

# The Landfill Is Full: Breaking the Data-Dumping Model

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**Abstract:** Students at risk for behavioral difficulties have unique needs that affect their academic, behavioral, and social skills. Many of these students are served in various educational settings, possibly transitioning back and forth from traditional schools to alternative settings. As they transition, there is a chance that the students' behavioral data will not follow them to and from education settings. This study explores systems that are used for tracking students' behavioral data within alternative settings and the transition to traditional public schools. A survey was administered to district staff to ascertain the processes in place for the transition of students and their data between alternative education settings and traditional public schools. Survey results are discussed, school exemplars are presented, and implications for future research and practice at the district level are suggested.

Providing support for students with disabilities in schools has been a national priority since the passage of the law of special education (Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975). In 2014, over 5.9 million students (ages 6-21) were enrolled in public educational services, and about 9% of those students were identified as students with disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2014). About 6% of those disabilities were identified as emotional behavioral disturbance (EB/D) and 5.3% were served in an "other environment" than their general education classroom (NCES, 2014). In Florida, almost 9% of the student population ages 6-21 was identified as receiving special education services and about 3% of this population was served in a separate setting compared with 11% of students identified as having an emotional disturbance (NCES, 2014).

Students with disabilities often struggle to graduation with and behavior challenges. In 2014, the average for all students graduating with a public school diploma in Florida was 76.1% (NCES, 2014), whereas for the over 357,000 (13%) students identified under Individuals With Disabilities Act Part B, 55% graduated and 3% dropped out (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Only 28% of those students with disabilities who graduated proceeded on to postsecondary education settings within one year of high school (NCES, 2014).

In particular, students with or at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (EB/D) fared worse academically compared to other students (Nelson et al., 2004) and were more likely to drop out of school; this risk is further increased by their mobility (e.g., changing of educational settings; Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003). In general, students with EB/D traditionally have low school attendance rates, which likely contribute to poor academic outcomes (Anderson, Kutaalsosh, & Duchnowski, 2001).

Students identified with EB/D, as defined in the Regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004); the successor to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, are those demonstrating one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:

(a) an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms of fears associated with personal or school problems. (IDEA, 2004, CFR §300.7 (a)(9))

At every grade level, students with EB/D receive services from general education teachers, special education teachers, and other staff to meet their academic and behavioral needs. When challenging behaviors occur, schools are often left unsure how to educate students with EB/D and transfer them to alternative school settings (McDaniel, Jolivet, & Ennis, 2014).

## Students Served in Alternative Settings

Alternative education (AE) settings aim to meet the needs of students who have not been successful in traditional school settings and are identified as exhibiting behaviors at risk for school failure (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Scott & Cooper, 2013). Students in these settings often have educational, mental health, and behavioral challenges and benefit from individualized and intensive instruction more likely received in alternative school settings (Jolivet et al., 2012). AE includes various types of alternative school settings, such as self-contained schools, center schools, alternative learning areas, day treatment programs, residential educational settings, and juvenile justice facilities (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010).

Alternative education settings are often characterized by smaller class sizes and student populations and more individualized learning settings (Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivet, 2011; Jolivet et al., 2012). AE settings are designed to serve all students with and without disabilities. However, the rates of students with EB/D being served in AE settings are higher than other student populations and continues to rise (NCES, 2014).

Originally, AE settings started in the 1960s and 1970s as some schools embraced tenets of progressive education and provided alternatives for students who were not thriving

in more typical public school environments (Kelchner et al., 2017). The 1997 amendments to the IDEA continued this trend by emphasizing children with behavioral needs and allowing Individual Education Program (IEP) teams to place students in interim educational settings for up to 45 days (IDEA §1415(k)). The IDEA amendments opened up AE to students with disabilities as places of last resort for education and highlighted the role the schools played in the education of students with severe behaviors (Owens & Konkol, 2004).

Shifting to an emphasis on a more separate setting for students with disabilities runs counter to one of the core principles of the IDEA that requires students to be served in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Florida defines LRE as students being “served in the regular education environment unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Florida Department of Education, 2000). The LRE is determined by the IEP team on a case-by-case basis considering a continuum of alternate placements, including instruction in regular classes, resource rooms, special classes, hospital/homebound, special schools, residential facilities, and juvenile justice programs (34 C.F.R. § 300.551). To be considered for a placement in an interim alternative setting, a student might be removed from the school for an offense (i.e., disobedience, disrespect, violence, abuse, uncontrollable or disruptive behavior) to the more restrictive settings that provide education and protect the student from expulsion (IDEA §1415(k)). As students identified with EB/D under IDEA are educated in alternative settings and achieve success, they ideally should return to their regular schools as soon as appropriate (Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010) and might then transition from AE to typical school settings.

