties. The team felt the students would benefit most by more time with the counselor, so they agreed to help share the paperwork duties of the counselor.

Many of the students were eager to find themselves in a setting where they could share feelings. In each counseling rotation, the counselor did find some students who did not need to be grouped together because of lack of focus or dominant personalities. Many students were eager to attend counseling each week (See Table 10). Some students were given behavior charts to self-monitor their behavior. Each chart listed three areas in which a student could earn points per class period. Every student was given a different goal based on his or her individual behavior record. Students were required to maintain possession of the chart, solicit teacher feedback and points, and present the chart to the counselor at the end of the day or week depending on the students. Most students were responsible with the charts.

Teachers who taught non-core classes were asked to allow various students to attend group sessions throughout the day. Most teachers agreed to do so expressing the program did help their students with coping strategies. One teacher was apprehensive about allowing students

out of class because she felt she could not keep the entire class on the same pace because some students were absent from class on a Monday while others might miss for group on Tuesday or Thursday. Although she felt the program was beneficial, she did not feel positively towards the extra work it created for her to ensure every child was making progress.

**Positive action.** For the most part, fifth grade and sixth grade teachers were the most committed to present Positive Action to students. The Positive Action team leaders were both eighth grade teachers who provided Positive Action quotes on the intercom daily; however, implementation in the seventh and eighth grade was minimal. The teachers did not buy in and felt the program took too much time away from academics. However, fifth and sixth grade students were exposed to Positive Action lessons each week. Every Wednesday, a specified fifth grade teacher used history class to teach Positive Action. In sixth grade, the science teacher committed to teaching Positive Action in fifteen minute increments daily.

**Teacher Training.** All teachers were provided classroom management training by the same consultant. The coach was a former high-school English teacher in the same district but from a school with different demographics. Many of the strategies presented were at first thought impractical with the students at Harvest. However, as the coach built relationships with the teachers, he was able to have honest conversations. During the Spring semester of 2018, the coach became a common figure walking the halls of Harvest. Teachers understood he would enter the classroom unannounced. The coach was committed to improving classroom management at the school and often sat with the teachers during planning periods and after-school having coaching conversations. Each visit would result in a collaborative plan to be implemented by the time he returned. Teachers were held accountable and were appreciative of it.

The team and the coach identified the highest needs. After a few observation days, the coach and team felt most teachers were implementing strategies but a few high-risk classrooms remained. At first, the targeted teachers were hesitant to allow a non-staff member to enter their classroom and coach them on classroom management skills. Of the staff members being coached, this was expressed more by males than females. The outside consultant hired specifically for these teachers was also a man. Afterwards, the teachers would request for him to return. They suggested he empowered them to “take back control” of the classroom.

Another form of coaching took the form of using mindfulness as a means to maintain engagement and control. During the Fall semester of 2018, a coach from the KidSMART program in New Orleans provided a workshop to teachers. The survey revealed a mean of over four on every question asked suggesting the teachers did believe the training was needed and effective. All teachers surveyed felt the trainer was knowledgeable about classroom management and a need existed for classroom management training (21.05% agree, 78.95% strongly agree). Both questions yielded the same results. However, when asked if they felt the strategies presented were applicable, three teachers (15.79%) answered with neutral. Only one question received a less than neutral rating. One individual disagreed the goals of the training were clear. Teachers were asked to give feedback. Below are themes that emerged from teachers. Some teachers mentioned the ABC’s of anger and the discussion of triggers and consequences as useful. Others thought experiential learning and role play made the information more understandable and applicable. One teacher commented, “Students were very engaged when he presented. This could work!” Strategies used to help students focus were mentioned as beneficial and arts integration was seen as an engaging means to manage a classroom.

Throughout the implementation of the project, the principal, assistant principal, and academic coach actively coached teachers on instructional strategies and classroom management strategies. Each teacher was observed and coached. Targeted teachers who issued the most referrals or were identified as needing most intervention received individual coaching.

**After-School program.** The after-school program was originally funded through an automotive production company grant. The funds provided bought snacks for students and paid bus drivers to transport students home. However, the grant did not pay teachers. During the first two years of the program, all teachers were required to give one hour after school to replace one professional development hour required by the school district. All faculty meetings were held during planning time. Teachers began to support the program. During the implementation of the action learning project, the principal used Title I monies to pay teachers for tutoring and clubs. When given the option, some teachers did not commit to stay even though pay was offered. The majority of teachers did eagerly agree to work at least of the two days.

There was no decrease or increase in student participation between years. The average school enrollment is 260 children. An average of 105 children enrolled in the after-school program yearly. Students often were disappointed if tutoring/clubs had to be canceled for the afternoon. Students were required to attend the Tuesday tutorial day in order to attend the fun club day on Thursday. Students remained committed and often reminded teachers of his or her attendance if the teacher forgot to mark present which would cost the student the opportunity to stay for fun clubs.

Parents were surveyed for their perceptions of the after-school program. All parents surveyed strongly agreed the after-school program was needed for the children. All parents agreed the after-school program gave students something positive to do after school (66.67%

agree, 33.33% strongly agreed). Parents were eager to sign permission forms for students to stay.

Table 10 shows the class of 2023 had the most students involved in counseling and after-school activities. Class of 2023 students participated in after-school clubs at a higher rate. Many of whom were involved in team sports representing the school. Those sports were not available to the Class of 2025 because they were too young. However, the Class of 2025 did participate in after-school activities when made available. As a whole, students chose after-school clubs more often than counseling. Few students in the Class of 2024 chose to participate in both. There is no explanation as to why those students did not participate in both or why those students participated less than either of the other two cohorts.

Table 10

*Targeted Students Choosing to be Involved in Counseling and After-school Clubs*

Cohort	Counseling	After-school Clubs	Both
Class of 2025	11 of 16 (69%)	11 of 16 (69%)	7 of 16 (44%)
Class of 2024	8 of 20 (40%)	10 of 20 (50%)	3 of 20 (15%)
Class of 2023	24 of 33 (73%)	28 of 33 (85%)	19 of 33 (58%)
All Cohorts	43 of 69 (62%)	49 of 69 (71%)	29 of 69 (42%)

**Research Question Three**

Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process? Using surveys, referral counts, and informal conversations, the research team determined counseling, after-school programs, and teacher training as the most successful portions of the action plan. The team analyzed how many students were involved in counseling, after-school

clubs, or both. Then, the team monitored the number of referrals those students received. Surveys also provided insight through open-ended responses. Additionally, the team analyzed the number of referrals written by teachers who received coaching. If the number decreased, the training was deemed successful.

**Analysis of group counseling.** Since the counselor was the team member most entrenched in the group program, she was interviewed for her perspective. She offered several positive comments about the program. She stated students enjoyed the “safe place” to discuss events and feelings, as well as, enjoyed the counseling activities. She felt some students, especially fifth and sixth graders, were motivated by the behavior charts looking forward to showing them off at the end of the day. Students enjoyed the feeling of meeting their behavior goals. Most promising were the informal encounters in the hallway. She reported students seemed to retain information and recall it easily. For example, if she saw a student about to get angry, she could say, “What are some things you can do right now to calm yourself down?” The students could immediately recite strategies discussed during group time.

The project included a pre and post-survey (See Counseling Document A) for students involved in counseling. The survey asked students to evaluate their perceived ability to handle conflict before counseling sessions and after an eight-week group counseling program. Using a Likert scale where students were able to rate their answers one (lowest) and four (highest). Eight different solutions were posed for handling anger (See Table 11).

All of these scores were totaled, and a loss or gain was calculated. Of the 43 students who participated in the spring sessions, 13 students’ total scored decreased from pre-survey to post-survey. The average loss in points was 3 points. Several students showed no change but were included in the loss category because the intent of the program was to improve the student’s



ability to manage conflict. Some students saw gain as large as 14 points overall. The average point total in the pre-counseling survey was 17.85 and increased to 20.43 in the post-counseling survey leading to a 14.74% increase.

During the fall, group counseling was evaluated by the 54 new participants. This time, a Likert scale rating of one to five was used with one representing strongly disagree and five representing strongly agree. The survey was the same survey given to the spring group; however, it was given when students completed the program. Instead of individually looking at each student's gains and losses, the group's responses were totaled. The prompt asked how likely the student was to choose the action the next time he or she was really angry with someone. See the Table 11.

Table 11

*Fall Group Counseling Results.*

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Ignore	20.37%	22.22%	18.52%	31.48%	7.41%
Delayed retaliation	24.07%	16.67%	12.96%	20.37%	25.93%
Talk it out	28.85%	19.23%	17.31%	19.23%	15.38%
Peer Mediation	14.81%	16.67%	31.48%	22.22%	14.81%
Channel Anger	9.80%	13.73%	19.61%	27.45%	29.41%
Laugh it off	7.55%	13.21%	15.09%	41.51%	22.64%
Reduce Anger	11.32%	13.21%	15.09%	39.62%	20.75%
Empathy	20.37%	11.11%	20.37%	14.81%	33.33%

According to the table, the notable differences were in responses for students who would choose to channel anger, laugh off a situation, or try to reduce the anger in another way.

