In Search of How Principals Change: A Qualitative Study of Events that Help and Hinder
Administrator Support for School-wide PBIS

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Abstract

Research has shown principal support to be a critical variable for implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices. However, there remains little understanding of the factors that may influence a principal's personal decision to support a practice. The purpose of the current study was to examine events that influenced principals' support for a widely-used approach to behavior in schools, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 school administrators who self-reported that they were initially opposed to or not supportive of PBIS but became stronger supporters over time. Qualitative analysis using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique revealed eight helping and three hindering categories of experiences in change in support, as well as two categories of early experiences that they reported might have built their support from the beginning. Implications for enhancing administrator support are provided.

Keywords: Implementation science, positive behavior support, systems change

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Administrator Support for School-wide PBIS

Principals play a significant role in education, and research shows that they have a powerful influence on student outcomes, such as achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004), as well as teacher outcomes, such as collegiality, attitudes, job satisfaction, and commitment to the school (Markow & Cooper, 2008; Price, 2011). In addition to the influence that principals have on teacher and student outcomes, principals play a significant role in the adoption, implementation, sustainability, and even effectiveness of interventions. Research has shown that strong principal support and leadership is directly related to the fidelity of implementation of a practice, that is, the degree to which a practice is implemented as intended (Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2006; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009; Rohrbach, Graham, & Hansen, 1993). Research findings suggest that teachers' implementation of interventions is more strongly related to principal actions than to teachers' personal characteristics or capacity to implement (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2011). Furthermore, a study by Rohrbach and colleagues (1993) indicated that when principals were informed of the importance of a program and the impact that they (as principals) can have on implementation, the fidelity of implementation by school staff was higher. In addition to influencing the fidelity of implementation of a practice, a study by Kam, Greenberg, and Walls (2003) indicated that principals can also influence the actual effects of the practice on student outcomes. In their study of the implementation and outcomes of a social-emotional learning curriculum, they found that improved student outcomes were only evident in schools in which *both* principal support for the curriculum and fidelity of implementation were high. In other words, even high fidelity of implementation did not improve

student outcomes when principal support was low.

Principal support has also been shown to be a critical component for practice sustainability (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, in press; Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004; Coffey & Horner, 2012; McIntosh et al., 2014). A study by McIntosh et al. (2014) found that strong administrator support was rated by school personnel as the most important factor influencing sustainability of a school-wide approach to behavior. These findings have significant implications, as sustainability is an ultimate but often elusive goal. In addition to the importance of principal support for sustainability, the lack of principal support has been indicated to be a barrier (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012; Lohrmann, Forman, Martin, & Palmieri, 2008). Lohrmann et al. (2008) observed that without administrator support, practices would often fail to achieve full implementation and consequently sustain.

School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

One practice for which principal support has been shown to be important is school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), a systems-level approach to building a positive school climate through the use of evidence-based interventions within a three-tier framework of behavior support (Sugai et al., 2010). Research has shown that PBIS is related to positive outcomes for students, including reduced problem behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010), increased emotional regulation (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), and improved academic achievement (McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). In addition to positive outcomes for students, PBIS is related to increases in staff morale, collegiality, teacher efficacy, and teacher job satisfaction (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012).

PBIS training emphasizes the importance of administrators in the process of planning and

implementation (Sugai et al., 2010). For instance, it is recommended that the school principal be

an active member of the PBIS leadership team. Principals are critical to the successful

implementation of practices in schools due to their unique role in the school. For instance, they

are able to allocate resources (e.g., teacher training, time, funding) to the practice, highlight the

priority of a practice to staff, and even influence implementation through hiring, either through

including activities in job descriptions or selectively hiring staff with practice competencies and

experience (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Kam et al., 2003; Richter, Lewis, & Hagar, 2012).

Consequently, research has indicated that principal support for PBIS is critical to its

implementation and sustainability, whereas a lack of principal support has been indicated to be a

barrier to implementation (Andreou et al., in press; Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; Kincaid,

Childs, Blase, & Wallace, 2007; Lohrmann et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2014). An absence of

principal support for PBIS may be related to other barriers, such as low conceptual

understanding of PBIS among staff, shortage of planning time, difficulty balancing competing

initiatives, and greater dependence on technical assistance (Debnam et al., 2011). Despite the

consensus in the literature regarding the importance of principal support to the success of PBIS,

there remains a lack of understanding regarding the aspects of the framework that may influence

principals' decisions to support it or characteristics of principals who become more supportive

over time (Debnam et al., 2011).