Studies have reported that students are transitioning from AE settings to traditional schools. In a 2000-01 report on public alternative schools by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 74% of districts allowed students to return to regular schools (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). In a follow-up study in 2007-08, districts allowed 63% of the students to return (Carver et al., 2010). In the 2000-01 report, a student was more likely to be able to return to the regular school if the student showed an improved attitude or behavior (82%) and was motivated to return (81%; Kleiner et al., 2002). In 2007-08, those reasons expanded and included an improved attitude/behavior (78%), motivated to return (77%), approved by school or staff (60%), or earned better grades (58%; Carver et al., 2010). Additionally, 35% of the schools surveyed in 2007-08 had a database that allowed them to track a student after exiting the AE program (Carver et al., 2010). Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005) examined the mobility of students across four years and found that 20% of the students attended two more educational settings per year and 15 of the 78 who finished school stayed in the same setting across four years. Overall, it appears that transition is a possibility, if not reality, for students with EB/D in AE schools.

Making a transition from an AE setting back to the typical public school is not without risk for such students. In a study interviewing students with EB/D who wished to remain in the AE settings, students shared that they preferred the smaller classes, stronger teacher relationships, not switching classes, working in an individualized way, knowing their peers, and feeling included (Owens & Konkol, 2004). Students indicated that they felt that if they returned to the regular settings, they might experience different learning environments and students who are at different academic levels, making the returning students' struggles more apparent (Kelchner et al., 2017). Such experiences often exacerbate the students' risk when returning to these settings and setting up more transitions to the original, more restrictive setting.

There is not as much research about the strategies to assist in the transition for these students and how best to reduce their risk for return to AE, expulsion, or dropping out of school altogether (Kelchner et al., 2017). Shortly after the changes to IDEA in 1997 that emphasized provision of special education in interim alternative settings, Rutherford and Quinn (1999) suggested that students with disabilities in AE settings would benefit from functional assessments (e.g., specific behavioral evaluations); functional curriculum (e.g., meeting students' needs); effective instruction (e.g., direct strategies that address IEP goals); comprehensive systems (e.g., coordinated special education); and appropriate staff resources and training, procedural protections, and transition programs and procedures (e.g., for the back and forth).

The need to focus on the transition of data is crucial because students often come into these settings after crises, which impacts the ability to plan ahead and leads to an IEP and other educational documents not following the student to the new setting. This lack of data transfer might impact the students initial programming (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999). When the student transfers back, a process should be in place to ensure collected data reaches the new setting (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999; Simonsen et al., 2011).

Additionally, as the student population in AE settings has shifted to students with disabilities and their accompanying IEPs, the importance of ongoing collection of data has become even more important. When Flower and colleagues (2011) reviewed the literature on effective practices for students in AE settings, they reported that one quarter included highly structured classes with behavioral management strategies. Subsequent studies looked at data collection, such as fidelity, implementation, social validity, and student outcomes, and found positive results in AE settings when data are collected and analyzed (Farkas et al., 2012). The need for data for IEPs and the practices used in AE settings suggest that there is a need for data, data analysis, and data usage.

### Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Studies of students with EB/D suggest the need for implementation of research-validated practices (Cook & Cook, 2013; Lane, 2004; Lane et al., 2005); the importance of collecting data (Simonsen et al., 2012); and the necessity

of having a process for the transition, especially for data between the settings (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999). In fact, in a qualitative study using interviews at an AE setting for at-risk youth with behavior difficulties, students reported weaknesses of the program as “responding inconsistently to behavior problems, creating poor transitions to adulthood, and producing a physically dangerous school environment” (Free, 2017, p. 501).