Table 12 shows the referral increase and decrease in students receiving counseling. The table is split Spring semester into third and fourth nine weeks because a great deal of unintended events occurred during the third nine weeks. Additionally, the after-school clubs were initiated after mid-February. Class of 2023 received nearly 50% more referrals than the other two cohorts; however, they decreased the most during 4<sup>th</sup> nine weeks. Although Class of 2024 had fewer referrals for students involved in counseling, the cohort also had the fewest students who chose to participate in counseling (See Table 10). Table 12 provides the total referral numbers for all students in the given cohort for the stated time period. At some point, each of the students represented in the table participated in the counseling program. When combining totals from third and fourth nine weeks of 2017-2018 SY, the totals exceed the total number of referrals written for students who during the first semester of 2018-2019 SY. The last column in Table 12 represents the number of students who received less referrals in the Fall 2018-2019 SY than the Spring semester of the previous year. Over 67% of students in Cohorts 2024 and 2023 decreased the number of referrals; whereas 45% of Cohort 2025 improved behavior. Overall, 70% of counseling students decreased their own individual referral count.

Table 12

*Referral Counts for Targeted Students and Those Receiving Counseling*

Cohort	Spring 2018 3 <sup>rd</sup> 9weeks	Spring 2018 4 <sup>th</sup> 9weeks	Spring 2017-2018 SY Semester Total	Fall 2018-2019 SY Semester Total	Counseling students who decreased referrals received
2025	34	24	58	24	5 of 11
2024	13	9	22	8	7 of 8
2023	62	32	98	45	18 of 27
Total	143	79	222	77	30 of 43

Although the numbers are promising, it is important to remember the same students might have been involved in after-school clubs as well. It is impossible to determine which program had the most impact on the decrease in referrals. In cohort 2025, three of the students involved in counseling were sent to alternative school for excessive referrals. One student received at least eight. Another student in cohort 2023 received eight referrals and was sent to alternative school. These unusual cases serve as outliers and may impact the data overall. Each of these students consistently receive high referral numbers each year they were enrolled. Their disruptive behaviors did not necessarily decline during implementation but failed to improve. Also, some of the students were prescribed medication for ADHD but did not regularly take the medication. A few of the others were leaders among their cohorts and instigated conflicts among peers.

**Analysis of involvement in clubs, programs.** Like the table above, Table 13 shows the number of referrals for targeted students per cohort. The final column provides the number of

students who were involved in after-school activities and received less referrals throughout the program.

Table 13

*Referral Counts for Targeted Students and Those Involved in Clubs*

Class of	Spring 2018 3 <sup>rd</sup> 9weeks	Spring 2018 4 <sup>th</sup> 9 weeks	Spring SY 2017-2018 Semester Total	Fall SY 2018-2019 Semester Total	After-school students who decreased referrals received
2025	22	14	36	38	7 of 11
2024	16	11	27	16	7 of 10
2023	72	28	100	45	20 of 27
Total	143	79	222	102	34 of 48

Overall, there is a decrease in the number of referrals for those involved in after-school activities. The reason the Fall semester total is elevated is due to one student receiving six referrals. He was eventually sent to alternative school. Again, such cases served as outliers.

Every stakeholder group was asked to complete a survey using Qualtrics. Each respondent was allowed to provide comments about the program. The parents surveyed suggested more community involvement but did agree the program was needed.

**Staff responses concerning the after-school program.** The following statements are common themes found throughout the staff responses. “The program was a confidence builder for those students who struggled in reading and math. The students’ work ethic seemed to improve in class.” Teachers noted several positives for the program. The opportunity to be exposed to enrichment activities, provision of transportation, engaging and varying activities

were all mentioned. Teachers did feel the program offered teachers and students and opportunity to build or strengthen relationships with one another; something class time does not often allow.

Staff members also gave suggestions as to how to improve the program. The following comments are directly from the survey. Teachers expressed the need for a more concrete and followed schedule. They also suggested the program begin at the beginning of school to reap the most benefits. They mentioned the schedule was too sporadic. Ensuring teachers were equipped with appropriate tutorial material was also mentioned. Smaller groups and allowing more than one teacher per grade level to teach a subject was also suggested. Finally, involving more community members was proposed.

Table 14 provides the results of the survey given to teachers about the after-school programs. The survey was given to teachers after implementation. The majority of the teachers felt the program was needed and benefited the school. Only half of the teachers surveyed determined the clubs needed to occur more frequently but the majority agreed the experience improved student morale and teacher-student relationships. Parents were not as involved as originally planned.

Table 14

*Teacher Results to Survey for After-School Tutoring.*

Question	Agree	Disagree
Organized well	14	1
Program needed	15	0
Improved culture	10	0
More days needed	5	5
Teacher student relationships improve	13	0
Student relationships improved	11	0
Involved parents	8	3
Students seem happier	11	0

**Student responses concerning after-school program.** The students also provided a few comments. When asked which portions of the program worked best, students were happiest with the math program and student engagement. One student commented, “I believe if the students and teachers don’t give up on each other, the whole program will be amazing.” Students were also asked which portions of the program could be improved. Many felt rewards for students who behaved best and worked hardest would be enticing. They asked for more computer time and free time outside. When looking at their surveys, question number two asked if the after school program was needed for our school, 19 students agree while only 5 students disagreed. This supports the idea that in the eyes of the students the program was needed. On the other hand, number 15 asked “The program provided opportunities for my parents to get involved in my academic and extracurricular activities.” Fifteen students agreed with the statement while

only seven disagreed. Question 11 asked if more days should be added to the program. Eleven students agreed with the statement and 8 students disagreed.

**Analysis of teacher coaching.** Teacher coaching is an important part of any instructional leader's role. One goal of this action research project was organizational learning. Through teacher coaching, the teachers and administration learned more about the coaching process and self-reflection. The culture changed from feeling threatened if an administrator, staff member, or outside consultant made suggestions to one where staff members welcome support. One of the teacher's mentioned earlier submitted 29 referrals in the Fall semester of 2017, 21 in the Spring semester of 2018, and only seven in the Fall semester of 2018. That results in a 21% decrease from first semester to second semester in SY 2017-2017 and a 67% decrease from the Spring semester to the Fall semester of SY 2018-2019. The other teacher mentioned did see a one to two referral increase per semester but some were due to individual students who accrued multiple referrals, not multiple students receiving referrals.

The coaches were also given a survey using Qualtrics. They were asked six open-ended questions ranging from what worked well to what can be improved. When asked if they saw teachers making progress, the following themes emerged. They felt teachers were taking suggestions and trying to implement. If given enough support, they felt the teachers were willing to trying something new. When asked what the most critical need for classroom management is, the following was suggested: effective, engaging, instruction. Relationship building and consistent enforcement of classroom routines were both cited as critical needs.

The most powerful comment for the researcher was addressing attention given to students who exhibit negative behavior. The coach suggested the staff gives more attention to negative behavior thus conditioning students to behave poorly to get attention. Though there are several

improvements needed in the teacher coaching portion, the component is considered effective because it has given the administration an opportunity to find the root-cause of student behavior and work with the teachers to address the issues.

#### **Research Question Four**

What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan? Although most strategies were supported and determined successful, a few problems did arise throughout implementation. The counselor expressed a few issues with group dynamics and scheduling. There were also several unforeseen problems with personnel, scheduling, and lack of oversight. Each is discussed below.

**Counselor's analysis.** The counselor reflected on the group process and behavior chart implementation. She suggested schedules conflicted with group time and often students were suspended on their group days. Sometimes, students were a "bad fit" for a group causing more disruptions than contributions. At times, behavior charts would continue to pile on a teacher's desk and not make it to the next class. She often heard teachers say students were "acting out" so they could receive a behavior chart. Finally, she felt older students were less motivated by behavior charts and were more likely to discard them at the beginning of the day.

**Unforeseen problems.** As the research team prepared to implement the action plan in the Spring of 2018, several issues unfolded. Just as school was beginning for the semester, a snowstorm closed school for five days interrupting routines and delaying implementation of after-school programs.

A beloved seventh grade teacher notified administration on the third of January that she would be out for two weeks awaiting surgery. The administration filled the vacancy with a short-term substitute who was not well-received by the students. Two weeks later, the teacher



experienced more health issues delaying her return. After three weeks without the permanent teacher, the administration was notified she would not return and a substitute would fill the vacancy for the remainder of the school year. The substitute hired was a former certified teacher from school.

Positive Action was never implemented with fidelity campus wide. Sixth grade teachers presented Positive Action consistently in the Spring semester of 2018. This affected Cohort 2024 as they were sixth graders then. In the Fall, the fifth grade teachers committed to implement Positive Action. Those students were not part of this study but will be monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

After-school activities were not consistently implemented until mid-February. There was a decrease in every category from third nine weeks to fourth nine weeks. Would implementing the program earlier have decreased the referrals in the 3<sup>rd</sup> 9 weeks? Because school sports are mainly played during the fall, Cohorts 2024 and 2023 had greater opportunities to be involved in after-school programs. Both cohorts experienced decreases in referrals. Cohort 2025 does not meet the age requirement to participate in school sports as of SY 2018-2019. However, some after-school clubs were offered sporadically throughout the fall for those students.