Understanding Change in Principal Attitudes

Given the pivotal role that principals play in implementation of PBIS and other

initiatives, it is useful to identify factors that are related to changes in principal support.

Although we are not aware of studies examining change in attitudes for principals in particular,

the general research base on attitude change provides some guidance. Rogers' (2003) theory of

diffusion of innovations provides some insight into factors that influence individuals in the decision to adopt or support a school practice. Although some principals—particularly those with high efficacy—may decide to support an effective practice upon hearing about it, others may have a slower decision process, and some may choose not to support it at all. To explain the decision process, Rogers proposed that when an individual is uncertain of whether an innovation will be superior to current practices, he or she will seek specific information to make the decision. Based on the information gathered, Rogers identified five factors that increased the likelihood that an individual or organization would adopt an innovation. First, the innovation must be perceived to solve a problem that exists with the current practices. Second, an innovation is more likely to be adopted if it is compatible with one's values, beliefs, prior experiences, and needs. Third, key opinion leaders (such as administrators and influential staff members) must support the practice if widespread and sustainable adoption is to occur. Fourth, a practice is more likely to be adopted if it can initially be implemented on a small scale or limited basis before scaling up. Finally, it is important that the outcomes of implementation of the innovation be visible. Rogers noted that although personal experience in implementation may be valuable, observing effects of implementation in other settings ("trial-by-others") may provide a vicarious experience of adoption, particularly if the settings are similar. .

Related to Rogers' theory, an extensive literature review by Petty and Wegener (1998) identified three key drivers by which change in one's attitudes may be facilitated by other individuals (sometimes called change agents). The first driver is providing knowledge regarding the practice. Prior positive or negative personal experiences can strengthen or weaken attitudes, but new information may provide the catalyst for exploring attitude change. The second driver is the credibility of the change agent. Credibility can come from perceived expertise in the practice

(i.e., knowledge), familiarity, trustworthiness, and likeability. Sources closer to the individual (e.g., friends, trusted colleagues, those in similar contexts) are often more credible--and therefore more influential--in attitude change. The third driver is relevance. If the change agent can describe the practice as relevant to one's personal situation, that person is more likely to seek additional information regarding change, engage in deliberate thought, and reframe his or her perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore how change in support for PBIS may occur for principals. By examining important events or experiences that influenced principals' decisions to support PBIS, we may better understand how to cultivate support among principals for a range of evidence-based practices. Qualitative methodology was used to gather information regarding events or experiences that principals perceived as helping or hindering their decision to support PBIS. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (1) What critical incidents do principals perceive as having helped build their support for PBIS?, (2) What critical incidents do principals perceive having hindered their support for PBIS?, and (3) What critical incidents do principals report would make it easier to support PBIS from the outset?

<div align="center">**Method**</div>

Participants and Setting

The current study included 10 school administrators (principals and vice-principals; 70% male and 90% Caucasian) from elementary and secondary schools from 10 different schools districts in across 8 U.S. states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, Oregon, Washington) and Canada (British Columbia). Participants were recruited by the first author through personal contacts and invitations during conference presentations. Desired criteria for

participation were that individuals were currently administrators and were initially opposed to or skeptical of PBIS and had recently experienced an increase in support. Individuals were encouraged to contact the first author if they felt that they met these criteria. Participants included one principal who reported that he was initially opposed to PBIS but had recently agreed to implement and nine administrators who reported that they were initially opposed to or only moderately supportive of PBIS but had become strong supporters over time. Participants had been educators for an average of 17.5 years (6 to 29 years), administrators for an average of 5.3 years (1 to 17 years), and implementing PBIS in their current schools for an average of 1.6 years. One school was in the pre-implementation stage, four were in their first year of implementation, and five had been implementing for two or more years. Three participants were hired at their current school after PBIS had been implemented, whereas the other seven participants were involved in the decision to implement PBIS at their current school.