The use of a Positive Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach can promote student success in AE settings by addressing behavior through evidence-based practices, emphasizing the ongoing use of data, prioritizing student academic and behavioral outcomes, and providing systems that can assist in the transition of students to and from the program. When implemented with fidelity, the multitiered PBIS framework enables all students to be successful and has been demonstrated as effective in AE settings (Jolivet et al., 2012; Jolivet & Nelson, 2010; Simonsen et al., 2010; McDaniel et al., 2014), often emphasizing the importance of the systems, practice, and use intensified for these settings (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Initial case studies reported data often included the use of a PBIS system to help organize and prioritize the collection and use of data in AE settings (Farkas et al., 2012; Gelbar et al., 2015)

PBIS is a school-wide systematic multitiered framework approach for teaching and managing behaviors using preventive and proactive practices (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Sugai et al., 2000). It provides a prevention framework for delivering needed supports at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and consists of systems, data, practices, and effective integration that are critical to obtaining desired schoolwide and student outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Schools that have demonstrated high implementation fidelity of PBIS achieve better student outcomes, such as fewer office discipline referrals and suspensions (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012; Flannery et al., 2014), reduced bullying (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012), increased teacher efficacy (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012), gains in academic achievement (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010), and more student engagement (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007).

**Primary prevention.** The first tier, Tier 1, is focused on schoolwide proactive strategies to prevent the most common challenging behaviors in all students (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). When PBIS is implemented with fidelity, roughly 80% of students will be successful with the schoolwide expectations identified and taught at this universal level (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Primary prevention strategies are universally designed to prevent problems, target all students and staff, provide students and staff with a strong foundation for teaching and recognizing appropriate behaviors, and have a low cost per individual. Examples include schoolwide positive behavioral supports (SWPBIS), school climate improvement projects, collaboration with family, and community engagement.

**Secondary prevention.** A smaller group of approximately 10-15% of students may need more intensive and targeted supports to be successful (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Tier 2 provides small group-based interventions to prevent

and mediate the most common behavioral challenges for students who were identified through review and data assessment as needing more support in addition to Tier 1 (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Tier 2 students are not responding well to universal interventions, and data indicate the need for more supports. Tier 2 has a moderate cost per individual. Examples of Tier 2 interventions include social skills instruction, conflict-resolution lessons, and peer-tutoring programs.

**Tertiary prevention.** The next level is Tier 3. Roughly 5% of students identified through data assessment need more individualized support (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Tier 3 is the most intensive tier and requires the most support, because it provides individualized academic and behavioral interventions and supports for students, such as functional behavior assessments (FBA), behavior intervention plans (BIP), and wraparound services (Carran, Kerins, & Murray, 2005; Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Tier 3 supports include student-centered interventions designed to address specific, chronic problems and yield a higher cost per individual.

The use of data is an essential feature of PBIS and is necessary across all intervention levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and systems (school, district, and state). Data sources used in the PBIS framework can vary. However, the most commonly used reporting method of a behavior incident is an Office Discipline Referral (ODR). ODRs can be defined and then standardized for use at the district or school level, depending on the schoolwide PBIS expectations (Sugai et al., 2000). In AE settings, behavior incident reports are often used as proxy for ODRs because the students' behaviors cause them to leave the classrooms (Gelbar et al., 2015). In-school and out-of-school suspensions (ISS, OSS) data are also recorded. When analyzed, ISS, OSS, and ODR data are often referred to as behavioral data, which can be used to monitor student data across time, location, and setting.

In alternative settings, PBIS has been used effectively to improve behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities, such as a reduction in behavior incidents and a decrease in physical aggression (Simonsen et al., 2010), as well as adherence and social acceptance of the program (e.g., fidelity and social validity; Farkas et al., 2012). The core features of PBIS are still in place, but in AE settings these can be tailored to the context of the environment and student population (Jolivet et al., 2012; Simonsen et al., 2011). Specifically, data at an individual level might include incident reports, points earned under any behavioral systems for positive behavior, direct observations, and individualized student success (Simonsen et al., 2011) and, at a systems level, might take into consideration how many students return to a less restrictive setting (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Data can be used to make ongoing decisions for students. In sum, procedures for collection and use of data are enhanced through the use of the PBIS framework in AE settings.

### Vignettes

Two students who have documented behavioral challenges highlight the need for frameworks of prevention and systems of data collection and transfer. Brian is a 7-year-

old male first-grade student who has been identified at risk for emotional/behavioral challenges as his behavior over the course of his first year in school has escalated from verbal disruption to physical altercations and running out of the classroom. In his previous district, Brian was placed in an AE setting in kindergarten and is currently in the process of being placed into another AE setting in his new district. His behavioral data was not transferred to his new district in the same state, and there are no documented behavioral data except that from Brian's first few months in the first grade.