### **Research Question Five**

Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?

Yes, according to referral data, there was a 20% decrease in referrals for targeted students.

**Description.** A consistent decrease in referrals for targeted students occurred. Targeted students received an opportunity for individual counseling style conversations with the counselor and administration concerning their behavioral choices and academic achievement. In addition, they benefited from the coaching teachers received and were granted opportunities to attend

after-school clubs. Table 14 shows a dramatic decrease in referrals for cohort 2023. Possible reasons for this sizeable decrease are explained later in this chapter.

Table 15

*Referral Counts for Targeted Students*

Class of	Spring 2018 3 <sup>rd</sup> 9 weeks	Spring 2018 4 <sup>th</sup> 9 weeks	% Decrease	Spring SY 2017-2018 Semester Total	Fall SY 2018-2019 Semester Total	% Decrease
2025	34	24	29.41%	58	45	22.41%
2024	27	18	33.33%	45	26	42.22%
2023	82	37	54.88%	119	55	53.78%
Total	143	79	44.76%	222	126	43.24%

For the most part, there was a decrease in referrals school-wide. However, intervention students decreased the referral amounts 13.66% more than the school.

**Research Question Six**

Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide? Using referral data, the number of referrals written for students at Harvest decreased.

**Description.** Student referrals decreased by 10% school-wide. Although cohort 2025 saw a slight increase from the spring to the following fall, overall, student referrals decreased by 29.58%. All students in the school possibly benefited from required classroom management training for teachers and Swivl reflections. After-school clubs were offered to all students. Positive Action was presented consistently to Cohort 2024 during the Spring semester. The teachers who received the most individual coaching taught Cohorts 2024 and 2023.

Table 16

*Referral Counts for All Students*

Class of	Spring 2018 3 <sup>rd</sup> 9 weeks	Spring 2018 4 <sup>th</sup> 9 weeks	% Decrease	Spring SY 2017-2018 Semester Total	Fall SY 2018-2019 Semester Total	% Change
2025	44	39	29.41%	83	94	11.70% Increase
2024	38	29	33.33%	67	50	25.37% Decrease
2023	111	50	54.88%	161	75	53.42% Decrease
Total	193	118	38.86%	311	219	29.58% Decrease

**Researcher observations.** Table 14 shows there was at least a 20% decrease in student referrals for every cohort of students targeted. Student Cohort 2025 saw the smallest decrease consistently yet still met the project goal. When this cohort was in fifth grade during the 2018 Spring semester, administration could not send students to the alternative school. As students moved to sixth grade during the fall, five of the nine students who attended alternative school were members of this group

**Observations worth noting.** The average number of referrals for targeted students was 1.82. However, some students received as many as eight referrals per grading period. There were students who showed significant progress throughout the program.

Cohort 2023 had a few students who showed monumental improvement. Student nine received 17 referrals in SY 2016-2017 and eight in SY 2017-2018, but none in the Fall of 2018. Student 17 in the same cohort decreased from 19 referrals in SY 2016-2017 and 13 in SY 2017-

2018, one in the Fall of 2018. Student 18 received 21 referrals in SY 2016-2017, 8 in SY 2017-2018, to one in the Fall 2018.

Likewise, Cohort 2024 students experienced similar success. Student six reduced his referrals from 12 to none, and student nine who dropped from seven in SY 2017-2018 to zero for the Fall of 2018. In fact, seven of the 18 students received zero referrals in the Fall of 2018.

Though Cohort 2025 saw the least amount of improvement, several individual students who displayed improved behavior. Student one was referred 10 times during SY 2017-2018 but zero during the Fall of 2018. Five of the 15 students previously identified for high referrals decreased their referrals to zero in the Fall of 2018. On the other hand, this cohort saw the most students who increased their referral counts. Student seven received seven referrals for the whole school year SY 2017-2018; the student received the same amount for the Fall semester of 2018 and was sent to alternative school. Student 14 followed a similar path to alternative school by continuing to receive several referrals 2017-2018 SY and the fall of 2018-2019 SY.

**Emerging themes.** Many of the students identified as high risk for referrals responded well to the interventions provided. Though some students did not participate in both interventions, each student did participate in at least one. Providing students with a “safe-space” to learn to work through interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict did have some impact on student behavior. Likewise, giving students a pro-social activity after-school seemed beneficial to all three cohorts. Given the data from non-targeted students, after-school clubs seemed to positively impact the school as a whole. Behavior charts for the younger cohorts gave students behavior goals and were adjusted to measure daily or weekly goals. Cohort 2023 received the most intensive interventions and showed the most improvement. As these students had access to after-school programs and counseling, their referrals decreased. There were fewer members of

Class of 2024 who were targeted and but the cohort received fewer referrals as a whole. In each table, the cohort received less referrals and accounted for fewer targeted students. Many of the Cohort 2025 students received daily or weekly behavior charts as fifth graders but did not use them when they were in sixth grade. Again, this cohort did not see the improvement the others saw. Was this a factor or was it because there are three or four students who serve as outliers because the individual students received multiple referrals? Chapter V gives further insights and implications for further study.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this applied research study was to improve student behavior at Harvest Middle School. The project sought to understand how student behavior affected student learning and what processes or interventions would positively impact the behavior. The research team applied three intervention strategies to a targeted group of sixth through eighth grade students at a high poverty middle school in north Mississippi. Students were identified by receiving multiple discipline referrals. Aspects of the intervention strategies impacted all students as well. This chapter discusses the problems identified then examines the data related to each intervention strategy: social-emotional learning, teacher training, and pro-social activities. The chapter then explains possible influences affecting the results and unexpected findings. An evaluation of the program is reviewed and the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research. Six research questions guided the study. The first question asked if students and teachers were able to identify problematic behaviors. The second question explored if the intervention strategies successfully improved student behavior. The third and fourth questions focused on what organizational components such as implementation fidelity, training, and attitudes were or were not efficacious in improving student behavior. The final two questions asked if referral counts among the targeted population decreased by 20% and 10% school wide.

Faculty and administration credited behavioral issues as barriers to academic and social growth. In 2016, Harvest was labeled an “F” school by the Mississippi Department of

Education. In 2017 and 2018, Harvest increased to a “D” which is still unacceptable in the school district and community. As mentioned in Chapter II, Patalay (2015) concluded that problematic behaviors causing disruptions impacted the achievement of all students. Could improving behavior contribute to academic achievement?

The research team included the principal, assistant principal, PBIS chairperson, counselor, and academic coach. The team used previous discipline and achievement data to identify problematic behaviors and researched literature concerning student behavior. Parents and teachers provided understanding to their perspectives but no piece of data was as powerful as the student voice. Throughout the process, the students became an integral part of the team by providing insight to attitudes, perceptions, and strategies during informal conversations, and day to day interactions. This study found relationships to be the single most important factor to transforming student behavior at Harvest Middle School.

**Researcher background.** This study was implemented during the researcher’s first year as principal at Harvest Middle School. Harvest is located in the northeast corner of Mississippi and serves students in grades five through eight. The federal government deems Harvest students as economically disadvantaged with 100% of the students receiving free or reduced meals. The school population is 95% African American, four percent Caucasian, and less than one percent Hispanic. The researcher is a Caucasian female in her mid to late thirties. Prior to becoming principal, the researcher served as assistant principal which gave her insight into the culture within the school and external factors affecting it. Before transferring to Harvest, the researcher was aware of the reputation of student behavior and aware the school was labeled a failing school by the state department of education. During informal conversations with staff and community members, student behavior was blamed for low achievement and low morale.

An abundance of research, as explained in Chapter II, provided evidence of ways student behavior negatively impacts student achievement. Much of the research suggested building teacher-student and student-peer relationships and implementing social-emotional learning as effective strategies to transform behavior.

In hindsight, the researcher acknowledges the Positive Action program was not implemented with fidelity across the school, a few teacher turnovers could not be anticipated when originally planning for the program. Discipline referrals were higher in these spots which may have contributed to an overall increase in referrals which may have impacted results. Despite these issues, the reader can garner much information from the study which may positively impact student behavior at his or her school. It is also important to note student behavior at Harvest Middle School is a complex problem requiring a complex set of solutions. While there were prescribed solutions targeted at specific problems, it was impossible for the multi-layered approach to not blur lines and overlap. While one particular approach may aim to address one issue, it may have affected other areas.

**Problems identified.** The initial goal of the team was to discern the reasons for problematic student behavior. When the problem was identified, a solution could be sought. According to the School Climate Survey (Table 8), students lack the ability to interact with one another and resolve conflict effectively. Teachers felt students were not emotionally healthy. Both of these issues may be attributed to the students' lack of supervision at home and poor adult relationships as described in Chapters I and II.

Compounding the problem of student to student relational issues was the students' perceptions certain teachers do not "like" them. This was further validated through the survey as teachers reported hearing colleagues speaking negatively towards and about students. Students



also expressed feelings of dislike from the teachers. Teachers were equally frustrated with students' inability to self-manage and initiate their own learning. It was important for students and teachers to see the need for stronger relationships and improved school culture.