Methodological Approach

Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was first developed by Flanagan (1954) as a pragmatic qualitative research approach, and elaborations on the original methodology have gained popularity in the field of psychology (Bedi, Davis, & Williams, 2005). More recently, CIT has been used to examine education, including sustainability of school practices and teacher collaboration and job satisfaction (Andreou et al., in press; Kain, 2004). The purpose of CIT is to use in-depth interviews to discover specific experiences and events that are perceived by participants to have either (a) helped or (b) hindered a specific outcome. For this study, we followed the procedures of the Enhanced CIT approach, a model that adds a third set of categories (a retrospective wishlist) and allows thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as potential CIs categories (Butterfield, Maglio, Borgen, & Amundson, 2009). In this study, the purpose of the

interviews was to identify the specific events or experiences that principals reported were influential in changing their decision to support PBIS.

Interview Protocol

The interview questionnaire for this study was adapted from Bedi, Davis, and Williams (2005) and reviewed by one of the Enhanced CIT developers for adherence to the methodology. First, a definition of PBIS was provided to ensure that there was a shared understanding of the approach and its principles and practices.   Next, the concept of support for PBIS was described to the participant. Support for PBIS was described as a combination of two components: personal support and active support. This conceptualization was based on Han and Weiss' (2005) observation that administrators show support through (a) personal support, meaning that the approach aligns with their personal values and beliefs, and (b) instrumental (i.e., active) support, such as allocating funding, time, and resources to the approach, making it a priority in the school, and taking an active role on the team responsible for planning and implementation. Participants were then asked to respond to three main questions about support for PBIS, separately for each of the two aspects of support. The questions included: (1) *What were the important events (i.e., specific behaviors, examples, or observable happenings) that helped build your [positive impression of/ active support for] PBIS as an administrator?* (2) *What were the important events (i.e., specific behaviors, examples, or observable happenings) that hindered your [positive impression of/ active support for] PBIS as an administrator?* and (3) *Looking back, are there things that would have made it easier for you to [build a positive impression of/ actively support] PBIS from the outset?* Participants were told that the critical incidents (CIs) could be events that happened inside or outside of the school or actions that s/he or other professionals took. They were also asked to describe each event or behavior completely and in

as much detail as possible. Follow up questioning and prompts were used to clarify or enhance the specificity of the events being described. Because the CIs for the two aspects of support were nearly identical (100% of responses to the active support questions were also provided for positive impression), the CIs were analyzed as one set of responses for personal and active support.

Procedure

Upon consent, each interview was conducted individually (in person or over the phone) by the second author, and the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. As suggested by Butterfield et al. (2009), the first author, a published author in the areas of CIT and PBIS, listened to every third interview and provided formative descriptive feedback to the interviewer. This process, which is customary in CIT research (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005), is used to attempt to ensure that the CIT method is being followed, the interviewer is not using leading questions, and the interview protocol is being followed (Butterfield et al., 2005)The first author provided feedback regarding using examples to clarify questions and asking participants to report their initial support for PBIS were incorporated into subsequent interviews. As per the guidelines for Enhanced CIT (Butterfield et al., 2009), data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, and participants were recruited and interviewed until analysis produced no new categories.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to the method set out by Butterfield et al. (2009). First, using the transcribed interviews, CIs were identified and sorted into helping CIs, hindering CIs, and wishlist items. The researchers then looked for patterns, themes, or differences among the CIs and wishlist items, creating categories with headings to describe the themes. This process

was repeated in groups of three interviews, and new categories were created as necessary. Throughout this process, the researchers kept a running log to indicate when exhaustiveness had been reached; that is, when no new categories were created in three consecutive interviews. No new categories emerged in interviews 7 through 10; thus, no more interviews were conducted. Next, the researchers created operational definitions for each category (available on request from the first author). Categories were retained if at least 3 respondents had provided a CI that could be placed in that category. This specific procedure is common in CIT research because it reduces the possibility of idiosyncratic responses or faulty recall of a particular participant (Kain, 2004). For categories with fewer than 3 respondents, the researchers examined the other categories to examine whether these incidents could be placed in a different category and retained for data analysis.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

One of the strengths of CIT as a qualitative methodology is its extensive use of credibility checks to assess and increase trustworthiness of findings (Kain, 2004). After data were analyzed, several additional credibility checks were conducted to assess the trustworthiness and credibility of analyses, which further reduces the influence of idiosyncratic responding from participants or inaccurate coding by the researchers (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). First, 25% of the CIs and wishlist items, along with the category names and definitions, were sent to an independent judge (the third author, otherwise not involved in data collection or analysis) for inter-coder agreement. This independent judge reviewed the category definitions and placed each CI and wishlist item into categories based on their operational definitions. The inter-coder agreement was initially 87%. After discussion among the authors, the operational definition of one category was clarified, and agreement was raised to 100%. Andersson and

Nilsson (1964) considered inter-coder agreement of at least 80% to be strong.