Beatriz is a 16-year-old high school junior who has been identified for special education supports for EB/D. Beatriz's behavioral challenges have progressively become more apparent, as she has transitioned from internalizing self-injurious behaviors to outward or externalizing aggression towards peers. Beatriz has attended multiple school districts within the same 50-mile radius as her family has moved to various low-income housing during her enrollment as a K-12 student. Beatriz's behavior has resulted in multiple office discipline referrals with many instances of in-school suspension (ISS), and out-of-school suspension (OSS). Although Beatriz has an IEP, without a data-transfer system available across districts, she has experienced more than 10 days of OSS within a year. She has frequently transferred midyear, perpetuating the loss of data and increasing her behavior challenges in the classroom.

## Purpose

### *Statement of research purpose and questions*

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EB/D) or behavioral difficulties who display serious chronic and challenging behavior are frequently educated in alternative education settings (McDaniel et al., 2014). Research on using intervention approaches (e.g., using check and connect; Sinclair et al., 2005) to support individual students with violent behaviors and success for the reduction of behavior using a PBIS approach (e.g., Simonsen, et al., 2010) exists. However, little research exists on the transition of these students to alternative settings and back to their home schools (Kelchner et al., 2017). There has been a call for transitional processes, especially for data transfer, going back to the start of having more students with disabilities in AE settings (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999).

The purpose of this study is to explore the process that schools implementing PBIS use in transferring student data between AE and typical school settings. A survey was developed to determine what systems are in place, or the lack thereof, for tracking students' behavioral data within alternative settings and their sending schools and district. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of AE settings and the students in the district who attend AE schools?
2. What are the district practices for the transfer of all students and for students with EB/D between AE and typical school settings?
3. What are the district practices for behavioral and academic data transfer for all students and for students with EB/D between AE and typical school settings?

## Method

To fully answer the research questions and gain the perspective of a wide variety of educators from various districts, a cross-sectional survey was chosen as the primary means of data collection (Fowler, 2009). As the survey was designed to collect descriptive data on the procedures employed, it is not necessary to validate or test for reliability and/or validity. A survey allows access to a large number of districts to obtain information with a quick turnaround. It also provides an understanding of the systems, or the lack thereof, that districts currently use.

The survey was created using Qualtrics 2018 online survey software. The survey consisted of 33 questions, the first four of which were on district characteristics. Then, participants responded to 29 multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions (see Table 1) based on the transfer of students and data procedures. The survey was distributed through e-mail to district personnel who work with data in school districts in Florida. Electronic distribution required all participants to have access to the Internet to participate.

An introductory e-mail rationale was provided prior to participation. After reading the letter, participants clicked a link to access the survey. Participants were not required to provide any identifying information during the survey. However, they were provided the option to do so if they had any additional follow up comments or questions. All data were stored as deidentified responses on password-protected computers and transmitted over secure university emails. No information that could potentially lead back to participants was collected. The survey was live for participants' responses from December 2016 to March 2017.

## Sample Description

The target audience included district-level administrators and district coordinators actively involved with the Florida Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (FLPBIS) project (see <http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>). There were 87 individual respondents who started the survey, with 15 completing the entire survey with supporting data provided and included in the analysis. Emails were disseminated to 109 recipients, which reached all 56 active PBIS districts of the total 74 school districts in Florida. In most active districts, the survey was sent to at least two district contacts or coordinators (DCs) who share the role, which accounts for the higher number of invitations to participate than the actual number of active PBIS districts. Some of the incomplete surveys may reflect that both the district recipients (DCs) may have started the survey and then only one submitted a completed survey. The 15 full respondents each represented an individual district in Florida and comprised 23% of the active school districts statewide.

## Survey Results

Results from the 33-question statewide survey are presented in the following survey analysis. The analysis reflects the completed surveys from 15 respondents across the state of Florida representing individual districts.

### *District Characteristics*

Respondents answered four optional questions about school district characteristics. Of the 15 included respondents, 10 identified as rural (66.67%), three as suburban (20%), one as urban (6.67%), and one as other (6.67%). The second question asked respondents to report the number of alternative education (AE) settings in their district. One respondent reported they have no in-district AEs; two respondents reported they have one AE; six reported two AEs; one reported three AEs; one reported four AEs; two reported five AEs; one reported eight AEs; and one reported 13 AEs. The third question asked respondents to identify the types of AE settings in their district.