Although most teachers considered themselves effective classroom managers, observations by administration and referral numbers did not suggest the same. Whole-school classroom management training did prove be beneficial as the number of referrals decreased school-wide post implementation. The other two components of the action research plan, counseling and after-school programs, addressed relationships.

### **Intervention Strategies**

Each of the intervention strategies is discussed next. Targeted students participated in group counseling for eight weeks. The students were taught social-emotional and conflict resolution skills. An after-school program was used to promote pro-social activities through one afternoon of tutoring and another of extra-curricular clubs. The goal was to give students a safe, structured, positive activity during what would usually be unstructured time at home and to build relationships with peers and adults. The project also provided classroom management training for every teacher on campus and extensive training for those who were identified as poor classroom managers. After reviewing the data, each strategy was assessed and an interpretation of the findings as related to each strategy is provided next.

**Counseling.** Social-emotional learning did seem to be beneficial for several reasons. Candid conversations and opportunities to share feelings gave many students a needed outlet and formed a positive relationship with the counselor. Students were allowed a “safe place” with a “safe person” to share feelings. Although students in counseling did not overwhelmingly commit to consistently choose positive alternatives when angry, the majority showed positive

strides in thinking and considered handling conflict differently than before counseling.

Counseling students did show a decrease in referral numbers in every cohort. Overall, 65% of students in group counseling decreased their referral numbers.

**After-school programs.** Like counseling, students involved in pro-social activities were able to strengthen relationships and build self-esteem. Both students and teachers reflected on this aspect in their open-ended responses. The quality of social relationships can be a predictor of student learning (Barigga, Doran, Newell, et al., 2002). Students in Cohorts 2024 and 2023 decreased referrals numbers with 2023 showing a dramatic decrease.

Although Cohort 2025 increased referrals by two between the spring and fall semester, there is a possible explanation. After-school clubs were not offered as often during the fall because football, basketball, and cheer occupied teachers' afternoons and were only offered to the older two cohorts. Overall, 71% of the students involved in after-school programs decreased their referral numbers. Another advantage noted by staff, students, and administration was the exposure to various activities. Because the majority of students are from homes identified as impoverished, they lack the opportunity to be exposed to various life experiences. The variety of clubs including cooking, robotics, book club, dance, theatre, and Spanish club offered students an introduction to new skills. The most encouraging data concerning these programs were the number of students who asked weekly if the clubs would occur and were disappointed if not. Even more encouraging were the students who were upset when they realized they could not stay for various reasons. Enforcing behavior standards and requiring students to attend tutoring before attending clubs proved to be an effective accountability system for students. Teachers were observed as happier during club time. One teacher remarked about her colleague, "If she would run her classroom like she runs her after-school tutorial, the kids would stay engaged and

love it!” Some teachers seemed genuinely disappointed when clubs were canceled for various reasons and offered to stay the afternoon with their club anyway. The after-school program did positively impact student-teacher relationships.

**Teacher Training.** Teacher efficacy in classroom management emerged early on as a deterrent for referrals. The pre-implementation survey revealed teachers felt they were effective classroom managers. Early observations by inside and outside sources disagreed. The entire staff received various classroom management trainings and most reported positive feelings towards the training. However, surveys by the trainers who observed classrooms after training revealed teachers needed more training and strategies were minimally implemented. Though the trainings may have initially impacted teacher management, further training is needed. The researcher feels more arts-based and positive classroom management trainings are needed to transform teacher culture within the school. Teachers’ tone with students has not reformed school-wide. Instead of using strategies effectively, the teachers use bits and pieces of strategies taught but retract to natural tendencies of shouting and negativity when under stress.

Regarding teachers who received intense coaching, the teachers showed improvement. A teacher’s understanding of the benefits instructional coaching provides is vital for success. Trust must be built between the coach and teacher for the teacher to receive and implement feedback. Overall, the effectiveness of the teacher training was only as effective as the teacher admitted to needing improvement. Once a teacher, during whole school training or individual, saw value in the training, he or she became coachable and began to change classroom management styles.

**Possible Influences.** Though the intervention strategies appear to have impacted student behavior to some degree, it is impossible to attribute all changes or lack of changes in behavior to the three intervention strategies. Other possible influences may have impacted behavior and

should be discussed. The opportunity to participate in team sports, maturation, simultaneous programs, personnel changes, and student transiency should each be considered as possible influences and should be taken into consideration when assessing the program.

Targeted students did show a greater decrease in referral counts than the entire student body. Therefore, some aspects of the intervention programs did prove effective. Since all students were affected by teachers who received training and after-school opportunities, counseling may be credited with some of the improvement in student behavior yet not all. However, since 69% of Cohort 2025 targeted students were involved in counseling and 73% of Cohort 2023 targeted students also were involved in counseling, one must consider the discrepancy in their referral decrease difference. Only 22.41% of the first group decreased referrals while 53.78% of Cohort 2023 lowered their numbers. Further study would be beneficial to determine to what can this difference be attributed.

*After-school activities.* One reasonable explanation is the 85% of Cohort 2023 targeted students were in an after-school activity, most of whom were involved in team sports representing the school. When a student enters the seventh and eighth grade, he or she is eligible for Mississippi High School Activities Association (MSHAA) events. This means students represent Harvest against other middle schools in various sports. Activities require practice daily and sporting events in the evening in front of students, parents, and community members. Being a part of these teams seemed to have a positive impact on student behavior. Coaches hold them accountable for behavior and students experience a team or family atmosphere. Additionally, students are able to display talents for which they can be proud of themselves and their performances.

Another possible influence as mentioned in Chapter III is maturation. When looking at the three cohorts of students, a trend develops in both the targeted students and total school population. Students progressively showed improvement as age increased. Refer to Tables 15 and 16 have been included again as a reference. In both tables, Cohort 2025 showed the least improvement while 2023 consistently shows the greatest improvement.

***Additional Social-Emotional Learning.*** In the spring of 2018 and first semester of implementation, a PhD candidate from the University of Illinois at Chicago conducted a self-esteem program with Cohort 2024 and 2023 female students. Some of the groups included targeted students. She met with groups of girls each week to teach coping strategies through art, poetry, and other forms of self-expression. It is impossible to know if these group sessions influenced the results. This was a form of social-emotional learning which was an original component of the action plan. The students were not chosen based on referral numbers but recommendations by the counselor and principal. The girls identified were at-risk for unhealthy behaviors and showed signs of low self-esteem. Because both of these groups showed vast improvements among all students, this too, could be a factor.

***Personnel Changes.*** Several personnel changes during the 2017-2018 SY may have affected implementation. As discussed in Chapter IV, a veteran teacher left second semester for medical reasons. She was replaced with a substitute for the entire semester. The number of referrals submitted by the substitute may have skewed the referral count for Cohort 2024. The change created a disruption in routines and procedures on the hallway thus affecting other classrooms. New administrative staff may have provided an additional variable. The year of implementation was the researcher's first year as principal. In addition, the assistant principal was hired in late July and had no previous administrative experience. The year of

implementation was also the counselor's first year at the school and as a middle school counselor. Finally, another key member of the team, the academic coach, transferred out of the classroom as an eighth-grade English teacher to the academic coach role in January. Doing so created another vacancy on staff. A certified English teacher was hired for the second semester. It is important to note that while both the seventh-grade substitute science teacher and new eighth-grade English teacher were both certified, the students did not respond to the seventh-grade teacher as a certified instructor. Instead, they viewed her as a substitute and behaved accordingly.

***Enrollment changes among targeted students.*** As stated in Chapter I, the student transiency rate at Harvest nears 30% annually. It was impossible to implement the program without some of the targeted students withdrawing. Some withdrew and re-enrolled during period of implementation. In the Fall of SY 2018, some students were added to the list to receive interventions because their referrals increased significantly in the Spring of 2018 or early Fall 2018.

## **Unexpected Findings**

The research team researched and applied three intervention strategies to transform student behavior at Harvest. During the implementation and data analysis stages of the project, unexpected findings were revealed. Relationships and student leadership emerged as powerful factors influencing student behavior. Both are discussed below.

**Relationships not programs.** As stated in Chapter II, before student behavioral culture can be improved, relationships must be the foundation. This project's most revealing finding was the importance of relationships. When a student experienced relational problems with another student, admittedly the student could not focus on academic content and became

combative at times. The quality of social relationship can be a predictor of academic achievement (Barriga, Doran, Newell, et al., 2002). Students were not equipped to handle emotional effects of other students' discontent and disapproval. Students did not understand how to express differences while maintaining respect for the other's opinions or decisions. Students at the middle school level experience many physical and biological changes. The rise in social media and instant messaging compounds this tumultuous time. Without adequate training in how to appropriately interact with others, the students are left overwhelmed with a myriad of emotions and no understanding of how to deal with them. Teaching students social-emotional learning is necessary especially at the middle school level. Though students did not make the correct choice every time faced with anger, students did show improvements on the surveys and in referral counts. More importantly, students were exposed to alternative means for handling interpersonal conflicts. Counseling also gave students a needed outlet for expressing feelings with which they did not know how to process. Inlay (2008) offered the idea of "clearings" and mediation conversations to resolve conflicts. Progress was slow but teaching students how to build and maintain appropriate relationships is healthy for both the school and student; these relational skills also foster civility within the next generation.