After analysis, a member check was conducted (Brantlinger et al., 2005). As outlined by Butterfield et al. (2009), each participant was emailed with their list of CIs and wishlist items for their review, along with their corresponding categories and operational definitions. Participants were asked the following questions: (1) Are the helping/hindering CIs and wishlist items correct?, (2) Do the category headings make sense to you?, (3) Do the category headings capture your experiences and the meaning that the incident had for you?, (4) Are there any incidents in the categories that do not appear to fit from your perspective? If so, where do you think they belong?, and (5) Do you have any other comments (i.e., is anything missing, is there anything that needs revising)? A total of 60% of participants responded, and all of these respondents indicated that the categories were appropriate and fit with their experiences.

Finally, the categories were provided to two experts (i.e., published researchers in implementation of PBIS) for review. The experts were asked the following questions: (1) Do you find the categories to be useful? (2) Are you surprised by any of the categories?, and (3) Do you think there is anything missing based on your experience? The two experts indicated that they found the categories to be useful, and were not surprised by any of the categories; however, both experts indicated some confusion regarding the distinction between two of the categories. The name of one category was changed in response to this feedback.

Findings

The list of helping, hindering, and wishlist categories generated from the interviews is provided in Table 1. It shows the number of CIs and respondents for each category (differences between these numbers are due to multiple CIs provided by the same participants within categories). Only categories in which at least 3 participants provided a response were retained.

Of a total of 97 unique CIs provided for both personal and active support, 91 (94%) were retained for the final results. The number of helping, hindering, and wishlist categories reported below and in the table represent the proportion of retained CIs.

Helping Incidents

Participants reported a total of 62 helping CIs that were coded into 9 categories, including 1 category with 2 subcategories. The categories and their descriptions are listed below, along with a quotation that illustrates a typical response in that category.

Learning from others. Learning from Others was the largest helping category, in terms of incidents and respondents. Fourteen CIs fell in this category, with 70% of participants reporting at least one CI in this category. It included two related subcategories, Networking with Implementing Schools and Talking with Other Administrators.

Networking with implementing schools. This category included incidents in which participants learned from other local schools that were implementing PBIS. Networking with Implementing Schools, reported by 60% of administrators, includes activities such as visiting another school, learning from a presentation provided by another school, and being able to learn from and network with schools in similar stages of implementation. It also includes hearing that other schools that were implementing PBIS and having success with it. These incidents were reported to be important because they provided participants with a better understanding of what PBIS really "looked like" in nearby schools and provided participants with ideas for strategies and interventions.

> *We took a trip to a school that was in about year five or six, I believe, of implementation, and we spent a day there observing, communicating with their administrators and their teachers and their PBIS team, and then just watching and that was, certainly, very instrumental…That brought it to life. Spending the day there…made it believable, I guess you could say.*

Talking with other administrators. A total of 40% of participants referred to the importance of speaking with other administrators who have implemented PBIS in their schools. They noted that other administrators provided credence to PBIS that teachers or district officials could not. These other administrators shared with the participants their personal positive experiences related to implementing PBIS or the importance of PBIS in their schools. The following quote captures what was reported by several participants.

> *It was just through a collegial conversation with another vice principal saying that they'd been to this very interesting conference where PBS was explained and introduced and the main concepts and thoughts behind it all was provided. So it was just through dialogue and then recognition that, certainly as a PBS system that's out there, is already being researched and it's already being implemented.*

Learning how PBIS aligns with personal values. This category refers to participants reporting learning about core aspects of the approach or philosophy of PBIS and coming to recognize that PBIS features were ways of articulating their personal values as educators. For instance, it refers to a personal appreciation that a key aspect of PBIS is defining expectations or acknowledging students, its comprehensiveness, or the philosophy that PBIS is an approach, not a program. These CIs also include recognizing aspects of PBIS that allowed the administrator to garner staff support (e.g., the ability to incorporate existing or new practices into the PBIS framework).