Six options were provided for respondents to identify and percentages of districts who responded having one or more were as follows: one (6.67%) has residential facilities; two (13.33%) have day programs; five (33.33%) have center schools; five (33.33%) have online programs; 13 (86.67%) have alternative programs; and four (26.67%) have other types of AE settings.

The fourth question asked if participants had access to 2015-16 school year (SY) data. Of the 87 respondents, 15 answered yes to this question. Data for SY 2015-16 were to inform the responses given for the next section, thereby creating the 15 respondents included in the analysis.

### *Overall Transition Procedures*

We addressed the procedures for transferring academic and behavioral data when a student exits an AE setting. The results are presented in Table 4. The first set of questions asked about existing protocol for students with and without EB/D when transitioning placements within the same district. Respondents indicated that the placement decision largely depended on the severity or intensity of behavior. There was very little reported difference in transition procedures if the student were identified with EB/D.

Of the four respondents who indicated a difference in the procedures for the transition, all indicated that the difference in protocol was in regard to use of ODR data. One stated that the protocol “depends on if court system is involved; usually yes they go back. Occasionally they go to a more restrictive” setting. Another reported, “Placement is determined by an IEP Team based upon a variety of data. The district team conducts a hearing to determine best placement.” Similarly, another reported, “In cases of severe behavior (e.g., bodily harm, possession with intent, weapon), the receiving school might request a hearing. All available data will be reviewed. This is true for all students, not just those receiving special education services.” Another respondent commented, “Environment IEP determines placement, not ODR data. ODRs are used as evidence to help IEP teams make decisions, but are not the only data collected or used when making this decision.”

The other set of questions asked about the transition protocol of students with and without EB/D to placements outside of the sending or home district. Eight of the respondents (53.33%) indicated there is a system for transferring ODR and academic data to new placements (AE and other) outside of their district. All commented that they

send behavioral and academic information upon request through a new placement setting request. One commented, “When requested by the parent or receiving school, specific student data are sent to the out-of-district placement.”

Similar to their protocol for sending student data, there was no indicated process for receiving behavioral data for new students into their districts other than making a formal request. Of all respondents, one indicated that their district had a record transfer system but only transfers with requests, “FASTER record transfer system. Sent on request from the receiving school.”

### *Behavioral Data Transfer for Students Between AE and Typical School Settings*

**Current systems.** Table 2 provides the percentage of questions about the systems in place for transitioning of behavioral data to and from AE settings. Of the 15 respondents, 100% transition their behavioral data (ODR) from the sending school to the AE setting and back again if the student is transitioned. A variety of systems were used to track the data and the range of responses, including Skyward, Student Pass, PEER, Genesis, FOCUS School Software, ProcessMaker Enterprise (PM2), Mainframe, eSchoolPlus, Infinite Campus, and other district-specific support applications.

A follow up question asked for respondents to provide the protocol used to transfer such behavioral data. Those using Skyward stated, “Skyward data indicate all referrals. Data from one setting can be narrowed by using date ranges.” A respondent who uses Infinite Campus stated, “All student academic/discipline data are entered into our database (Infinite Campus); at the time of student enrollment to the alternative setting, the receiving alternative school obtains access to the ODR.”

Similarly, those who use GENESIS stated, “Genesis/Ideas gives ODR data but must be accessed usually by guidance”, and “GENESIS data are available districtwide, so information about ODRs, suspensions, and discipline are accessible for each student.” Finally, those who use Student Pass commented, “School staff enter data electronically into the Student Pass data system and when the student’s enrollment changes, the data are immediately at the new school site,” and “happens automatically upon enrollment in Alt Ed.”

The next set of behavioral data questions asked specifically about the movement of data procedures of behavioral data for students with EB/D. Ten (66.67%) stated their procedures do not change. Of the five (33.34%) who stated their procedures are different for transitioning to and from sending school to AE and back, four stated their protocol included an IEP meeting to review behavioral data. Two of those indicated that the outcome decision of that meeting is entered into the PEER system.

Similarly, all 15 responses indicated that behavioral data procedures are the same if the student is going to AE or back to their sending school. Four respondents further indicated that the protocol for the transfer of behavioral data does differ for a student with EB/D, much like those who reported using the PEER system. This protocol includes

an IEP meeting and data-based decision making using behavioral and academic data.