"We teach who we are" (Powell, n.d). It is impossible to do so without relationships. Informal observations and referral data revealed teachers with the strongest adult-student relationship wrote the least amount of referrals and were able to consistently teach uninterrupted. These teachers seemed happier at school and students were happier in the classroom. As Brown-Wright and Tyler (2010) stated, "students who form close relationships with teachers" (p. 128) perform better, relate to peers better, and tend to feel more positive towards school. After-school clubs provided an opportunity to build and rebuild these relationships. The primary benefit to

the clubs was this one aspect. According to this study, teachers must intentionally build relationships before students will respond academically. One teacher was new to the school in the Fall of 2018. Though a veteran teacher, she experienced a large amount of disruptive behaviors and classroom management issues. When we interviewed students, the main complaints were “she hollers too much” and “she gets in my face.” She raised her voice to speak over the cumulative volume of all of the children talking at once. The proximity issues were actually a result of her many years working in a Hispanic culture. However, when working with African-American students from impoverished homes, violating the personal space of three feet unintentionally threatens the students which triggers a fight or flight instinct. The teacher had to work exceptionally hard to rebuild the relationships severed by volume and space violations. After speaking with students and teachers and examining the data, relationships are the cornerstone of a healthy school culture.

*Honest conversations.* One unintended phenomenon that arose out of this project was the candid conversations between the principal (researcher) and students. Because the principal was already tracking student referrals, she began to also update scores for benchmark assessments each nine weeks and the state assessment at the end of the year. What emerged was a trend she would share with the individual student as she disciplined them. The counseling conversation consisted of the principal and student breaking down his or her data to look for trends between discipline and achievement. More times than not, as a student’s behavior improved so did his or her assessments scores. Conversely, as the student’s behavior declined, assessment scores dropped as well. This data proved to spark enlightening dialogue between the principal and students. Students desired to be considered “smart.” When they realized their behavior was contributing to failure or success towards this goal, it became motivation for better



behavior. These conversations became so frequent, the principal began showing the data to classes and explaining the relationship between achievement and behavior. Behavior and achievement data became part of discipline. Additionally, students making positive decisions were often pulled to the side by the principal to be congratulated on improvement in both areas. Not only did this improve the relationship with principal and student but began motivating students to make better choices in the classroom.

Table 17

*Examples of Achievement Data and Referral Counts for Targeted Students*

Student	Referrals	Assessment	Referrals	Assessment
Student 21	19	3a	13	4
Student 23	8	3a	1	3b
Student 31	9	2a	5	3b

One last variable needing to be discussed is the length of relationships between the principal and Cohort 2023. Cohort 2023 entered the school the same year the principal was hired as assistant principal. Three years were used to cultivate deep relationships and trust between the students and principal. The candid conversations could occur because of these relationships.

**Student leadership and responsibilities.** The Character Education Partnership (Graff, 2012) is discussed in Chapter II. Teachers in that study believed students should be taught work-related and social habits. Although this was not originally part of the action plan, the administration often sought opportunities to give at risk students responsibilities around school. Doing so did positively impact a few targeted students. One student received multiple referrals as a fifth and sixth grader. During his seventh grade year, he was asked to ensure students in the

self-contained special needs class were provided breakfast each morning. He began to show signs of responsibility, empathy, and self-management. The student decreased his referrals during his seventh-grade year and became a leader on the hall. In fact, he garnered more responsibilities as the administration saw his commitment to improve.

Another anecdotal story occurred when the principal decided the eighth-grade students would need to retake the benchmark assessments in math because the group scored poorly. The top scoring student in the grade began to complain about the retake. She then asked the principal what she missed on the test. The principal took the student to the office and showed her the data for the cohort. By letting the student determine the standards on which the group scored the lowest, the student was dumbfounded by the poor performance and declared she understood why the group would need to retake the assessment. Now, she was made aware of her weak areas and stated she would look online for videos to explain how to work those problems. She then began to offer suggestions for instructional strategies. By the end of the discussion, the student was paired with a math coach and tasked with helping create real-world scenarios to help students master a conceptual understanding of the content. The student seized the reigns of the project and recruited other students to help. Not only did she take control of her learning, she was empowered to help others learn.

**Student insights.** At the conclusion of the study, the researcher felt it important to converse with four of the students who dramatically decreased referral numbers. By doing so, she could acquire a student's perspective as to what he or she credits for personal improvement. This process was not an original step in the action plan but it became apparent that such conversations might help the researcher better understand outcomes and reasons. After a few informal conversations with three cohort members of 2023 and one from 2024, three of the

students shared insights. The first male student credited his membership on the school basketball team as a determining factor. The coach holding him accountable for actions combined with the adrenaline he felt on the court helped him when making behavioral decisions. The other male student felt grades were his motivating factor. Both males thought competition between classmates for highest grades motivated them. While thinking through possible reasons for their improvement, the conversation moved quickly to teacher-student relationships. They suggested teachers bragging on students made the student want to work harder. Tone became another topic. “It’s how they say things and the other kids react. We feel like we have to defend ourselves and get smart back if the teacher is rude and others laugh” (Personal Communication, 2019). When recalling the effectiveness of a former teacher, they described her as strict but “real”. If she had to reprimand a student, she did not hurt the student emotionally. When speaking with the older female student, she began to describe her transition as a decision to change her friend circle. Again, the more she talked, her conversation circled back to relationships with teachers. She felt teachers taking a special interest in students was the key to success. She described a current teacher in eighth grade through the following description. “Mrs B encourages me, stays on me about my grades, behavior, who I’m hanging with. I tell Mrs. B everything even stuff I don’t tell my friends” (Personal Communication, 2019). The researcher asked her what advice she would give to teachers to impact student behavior. She suggested students need a teacher who will talk with the student, ask why the student is sad or angry, and stay on the student about grades and behavior. This female student in Cohort 2024 credited counseling helped her learn to control her anger. Maturation also seemed to play a role in her improvement as she expressed her decision over the summer to change her attitude and behavior for the fall. Relationships remained the common thread throughout each conversation.

### **Program Evaluation Standards.**

The Joint Committee on Standards for Evaluation describes program evaluation as a way to systematically investigate the quality of a project so as to make judgements and decisions with the new knowledge attained in order to lead improvement in response to the needs of stakeholders (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). This project was analyzed according to the five quality standards: utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. The next portion assesses the project as related to each program evaluation standard.

Utility evaluates the significance of a program. Because utility describes the extent to which stakeholders understood the program and were able to understand the goals of the program, this project is deemed to have met this evaluation standard (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). . This project gave a voice to stakeholders, especially students. Students were able to help choose which after-school clubs were provided and they were able to express themselves during counseling. By doing so, students were able to justify behaviors then work towards changing them. The principal's/researcher's vision was to create a school climate where students were successful socially, emotionally, and academically. Throughout the project, the main goal communicated was to improve social-emotional learning to decrease misbehavior. When behavior improves, so does achievement. By doing so, project supports social-emotional learning theory which says learning is possible once physical, social, and emotional needs are met.

Feasibility gives attention to the logistics and practicality of implementation (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). Several factors must be considered when trying to implement a similar project. First, the leadership must be willing to consider non-traditional programs and be creative. A smaller school setting gives a counselor the opportunity to work closely with students. The

counselor of the school must believe social-emotional learning is vital to the success of a student. Extra time to print, distribute, receive, and reward behavior charts and plan and conduct counseling sessions will add extra duties to the counselor. A school staff who is willing to stay after school to lead clubs which interest students is also needed. Some clubs included cooking, dance, yoga, theatre, robotics, and book club. The teachers must be willing to research and facilitate these activities. The teachers in this project were compensated using Title I funds. However, teachers donated their time the two previous years. Bus drivers to transport students home and someone to coordinate the routes are essential. Tracking discipline data will be required to monitor progress. This project used the school district's student management system to mine data and an Excel spreadsheet to manage data each nine weeks. The principal must be willing to devote professional development resources to classroom management training. Finally, the project will require a flexible leadership team who will continuously progress monitor and make changes as needed.

An evaluation of the ethics involved in a program is called propriety. Ethics may refer to the researcher's devotion to privacy, human rights, laws, inclusiveness, and conflicts of interests (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). Before the project was implemented, the researcher participated in ethical research training. All participants were protected through FERPA and IRB protocols. Each participant was given letters and permission forms approved by the IRB. All counseling session discussions were kept confidential between the counselor and students. Student discipline referral data was only shared with the research team. During conferences, an individual student's data was shared with the parent and student. Surveys were anonymous so as to protect the identities. Teacher observations were only used as the content for critical conversations between a teacher and his or her classroom management coach. The program

continued to seek input from stakeholders to improve the program and be responsive to their needs.