> *Whenever I found out this goes on and continues and there's data entries, and their monthly meetings to review the data, then I knew, it must be better than any of the other programs.*

Although the responses that formed this category were not necessarily linked to a specific incident or event, it was clear that learning about how one or more PBIS features related to their values was critical to most participants, as 70% provided CIs in this category. It is likely that the experience of learning about these PBIS features occurred during trainings or through speaking

with other administrators. However, participants were clear that their personal response to specific aspects of PBIS (i.e., its principles and practices) was the pivotal aspect of the CIs in this category.

Experiencing its effectiveness firsthand. This category, reported by 40% of administrators, refers to positive outcomes that occurred after implementing PBIS, such as seeing a decrease in problem behaviors, or hearing positive reactions from teachers and parents in their school. These CIs occurred either in the participant's current school (i.e., as an administrator) or at a previous school (i.e., as an administrator or teacher). For instance, one participant reported witnessing its success when he was a vice-principal.

> *The drop in referrals at my previous school… I know it was a huge drop and I almost want to say it was close to a 50% drop in about three years. Seeing that at my previous school really sold me.*

Observing a need for PBIS. Half of participants reported CIs related to seeing specific problems in their schools—such as high rates of problem behavior, problems with attendance, or seeing that staff needed effective strategies—as helpful in increasing their support for PBIS. These CIs occurred through either personal observations or viewing data, and participants felt that these problems could be addressed by implementing PBIS.

> *We conducted surveys and some of the data that came forward, stating that our students were not feeling safe in our building, didn't have a clear understanding of the expectations of our building, and the student to staff data wasn't the best, and that our staff didn't feel connected to the administration, and there were some real pertinent pieces of data that came through in that survey that made us stop and pause and say 'wow, how can we change how we do business?'*

Attending informative PBIS trainings. A total of 50% of administrators reported the positive influence of attending trainings or conferences that provided useful information regarding how to implement PBIS or adapt PBIS systems to their schools' needs. This category appeared to be a meaningful event for many participants, as it not only allowed participants to

gain an understanding of how PBIS operated in schools, but also provided some participants with specific strategies that they could try at their schools.

> *At the conferences we were able to see….ways of implementing non-specific PBIS elements and incorporating them into what we had at our site.*

Seeing staff share support for PBIS. Seeing Staff Share Support for PBIS (50% of participants) describes CIs in which administrators witnessed or learned that staff at their schools were supportive of implementing (or continuing to implement) PBIS. Support may have come from personal comments or staff-wide votes. Some participants noted that they had transferred to a school that was already implementing PBIS, and although they were opposed to it, hearing that staff were deeply invested in continuing to implement PBIS helped change their opinions.

> *A few of the teachers, the first thing they asked me was, "When are we going to have our case and team and we want to have PBIS in place on our way in," so that being spoken to me clearly within the first few days of being hired, I knew it must have been very important.*

Connection to a coach. Half of participants reported Connection to a Coach, receiving informational or technical support from a PBIS coach, coordinator, or a knowledgeable staff member (i.e., internal coach) as helpful in influencing their support for PBIS. Participants also reported that having a positive personal connection with a PBIS coach, coordinator, or knowledgeable staff member was as important to increasing their support as the actual coaching services that they received. Interacting with trusted colleague made their ideas more credible.

> *I also had a special education department chair here on campus that had done extensive research in the past, in both her master's program and her doctoral program and was quite familiar with PBIS, and so my interactions with that person help form a positive impression…she does things excellently, so, in this case, it manifested itself in doing things really well about PBIS, so, it's kind of all connection to teach—just like PBIS teaches, there was a connection to the individual first and then the PBIS second.*

Attending PBIS team meetings. A total of 30% of participants noted that experiences of attending PBIS team meetings regularly and feeling that the PBIS team was supportive and

productive were helpful in building their support for PBIS. They also reported that observing

specific, effective actions of the PBIS team, such as analyzing data and addressing areas of

concern, was helpful.