**Academic data transfer for students between AE and typical school settings.** Table 3 provides the percentage of questions about the systems in place for transitioning of academic data to and from AE settings. Of the 15 respondents, 100% transition their academic data from the sending school to the AE setting and back again if the student is transitioned. A variety of systems were used to track that data and responses included the use of Skyward, Performance Matters, Genesis, FOCUS, Data Warehouse, Mainframe, eSchoolPlus, Infinite Campus, cumulative records, and other district-specific support applications. Protocols for transferring of academic data were stated as the same as for behavioral tracking data, with the additional comments on the use of Data Warehouse. One respondent indicated:

Data Warehouse is a web-based program that was created and is maintained by employees. Users may review data for individual students and for student groups, such as by class, course, course grades, and skill assessment results, as well as by special user-defined groups.

Another respondent noted, "Data Warehouse contains information regarding teachers, classes and schedules, test scores, aggregate scores and trends, course grades, Progress Monitoring Plans, Professional Learning Communities teaming and collaboration, as well as the ability to give and analyze online assessments."

The next set of behavioral data questions asked about the specific data movement procedures for behavioral data for students with EB/D. Twelve (80%) of respondents stated their procedures do not change. Of the three (20%) who stated their procedures are different for movement to and from sending school to AE and back, all three stated their protocol included an IEP meeting to review behavioral data. One stated, "Students are entered into Skyward, but there is an additional data packet for all students with disabilities, including students with EB/D; an IEP meeting is held and data is documented in PEER." All responses indicated that academic data procedures are the same if the student is going to AE or back to their sending school. Three respondents indicated that the protocol for the transfer of academic data does differ for a student with EB/D. This protocol includes an IEP meeting and data-based decision of behavioral and academic data.

## Discussion

### *Summary of Findings*

The results suggest that there is a lack of consistent procedures and protocols for the transferring of students' behavioral data. Of the 109 survey invitations disseminated, 87 responders attempted or started the survey but were unable to complete it due to the lack of data, accounting for 82% of all invitees. Of all who attempted to take the survey, 15 respondents (18%) completed it. It is important to note that the 15 respondents represented 23% of all

active PBIS school districts in Florida. The inability to answer data survey questions after recruiting additional district personnel for further assistance highlights the lack of a needed data system for tracking challenging students.

The low response rate suggests that more needs to be done to set up a process of data tracking and transferring students between systems. The majority did not complete the survey, suggesting a lack of data required to answer the questions. This finding further highlights the number of districts in Florida that might need to improve their data-tracking systems. When systems are inadequate or nonexistent for tracking student data, districts cannot identify the potential of "data-dumping" occurring within their district. Without a comprehensive system that is readily accessible to interpret and allow for proactive intervention across and within settings, addressing student concerns or potential system issues that may impact student success may be missed entirely. Many districts cannot identify that data-dumping may be an issue if there is no data to access. A system cannot be fixed when the area that may be broken cannot be identified.

The information collected from the results of the 15 respondents is critical to inform practice. The respondents indicated that when a data-tracking system is in place, data are successfully transitioned to and from LREs within district placements, and data are subsequently used to make decisions on LRE placement. Additionally, 100% of all 15 respondents reported that the sending of behavioral and academic data to the outside district placements occurred when formally requested. If not requested, the new out-of-district placement will be unaware of suspension days already accrued within a given school year. Students with EB/D and academic deficits might be at risk for experiencing loss of instructional time as well as exceeding the maximum of 10 days allowed under IDEA due to the lack of student information transferred.

In the end, the results of this survey suggest that the needs of students with EB/D are not being met due to a lack of a data system and transfer of data. In turn, students with EB/D are at risk for lacking protection by federal law under IDEA when the data transfer fails. The results highlight the lack of consistent protocol and procedures for behavioral data-tracking for students with the most challenging behaviors, therefore suggesting that the data-dumping phenomenon is occurring in Florida. Further, the results underscore the need for administrators to understand the importance of having such behavior data-tracking systems in place to provide effective and efficient education to their students and to maintain overall accountability.

### *Exemplars Within the Vignette*

McDaniel et al. (2014) suggested that PBIS integration in AE settings should include staff consensus, aligning PBIS with existing behavior management systems and the need for heightened awareness for school reform. These authors recommended the following to AE settings and their districts:

- (1) Capitalize on any state-level PBIS support available,
- (2) Invest in the use of data-based decision-making,

- (3) Allow current behavior patterns to guide practices at both the school and district levels for the availability of transportable data as students transition across settings (Simonsen et al., 2010), and
- (4) Adopt practices focused on sustainability for long-term effects.