The findings of a study are dependent on the accuracy and truthfulness of the data presented. Accuracy requires the program to use multiple sources of data, detail methods of collection, and ensure the data is reliable (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). The data presented in this project can be validated through district records. The methods of collection were as planned and reported. Multiple sources of data were used including: surveys, observations, meetings, quantitative data, and informal conversations were used. Not all conversations were documented after occurring. Therefore, there is no physical documentation of the conversation, only the recollection of the researcher. Discipline data was input into the descriptive data document after each grading period. Data may have been impacted due to targeted students enrolling and withdrawing from the school. Based on trend data for this school, a cohort of students may have a change of nearly 30% of students from one year to the next. This means it is possible for several variables to affect the increase or decrease in behavior from one year to the next. For example, if a student received multiple referrals in one year and was not enrolled the next year, it would appear the total number of referrals for the cohort decreased when, in fact, the absence of the student may have affected the numbers. Overall, the data and findings presented are accurate.

Chapter III details the method in which documents and data were collected and stored, as well as, the methodology used in the project. It is important for the researcher of any study to be held accountable to keeping documentation of all processes and data (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). Despite the possible limitations mentioned in Chapters III and IV, there is sufficient documentation to support the findings of the study. The documents were kept in the principal's

office and gathered throughout the project. During the analysis of the data, the researcher used documents and data to drive all findings. Subsequently, she then cross-referenced multiple data pieces to confirm the findings.

### **Next Steps.**

The purpose of this applied research study was to transform student behavior at Harvest Middle School and increase organizational learning. Though the project is completed, the research team evaluated which aspects should be continued and how the team should move forward to continue to improve student behavior at Harvest Middle School. Any endeavor deemed successful is a continuous improvement effort requiring amendments to the original plan. The following explains the next steps the research team intends to take to ensure the progress obtained serves as a foundation for future decisions and initiatives at the school.

**Teacher Training.** The administrative team members are committed to serve as instructional and management coaches. The principal's vision for the school is for every student to enjoy coming to school each day so he can grow socially, emotionally, and academically. To do so, teacher tones and de-escalation techniques must be honed. Much attention is still needed to transform the culture.

Teachers will continue to be required to self-reflect on instructional and management practices through video. Reflections will serve as catalysts for coaching conversations, especially for teachers whose student achievement is low and/or referral numbers are elevated. The goal is to help teachers eliminate minor behaviors by becoming proactive not reactive and/or punitive.

**Data conversations.** After seeing the success with student-administration data conversations, the principal has committed to individually meet with every student after each

benchmark assessment. This is feasible at a school the size of Harvest but not practical at larger schools.

**After-school activities.** Giving students an opportunity to build relationships with teachers while engaging in pro-social activities will be continued at Harvest. After-school clubs will become priority in the spring for all students. The fall is more difficult because of MHSAA events; however, the team is dedicated to finding teachers who can designate one day each week for the younger students not eligible for school sports.

**Group counseling.** Group counseling will continue at Harvest with students assigned based on risk-level first. The research team will also investigate more opportunities to provide a “safe space” for students to vent and discuss difficult matters. The principal has also committed to meet with a group of males who have expressed they are at-risk for gang activity. The administration hired a woman and man to work with all female and male students, respectively, twice each month. Both individuals were motivational speakers in the state and each authored material addressing self-esteem and positive choices. Each met with students during the grade level’s physical education period. Topics included aspects such as integrity, self-esteem, and bullying. The team feels strongly that social-emotional learning must be taught to all students whether in small group counseling or large group coaching.

**Parental involvement.** One area in which the administrative team plans to improve most is parental involvement. After working with a parent and community engagement specialist, the team began to mobilize parents to take more active roles in the school. The team began to offer more parent involvement activities and slowly released some control of planning to the parents. The obstacle will be sustainability. The team plans to create a calendar of meetings and projects which will be held at varying times to accommodate parents’ work schedules.



**Student leadership.** Another area needing sustainability is the student leadership program. Again, a calendar will be created to make sure meetings are consistent. As students take more responsibility, the goal is they will self-manage and develop more civility.

**Evaluation of organizational learning.** The organization functions more as a team since the project. The research mandated the team dive into the data to conduct a root cause analysis. Each member of the team began taking ownership of different initiatives. The leadership became distributive in nature. The administration and research team have become joint problem solvers and researchers of best practices. The teachers are progressing in a similar direction. Though the transformation is much slower, teachers are beginning to identify problems and work together to find practical solutions. The researcher learned the importance of disaggregating data to uncover trends which may aid in making informed decisions.

**Recommendations for further research.** For schools who will consider using this program as a model, certain aspects of the project will heavily impact outcomes. First, the program cannot be successfully implemented unless the principal believes academic learning only takes place after children become socially and emotionally healthy. The other key team member is the counselor. The counselor must be committed to researching social-emotional curriculum, meeting regularly with students to implement the curriculum, managing behavior charts, and rearranging his or her schedule to make sure student needs are attended to before all other clerical or administrative roles a counselor often assumes.

After-school clubs are an important component of this plan. If funds are available, compensating employees to stay is beneficial. However, if funding is not a possibility, a principal can ask teachers to volunteer time. In fact, there was no difference in the number of

teachers who stayed when they were not paid early in the program and the number of teachers who chose to stay and received a stipend. Grants are available to pay for bus drivers and snacks.

As explained throughout the study, Positive Action was not implemented with fidelity. When trying to discern why, the team suggested a few reasons. Positive Action was introduced mid-year and was hard to suddenly implement across the campus. The next year, teachers did not see value in the program and were not held accountable for implementation by the administration. Therefore, it would be important to garner buy-in from the staff and train each properly in implementation strategies. Follow-up to ensure teachers are using the program may help with fidelity. Yet, this project concludes relationships are more impactful than any program and programs may only be successful once relationships are built. Since relationships are vital, the researcher determined teachers need extensive training in building relationships in addition to classroom management training.

One other issue needing to be addressed is what strategies are needed to deal with non-compliant teachers. Some teachers are not inherently nurturing and find the social-emotional strategies as coddling and enable students to behave irresponsibly. Others are academically focused and feel time dedicated to social-emotional learning and relationship building deducts from instructional time. Conversely, the research suggests instructional time is wasted anyway because disruptive students distract others and monopolize the teacher's time.

## **Conclusion**

When students are given voice and choice, they begin to take control of their learning. Student empowerment should be explored. The more students are talked “with” not “at” seems to have more profound impact on their behavior than punitive or reward-based initiatives. Students are empowered in appropriate ways when given opportunities to participate in

decisions, school-wide and individually. Transparency with students is key. If students do not understand a rule or decision, adults need to explain why. Open dialogue with students not only teaches how to rationalize but also models appropriate discourse for debate with others who differ in opinion.

This project was implemented with the intentions of determining if a correlation existed between a decrease in student referrals and the intervention strategies. As the data analysis process unfolded, the researcher recognized relationships as much more effective than programs. Principals and staff building strong relationships with students to have honest conversations about the connection between behavior and achievement yielded better results than the other intervention strategies. School is an opportunity to develop future leaders and an adept citizenry for our country. It is the conclusion of this applied action research study that strong relationships become the foundation on which these types of schools are built.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: BEHAVIOR COMPARISONS

Table 2

*Student Behavior Comparisons SY16-17 to SY 17-18*

Student	MAAP ELA score	After-school Activity	#of referrals 2016-2017	# of Referrals 1 <sup>st</sup> 9weeks
1	2a	No	5	1
2	2a	No	6	2
3	1b	Cheer	4	0
4	3b	Cheer	6	0
5	2b	No	7	0
6.	3b	Cheer	4	0
7	2b	FB	16	5
8	2b	FB	6	1
9	1b	FB	17	1
10	2b	FB	9	1
11	3b	Cheer/removed	10	3
12	2a	FB	14	1
13	2b	No	3	0
14	3a	FB	14	3
15	2a	FB	15	0
16	3b	No	19	5
17	3a	No	21	4
18	2b	Cheer	9	0
19	3a	Cheer	10	0
20	3a	FB	4	1
21	3a	FB	15	3
22	3a	Cheer	13	0
23	1a	FB	3	0
24	1b	FB	7	0
25	3a	Cheer	8	0
26	3b	FB	7	1
27	2a	FB	3	0
28	3a	Cheer	7	0

## APPENDIX B: CLIMATE SURVEY

*School Climate Survey*

### Survey Protocol: Faculty & Staff

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

Statement of Consent:

*This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Lindsay Brett from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the relationship between improving student social-emotional skills and student behavioral improvement. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*Lindsay.brett@leecountyschools.us  
lcbrett@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Jill Cabrera-Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*jdcahrera@olemiss.edu; (662)915-7069 (office)*

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information you provide today will help us to understand the implementation of social-emotional learning and behavioral improvement methods. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the survey?*

School Climate Survey

*Pre and Post Intervention*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
Our school is welcoming to all staff.					
All students feel welcome at our school.					
Our school has high expectations for our students.					
Our school has high expectations for staff.					
Our students get along well.					
Our students and teachers have positive relationships.					
Families, students, teachers, and administrators listen to each other and work together to solve behavioral issues.					
Our students exhibit conflict-resolution skills.					
In my opinion, student behavior contributes to poor academic achievement.					
I intentionally build relationships with my students.					
I am an effective classroom manager.					
I spend the majority of my instructional time addressing behavior.					
Students know and follow my classroom routines.					
All teachers speak in a positive tone towards students					
All teachers have set routines and procedures for their classroom.					
I've heard a student use a slur or speak negatively to another student.					
I've heard an adult in the school make a negative remark about a student or group of students.					
Our school creates opportunities for students, staff, and families to get to know each other.					
I have freedom in my classroom to reward or encourage students for positive behavior.					
Our students engaged in positive activities outside of school.					
When students are engaged in after-school extra-curricular activities, their behavior is better in the classroom.					
Our students have sufficient opportunities to expend energy.					
Our student are emotionally healthy.					
I look forward to coming to school each day.					