> *I had a, a really good PBIS team that came together and we had a lot of great ideas that we put together, which, sort of, helped make our program very strong and very prevalent throughout the school, so I would say the support of my colleagues on the PBIS team was definitely a positive.*

Hindering Incidents

A total of 14 hindering incidents were provided by participants. These incidents formed

three separate hindering categories.

Disagreeing with philosophy of PBIS. Half of the administrators referred to having a

negative personal reaction to one or more aspects of PBIS, such as rewards, or a negative

reaction to a practice that was viewed as similar to PBIS. Sometimes these disagreements were

due to misperceptions of PBIS (e.g., that consequence systems do not allow for administrator

discretion), but others were reactions to key principles or critical features.

> *I didn't like the idea of rewarding a problem child for the one time they did something good….I just thought that was stupid, just to be real honest. I thought, "This kid is being a knucklehead every day and today he's not, so I'm going to reward him."*

As with the helping category, Learning How PBIS Aligns with Personal Values, these

responses refer more to beliefs and opinions than specific events or incidents. The

number of respondents providing CIs in this category indicates that these beliefs and

opinions may be important factors in support that were specific to PBIS.

Witnessing unsupportive staff. A total of 40% of administrators reported the negative

effects of interacting with staff or fellow administrators who did not support implementing PBIS,

although not PBIS in particular. These incidents occurred during staff meetings or personal

conversations.

> *The biggest struggle with implementing any change in a school, and it's not just specific to PBIS, it's getting the whole staff to buy in and to be consistent…That was the biggest struggle. It's dealing with your naysayers.*

Negative reaction to time commitment. Some participants (30%) referred to having a negative reaction to the commitment required for sustaining a practice such as PBIS. As with the previous category, these incidents were characterized by reactions not specifically to PBIS itself, but rather to the resources necessary for long-term systems change and previous failures.

> *The sustainability and commitment to PBIS is something that maybe hindered my impression, because we have a lot of turnover in our district...And, I think, when you're entrenched in the district for a long time, you see a lot of initiatives come and go in your district and the same within your school.*

Wishlist Items

In addition to helping and hindering categories, participants provided a total of 15 wishlist items, suggestions regarding incidents that—if experienced early—might have increased their support for PBIS from the start. These responses formed 3 categories, including 1 category with 2 subcategories.

Learning about PBIS earlier. The largest wishlist category, Learning about PBIS Earlier, had two related subcategories, Learning from More Experienced Administrators or Other Schools and Attending a Conference or Training Earlier On.

Learning from more experienced administrators or other schools. Fifty percent of participants provided a response in this category. Incidents in this category include the desire to have networked with more experienced administrators or have learned from schools that were already implementing PBIS through visiting these schools (and seeing how it works) or attending presentations by local schools. Participants referred to such experiences as something they wished was either more available to them or that they had chosen to do earlier.

18

Traveling to other schools. Seeing how it's done at different places. Having a good example to follow, other than just the theory of the program and the protocol that has been given to us in professional development.

Attending a conference or training earlier on. Fifty percent of participants spoke of wishing that they had been able to receive more information about PBIS before implementation through attending in-service opportunities or having it covered in teacher education programs. In some cases, these experiences might have prevented some misconceptions from forming.

Maybe if I had attended a conference earlier on, and I still haven't, I'm doing that tomorrow, but maybe if I had attended a conference and tried to seek…the answers to those initial concerns.

Planning for implementation. This category, noted by 30% of respondents, refers to wishing that they had more time before implementing PBIS or joining a school that was already implementing PBIS to plan for effective implementation. Participants noted feeling uncomfortable with having to catch up with their teams and staff in moving forward to implement PBIS. For those joining schools already implementing PBIS, respondents wished that they had additional time to learn about PBIS before assuming a leadership role at the school.

I think if all of this started from day one, if we would have started from day one of the school [year], now we're playing catch up. So, now we're starting to put that in, in the middle of the year, but if we had started from day one it would be easier.

Discussion

School principals play pivotal roles in adopting, implementing, and sustaining practices in schools. Their support—or lack of support—for a given practice can make the difference between durable implementation and abandonment, as their support can serve as a lever to enhance other factors needed for implementation and sustainability (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). In this study, school principals and vice principals who reported that they originally opposed or only moderately supported PBIS were

19

interviewed and asked about incidents that helped and hindered their decision to become

active supporters of PBIS in their schools, along with what they wish they had

experienced to accelerate their change in support. Findings of this qualitative analysis

provide some preliminary illumination of the change process and point to three perceived

mechanisms for change in administrator support.

Formal and Informal Channels of Information

First, administrators reported that they became more supportive after obtaining

knowledge about PBIS through both formal and informal channels. The simple act of

learning about the practice was indicated by the respondents as influencing their support

of PBIS. These responses fit with Rogers' (2003) notion that individuals will seek (or be

open to) information to reduce discomfort when they are uncertain of the potential benefit

of a practice. Half of the respondents cited formal channels, which included district

trainings and conferences, as being influential. These sessions were noted as important

for learning the foundations and philosophy of PBIS. However, more administrators

(70%) found informal channels, such as talking with other administrators or visiting

schools implementing PBIS, as pivotal experiences. Participants noted that talking with

fellow administrators or school visits, where they could see PBIS in action, were more

useful than hearing from district administrators that it was an important district priority.

This informal peer networking, where administrators can discuss their shared needs or

concerns and see PBIS implemented in local schools with similar student bodies, was

noted as a strong influence in their decisions to become champions for PBIS in their own

schools. These conversations with close colleagues had principals believing that positive

outcomes were possible with the framework, and thus, their initial hesitancies subsided.

This finding aligns with the credibility driver for attitude change (Petty & Wegener, 1998), as these trusted colleagues may have been viewed as more credible sources of information that district administrators or unfamiliar coaches. In addition, they may have valued information from other principals, in similar schools, more because of their similar contexts and relevant to their needs (i.e., trial-by-others; Rogers, 2013).

Philosophical Alignment

Just over 20 percent of the helping and hindering incidents focused on administrators' personal reactions to the philosophy or critical features of a PBIS approach. These responses were intriguing, given that participants were specifically asked to speak of specific behaviors, examples, or observable happenings. However, it is clear that these personal reactions were important to the respondents, as 80% of respondents mentioned at least one incident in this category. These responses align with Rogers (2003) concept that an individual or organization may be more likely to adopt an innovation if it is congruent with their values and beliefs. Some administrators reported prior experiences with different practices as (positively or negatively) influencing their conceptualization of PBIS, which also fits with Rogers' theory. Although less observable, the findings indicate that attending to administrators' beliefs (and how PBIS may align with personal values in previously unknown ways) could be an important variable for change.

Upon initial consideration, this factor seems to be somewhat fixed and difficult to change directly. However, the findings indicated a few avenues to change. For example, a number of respondents noted misconceptions about PBIS (e.g., using rewards without considering how they can be differentially reinforcing) when sharing incidents that

hindered support. Following on from the previous mechanism, early formal training in

PBIS for administrators could possibly dispel these misrules or diminish the strength of

these negative perceptions by highlighting advantages of the approach that may be

valued. Half of respondents specifically noted that receiving formal PBIS training from

the outset of their administrative careers would have strengthened their support earlier.

In addition, in keeping with research on attitude change (Petty & Wegener, 1998;

Rogers, 2003), positive experiences with implementation may indirectly change

administrators' philosophies. Administrators may come to value practices that are shown

to be effective in enhancing student outcomes that are important to them (McIntosh,

Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010; Witt & Elliot, 1985). As seen in this study,

firsthand experience of the effectiveness of PBIS was endorsed as an important helping

incident. As a result, highlighting the effectiveness of PBIS through visits to local schools

may be a more promising approach to changing minds than a simple appeal to PBIS

values.

Finally, although it may be difficult to change the personal values of

administrators who oppose certain approaches, selecting administrators based on their

commitment to district initiatives could help to prevent such problems. Although training

and experience could indirectly change values, it may be more effective to consider

principal selection procedures as the pivotal action in increasing the number of

administrators who value the principles and critical features of a given practice (Blase,

Van Dyke, & Fixsen, 2013; Strickland-Cohen, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014).