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT CHART

*Student Discipline, Achievement, Participation*

*Example*

Student	Achievement	Referral #	Referral Type	Counseling	Behavior Chart	After-school

Element I  
Counseling Document A

Survey Protocol: Student

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

Statement of Consent:

*This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Lindsay Brett from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the relationship between improving student social-emotional skills and student behavioral improvement. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

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*jdcahrera@olemiss.edu; (662)915-7069 (office)*

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information you provide today will help us to understand the implementation of social-emotional learning and behavioral improvement methods. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the interview?*

*Pre-Post Student Counseling Survey for Students*

The next time you find yourself REALLY angry at someone or something, how likely is it that you would...				
	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
1. Ignore the situation?				
2. Ignore the situation but get the person later?				
3. Try to talk it out?				
4. Suggest peer mediation?				
5. Channel your anger into something constructive?				
6. Laugh it off?				
7. Try to reduce your anger?				
8. Try to see the other person's point of view?				

Source: Dahlberg LL, Toal SB, Swahn M, Behrens CB. *Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influences Among Youths: A Compendium of Assessment Tools*, 2nd ed., Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2005.



## Element I

### Counseling Document B1

#### *Conflict Resolution*

##### *Session 1*

Objective: Students will learn the purpose of the anger coping group and will begin to build trust among one another. Participants will begin to learn what anger is and how to assess their own anger with the hassle log and anger thermometer.

Materials:    Pretest            Anger Thermometer Handout Poster paper  
                  Markers            Hassle Log Handout                    Multi-colored candy

##### Process:

1. Purpose and goals of the group: helping students make positive decisions and avoid conflict
  - a. Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision making and responsible behavior
  - b. Apply strategies to manage stress and motivate successful performance
  - c. Evaluate strategies for preventing and resolving conflicts
2. Review group rules, expectations, and confidentiality.
  - a. Confidentiality: we will not share anything said in group UNLESS there is a situation involving yourself or someone else getting hurt – Agreed?
  - b. The purpose of this group is to teach new behaviors and skills. You must be willing to try something new, both inside and outside of the group – Are you willing?

- c. In order for the group to be effective, you will be asked to share personal information – Are you willing to self-disclose?
  - d. Have students come up with additional rules and add to the poster
3. Icebreaker Activity
4. Self-Assessment
5. Pretest
6. Anger Thermometer: The anger thermometer is a reflective activity designed for us to think about our anger in concrete terms. A lot of times we know we're mad or upset, but we can't describe it. On the top half of the page, I want us to think about the things or the people who make you the angriest. List the things that make you angriest. They don't have to be in any particular order. Let's talk about these. What about these things make you angry?  
  
Now for the bottom half, I want us to use descriptive words to put levels to our anger. Your baseline word, represented by 10 on the thermometer, should be the least angry you have ever been, and your angriest word should be at 100. Let's keep up with these to look back on throughout our weeks.

## Element I

### Counseling Document B2

#### *Conflict Resolution*

#### *Session 2*

Objective: Students will learn to identify their bodies' reactions to feelings of anger. Participants will start to identify what their triggers for anger are. By understanding body cues and anger triggers students can begin learning to change their response to anger in future sessions.

Materials:    Anger Buttons Worksheet    Physical Cues to Anger Handout  
                  Physical Cues Worksheet    Hassle Log Week 1

#### Process:

1. Purpose and goals of the group: helping students make positive decisions and avoid conflict
2. Review group rules, expectations, and confidentiality.
  - a. Confidentiality: we will not share anything said in group UNLESS there is a situation involving yourself or someone else getting hurt – agreed?
  - b. You must be willing to try something new – agreed?
  - c. In order for the group to be effective, you will be asked to share personal information – agreed?
3. Explain to students what a trigger is.
  - a. What happens when you let go of a stretched rubber band?
  - b. What happens when you pull a trigger?
  - c. What happens when someone does something you don't like?

4. Hand out the Anger Buttons worksheet and have student write down something that pushes their buttons, pulls their trigger, etc. Discuss.
5. Talk about what happens in our bodies when we get angry. Have students complete the Physical Cues to Anger worksheet and discuss it with their peers. How are people similar in their anger? How are they different?
6. Discuss the importance of knowing what your triggers are and recognizing when you are getting angry.
7. Dismiss students who did not meet goals this week. Let students who met the goal stay and enjoy their reward.

## Element I

### Counseling Document B3

#### *Conflict Resolution*

#### *Session 3*

Objective: Students will be educated on anger reduction techniques and will demonstrate an understanding of how to use techniques through practicing them in session.

Materials: Anger Reducers Handout

Process:

1. Review any Hassle Logs.
2. Review the last session.
  - a. Trigger/Anger Buttons
  - b. Physical signs of anger
3. Introduce the concept of using anger reducers to decrease level of anger.
4. Review Anger Reducers Handout
  - a. Demonstrate and practice counting backward technique
  - b. Demonstrate and practice deep breathing technique
  - c. Have students identify and share an identified place for pleasant imagery
5. Ask the students to identify a situation in which they could use an anger reducer.
6. Discuss the Hassle Log and assign for homework.
7. Dismiss the students who did not meet the goal for the week. Allow students who met the goal to stay and enjoy their reward.

## Element I

### Counseling Document B4

#### *Conflict Resolution*

#### *Session 4*

Objective: Students will learn the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how to identify, challenge, and replace unhealthy beliefs through completion of an ABCDE analysis on a situation in which they were angry.

Materials:     ABCDE's handout     ABCDE's Worksheet (x2)  
                  White board             Dry erase markers

#### Process:

1. Review any Hassle Logs.
2. Briefly review last session.
  - a. Counting backwards
  - b. Deep breathing
  - c. Pleasant imagery
3. Review ABCDE's of Anger Control handout and discuss how thoughts impact emotions.
4. Using whiteboard, demonstrate the steps of the ABCDE model using a hypothetical situation.
5. Have students complete ABCDE's Worksheet and process with the group.
6. Assign homework: Students complete ABCDE's Worksheet for a situation before next session.

Element I

Counseling Document B5

*Conflict Resolution*

*Session 5*

Objective: Students will learn ways to express feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in an assertive manner by utilizing the Conflict Resolution Model. Students will practice the steps of the Conflict Resolution Model through role play. Students may utilize situations they have previously recorded in their Hassle Logs.

Materials: Conflict Resolution Model Handout White board  
Dry erase markers

Process:

1. Review homework (ABCDE's handout).
2. Teach group members about assertiveness vs. passivity.



Passive Aggressive

Aggression – expressing feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in a harmful and disrespectful way.

Passive – failing to express feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, or expressing them in an apologetic manner that others can easily take no notice of.

Assertive – standing up for your rights and expressing feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in direct, honest, an appropriate way that do not violate the rights of others or show disrespect.

3. Review Hassle Logs and ask members if they handled their situations in an assertive or passive manner.
4. Using whiteboard, write the steps of the Conflict Resolution Model for students to see and go through steps using a hypothetical situation.
5. Ask students to identify a situation in which they could have and will be able to use this model as a means to assertively resolve conflict.
6. Homework: remind students to continue to fill out their Hassle Logs as a means to chart occurrences of anger; provide students with a handout including the steps to the Conflict Resolution Model and instruct them to practice using the model.





Element I

Counseling Document B7

*Conflict Resolution*

*Session 7*

Objective: Students will learn how to cope with the anger of others. In addition to learning about empathy, students will begin to practice expressing empathy.

Materials:      Dealing with someone else’s anger worksheet                      Whiteboard  
                         Understanding the feelings of others handout                      Dry erase markers

Process:

1.      Review Hassle Logs.
2.      Briefly review material on dealing with accusations and keeping out of fights
  - a.      Dealing with accusations
  - b.      Keeping out of fights
3.      Explain “dealing with someone else’s anger” handout and discuss steps to respond appropriately when someone else is angry.
4.      Have students complete “dealing with someone else’s anger” role plays based on information from previous Hassle Logs. Process with the group.
5.      Discuss “understanding the feelings of others” handout.
6.      Create hypothetical situations on whiteboard that allow the participant to show another person that they understand what that person is feeling.
7.      Remember to use Hassle Logs between sessions.

## Element I

### Counseling Document B7

#### *Conflict Resolution*

#### *Session 8*

Objective: Students will review and reflect on what they have learned throughout the group process. Group leader will congratulate students on their completion of the group training and provide them with an award certificate.