Visible Staff Support

The third mechanism for influencing administrator support was through

witnessing levels of staff support, either high or low. Staff support was noted as a powerful facilitator and an even more potent barrier. Eighty percent of respondents spoke of staff support, or lack thereof, during interviews. When administrators were able to observe support from teams and staff, either from votes or informal conversations, they were more likely to view PBIS positively. When they saw signs of opposition or indifference to the approach, they were more likely to be skeptical themselves. These responses point to the influence (both positive and negative) of staff support in administrators' decisions whether to support PBIS (Atkins et al., 2008). Furthermore, staff support may be viewed by administrators' as a reflection of the degree to which the practice is consistent with the values, beliefs, and needs of the school community, as predicted by Rogers' (2003) framework.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of the study makes generalization of results a challenge. The purposeful sampling of respondents and the small sample limits the extent to which these findings may apply to the broader population of administrators, such as those with extremely low support. As a result, it would be wise to examine these questions with a wider range of administrators. In addition, the retrospective recall used in the study can be prone to bias in responding due to the error introduced by recollection. Additionally, although participants shared specific wishlist ideas for enhancing their support, they might not have been persuaded by such strategies at initial introduction. This hypothesis could be examined in future quantitative research by proactively implementing these strategies and measuring both principal attitudes and fidelity of implementation in their schools. Finally, this study examined PBIS in particular—other factors may be more

influential for other practices.

Implications for Practice

      Although it is common simply to hope for the best or rely on individual efforts to win over skeptical principals (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2014), these findings indicate that certain coordinated steps could be promising in building and maintaining administrator support. This study suggests specific strategies that may be worth further study in encouraging this change, particularly at the district level, and the wishlist results indicate that similar administrators may welcome more deliberate efforts.

      The administrators in this study recommended developing trainings specifically tailored to administrators. Content that might be important includes (a) the basics of the approach (to build conceptual understanding of PBIS features and reduce misrules), (b) applicability to their priorities as administrators (to enhance personal relevance of PBIS for pressing needs) , (c) local examples of implementation (to demonstrate visible outcomes in similar settings), and (d) the specific role of administrators in implementation (to build staff support for PBIS). These components reflect both the findings in this study and drivers identified in the literature on adoption and attitude change (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Rogers, 2003).

      In addition, districts could try to increase the likelihood of informal communication by developing or expanding a coaching network and creating opportunities for administrators to share their successes. A district team can set up networking sessions or professional learning communities to encourage these channels of communication. In addition, maintaining a list of exemplar schools in the district or region that can host administrators and teams for visits can help administrators see how

the approach could be implemented in their schools (Sugai et al., 2010). Administrators reported that these site visits were especially pivotal in swaying their support for the practice.

Another potential strategy for enhancing administrator support, especially during administrator turnover, is embedding the practice into the district's administrator position descriptions, hiring priorities, and transition plans. This strategy reduces the chances of hiring administrators who are initially (and perhaps durably) opposed to the practice. When administrators turn over, additional coaching may help the new administrator learn how their school has chosen to implement the framework and what this commitment means for their role (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2014). Finally, if the school staff can demonstrate their visible commitment to the practice (e.g., through a secret ballot vote), these findings hint that reluctant administrators may be more willing to continue the practice. Once they see its effects firsthand, their support may increase. Future research is needed to validate this and other hypotheses from the current study.

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Table 1

Number of Incidents and Total Percentage of Respondents for Helping, Hindering, and Wishlist

Categories

Incident Type	Categories (and Subcategories)	Number of Incidents (% of Total Respondents)
Helping	**Learning from others**	**14 (70%)**
	Networking with implementing schools	9 (60%)
	Talking with other administrators	5 (40%)
	Learning how PBIS aligns with personal values	**13 (70%)**
	Experiencing its effectiveness firsthand	**9 (40%)**
	Observing a need for PBIS	**7 (50%)**
	Attending informative PBIS trainings	**6 (50%)**
	Staff support	**5 (50%)**
	Connection to coach	**5 (50%)**
	Attending PBIS team meetings	**3 (30%)**
Hindering	**Disagreement with philosophy of PBIS**	**6 (50%)**
	Witnessing unsupportive staff	**5 (40%)**
	Negative reaction to time commitment	**3 (30%)**
Wishlist	**Learning about PBIS earlier**	**12 (80%)**
	Learning from experienced administrators or other schools	7 (50%)
	Attending conferences or trainings earlier	5 (50%)
	Planning for implementation	**3 (30%)**