Materials: Reflection questions handout Post Test

Process:

1. Review Hassle Logs.
2. Have students answer the reflection questions on the handout. Once students have completed the questions, depending on time, have them discuss their answers with the group. Collect the completed handout to use during the Booster Session.
3. Explain to students that they will meet again in three weeks for a booster session in which they will discuss progress and review anything with which the students may be struggling.
4. Have students complete the post test.
5. Hand students a certificate of completion and congratulate them on completing the group.

Element I  
Counseling Document C

*Student Behavior Chart*

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**Monday**

	Asked permission before speaking	Did not use profanity	Did not horseplay	Followed directions
1st				
2nd				
3rd				
5th				
6th				

**Tuesday**

	Asked permission before speaking	Did not use profanity	Did not horseplay	Followed directions
1st				
2nd				
3rd				
5th				
6th				

**Wednesday**

	Asked permission before speaking	Did not use profanity	Did not horseplay	Followed directions
1st				
2nd				
3rd				
5th				
6th				

**Thursday**

	Asked permission before speaking	Did not use profanity	Did not horseplay	Followed directions
1st				
2nd				
3rd				
5th				
6th				

1+Teacher's Initials = achieved goal  
 0+Teacher's Initials = did not achieve goal

Goal for the week: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Total for the week: \_\_\_\_\_

Element II

Teacher Training Document A

*Referral numbers by grading period*

Teacher	9 wks referrals	9wks referrals	9wks referrals	9 wks referrals

## Element II

### Teacher Training Document B1 Survey

#### Survey Protocol: Faculty & Staff

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

Statement of Consent:

*This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Lindsay Brett from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the relationship between improving student social-emotional skills and student behavioral improvement. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

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*lcbrett@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Jill Cabrera-Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*jdcahrera@olemiss.edu; (662)915-7069 (office)*

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Element II

Teacher Training Document B 1 Survey

*Teacher Training Feedback Survey*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The training was well organized.					
This training was needed for our school.					
The trainer was knowledgeable about classroom management.					
The instructor was knowledgeable about our student population and provided appropriate strategies.					
Goals of the training were clear.					
There is a need for classroom management training in our school.					
The strategies presented were applicable to my classroom.					
I feel like I can implement the strategies presented and be effective in the classroom.					
Do you feel like this training has equipped you with tools to empower you to be a better classroom manager?					

What was the most effective portion of this training?

Is there a strategy about which you like to have more information? If so, which one?

How can this training be improved?

Which classroom management needs did the training not address?

## Element II

### Teacher Training Document B2 Survey

#### Survey Protocol: Trainer Survey

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

Statement of Consent:

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Element II

Teacher Training Document B2 Survey

*Teacher Training Coach Survey*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The strategies presented are effectively being implemented in the classrooms.					
Teachers are confident implementing strategies.					
Teachers are open to receiving feedback and coaching after I observe their classroom management techniques.					
There is a need for whole-school follow up training.					
A few teachers need intensive coaching.					

Which strategy do you see used most?

What is our most critical need concerning classroom management you have observed?

Do you see teachers making progress? In what ways?

How can the administration support the teachers in the area of classroom management?

How can this training be improved?

### Element III

#### Proactive Document A Survey Survey Protocol: Faculty & Staff

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
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Element III

Proactive Document A Staff Survey

*Positive Action Process Survey for Teachers*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The PA program was well organized.					
This program was needed for our school.					
The students were engaged each week.					
Goals of the program were clear.					
Teachers were adequately trained on PA.					
Students understood the expectations of the program.					
PA motivated students to make positive behavioral choices during the regular school day.					
One teacher on each hall as the PA coordinator was appropriate.					
Students talked about the program positively.					
The program improved the culture of the school.					
Teaching PA during history classes was appropriate to meet the needs of the students and program goals.					
More days should be added to teaching PA.					
PA should be taught in a different class.					
PA improved student-teacher relationships.					
PA improved student-student relationships					
The time required to teach PA is worth it because it improves behavior.					
Students involved in the program seem happier than before the implementation of the program.					
Students are given positive reinforcement through praise, rewards, etc. through PA.					
PA helped students become make better choices beyond behavior.					
PA helped students become better students academically (studying, completing homework, engaging in class.)					

### Element III

#### Proactive Document B1 After-school Student Survey

##### Survey Protocol: Student

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

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Element III

Proactive Document B1 After-school Student Survey

*After School Clubs Student Survey*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The after-school club program was well organized.					
This program was needed for our school.					
I was engaged each week.					
The Goals of the program were clear.					
I understood the expectations of the program.					
The program motivated me to make positive behavioral choices during the regular school day.					
The after-school program clubs were appropriate for our students.					
Students talked about the program positively.					
The program improved the culture of the school.					
The schedule of the program was appropriate to meet the needs of the students and program goals.					
More days should be added to the program.					
The program should extend the time each day.					
The program improved student-teacher relationships for me.					
The program improved student-student relationships					
The program provided opportunities for my parents to get involved in my academic and extracurricular activities.					
Involvement in the program made me feel more positively about myself.					
Involvement in the program gave me an opportunity to become better at something that interests me.					
Students in the program are given positive reinforcement through praise, rewards, etc.					
Having an after-school program gave me something positive to do afterschool.					
I make poor choices when I have free time at home after-school.					

How can we improve the program?

Which portion of the program worked best?

## Element III

### Proactive Document B2 After-School Parent Survey

#### Survey Protocol: Parent

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

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Element III

Proactive Document B2 Parent Survey

*After School Clubs Parent Survey*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The after-school club program was well organized.					
This program was needed for our school.					
The goals of the program were clear.					
I understood the expectations of the program.					
The program motivated my child to make positive behavioral choices during the regular school day.					
The after-school program clubs were appropriate for our students.					
My child talked about the program positively.					
The program improved the culture of the school.					
The schedule of the program was appropriate to meet the needs of the students and program goals.					
More days should be added to the program.					
The program should extend the time each day.					
The program improved student-student relationships.					
The program provided opportunities for parents to get involved in my academic and extracurricular activities.					
Involvement in the program made my child feel more positively about herself/himself.					
Involvement in the program gave my child an opportunity to become better at something that interests her/him.					
Students in the program are given positive reinforcement through praise, rewards, etc.					
Having an after-school program gave my child something positive to do afterschool.					
My child makes poor choices when she/he has free time at home after-school.					
As a parent, I felt there were adequate opportunities to be involved in the program.					

How can we improve the program?

Which portion of the program worked best?

## Element III

### Proactive Document B3 After-School Teacher Survey

#### Survey Protocol: Faculty & Staff

General Research Topic: Improving Student Behavioral Culture

Specific Research Questions:

- Were the teachers and students able to identify and justify common student misbehaviors?
- Were the strategies used in the action plan supported by the stakeholders involved?
- Which areas of the program were deemed successful during the implementation process?
- What limitations or problems affected the successful implementation of the action plan?
- Was there a 20% decrease in student referrals among targeted intervention students?
- Was there a 10% decrease in student referrals school-wide?

Conceptual Framework: *implementation, academic achievement, social-emotional learning*

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Element III

Proactive Document B 3 Teacher Survey

*After-School Teacher Survey*

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5- Strongly Agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
The after-school club program was well organized.					
This program was needed for our school.					
The students were engaged each week.					
Goals of the program were clear.					
Students understood the expectations of the program.					
The program motivated students to make positive behavioral choices during the regular school day.					
The after-school program clubs were appropriate for our students.					
Students talked about the program positively.					
The program improved the culture of the school.					
The program was schedule of the program was appropriate to meet the needs of the students and program goals.					
More days should be added to the program.					
The program should extend the time each day.					
The program improved student-teacher relationships for me.					
The program improved student-student relationships.					
The program provided opportunities for parents to get involved in their child's academic and extracurricular activities.					
Students involved in the program seem happier than before the implementation of the program.					
Students in the program are given positive reinforcement through praise, rewards, etc.					

How can we improve the program?

Which portion of the program worked best?

## VITA

Lindsay Brett

### EDUCATION

2010

Master of Education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, Regent University

2003

Bachelor of Arts, Liberal Arts, Mississippi State University

1999

High School Diploma, Tupelo High School

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYEMENT

2017- Present

Principal, Lee County Schools

2015-2017

Assistant Principal, Lee County Schools

2003-2015

Teacher of Theatre and ESL, Tupelo Public Schools

### PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

7-12 Speech Communication, Mississippi License

7-12 Humanities, Mississippi License

K-12 English as a Second Language

K-12 Spanish

Administrator, Career Level, Mississippi License

Trained Facilitator, National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)

Mississippi Professional Educators (MPE)

Delta Kappa Gamma

Phi Kappa Phi

## AWARDS

North Mississippi Top 40 Under 40, 2018

Lee County NAACP Jack Reed Race Relationships Award, 2018

Administrator of the Year, Lee County Schools, 2018

CREATE Teacher of Distinction, 2012

Teacher of the Year, Tupelo Middle School, 2011

Teacher of the Year, Tupelo Middle School, 2007

Inspirational Teacher by Tupelo High School Future Educators of America, 2004-2013