A major area of focus of these suggestions is based on data and examining the current practices around data being imperative to developing a comprehensive framework.

The large percentage of respondents who did not complete the survey because they did not have the necessary data further fuels the need to have a data-tracking system in place that supports students across LRE settings. School systems are engaging in a potential disservice to students with EB/D by not proactively allowing for the transportation of behavioral and academic data. The results of this study confirm the critical need for a consistent behavioral tracking system as a part of the data collection and data-based decision-making process for students with behavioral challenges.

Also highlighted through the respondents of this study is the need for data tracking across settings, even within an existing PBIS or multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework. While it is commendable that the data transfer occurs within district walls, states must consider how they can better meet the needs of their students by providing access to data that is transportable across their respective state and/or geographic region.

Florida has engaged in historical and widespread implementation with fidelity of PBIS, which has garnered the state a reputation both nationally and internationally as an exemplary state highly supportive of PBIS practices. One would assume that data-based decision-making across the majority of the state's districts was evident and an integral part of the PBIS process. However, this study suggests that despite the extensive PBIS activity across a state that has committed to the multitiered approach to behavior and has developed a strong statewide infrastructure, the majority of its districts are still lacking data-tracking ability. This highlights the need for further training and technical assistance at the state, district, and school levels and also magnifies the need for state leadership in recommending that districts establish comprehensive data systems that allow for student decisions to be readily made. For states and districts that do not have an established statewide PBIS project, data sharing will be even more difficult to establish without local support.

Below are two model demonstrations of alternative education settings for the FLPBIS MTSS Project that are realizing positive student outcomes. Both schools use the RtI:B (Response to Intervention: Behavior) Database (FLPBIS: MTSS Project, 2011). The RtI:B Database is a free online data system for Florida schools where faculty and staff record classroom referrals, ODRs, teacher ratings of student behavior, and/or direct measures of student behavior. The database provides user-friendly graphs to assist with data-based decision-making across school and student measures. The behavioral data presented below has

been entered into the RtI:B Database and exemplifies how districts can use this free system to track students as they transition placements within a district. The names of the schools have been changed to maintain anonymity.

As examples of ideal data transfers, the authors use Brian and Beatriz. Sam Daniels School (SDS) is an AE independent setting located in the panhandle or northwestern part of Florida in a medium-sized rural district. The SDS mission is to provide a safe learning environment that promotes each child's social/emotional and academic development through PBIS and research-based practices. All students are provided opportunities to develop and achieve according to their own strengths in preparation for integration to the least restrictive educational and social setting. PBIS expectations are to show respect, to be safe, and to be a problem-solver.

SDS serves 119 students in kindergarten through Grade 5 with 97% of students receiving special education services, 92% receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and an average daily attendance of 92%. SDS's 2015-16 data reported 571 ODRs per 100 students and their core effectiveness indicated 28% of students responding positively at Tier 1, 42% at Tier 2, and 30% at Tier 3. They scored 95% on the Benchmarks of Quality (Kincaid, Childs & George, 2005) implementation fidelity measure. Outcome data indicated both a decrease of 14% in ODRs and a 20% decrease in out-of-school suspensions from the previous year. However, there was a 78% increase in ISS due to a school policy of recording one-hour lunch detentions as ISS.

Brian was placed at SDS, where his behavioral needs were met with intensive supports, as the school has a PBIS coach or facilitator who works with the staffing specialist and guidance counselor to identify new students' needs quickly. Brian was identified as a new student and the PBIS Team immediately began collecting and monitoring his and other students' data daily. As Brian's data are recorded and monitored, his needs are problem-solved during the weekly PBIS meetings with the school's Crisis Intervention Team that provides extra support for students whose behavior indicates a need for more intensive supports. The team uses a push-in approach with Brian and other students to offer extra support in the classroom to attempt to deescalate his behaviors and keep him in class. Through consistent data collection and PBIS framework, Brian is able to experience behavioral success at SDS and is actively working with his sending school on a transition plan for his second-grade year.

Patton Academy (PA) is an alternative center located in the southern part of Florida in a very large urban district. The PA vision is to prepare students to effectively function in a culturally diverse and complex society. The school's mission is to help students achieve emotional, social, civic, and academic growth with the following five core values: responsibility, respect, trust, caring, and family. PBIS expectations are that students get in the game, respect self and others, own choices, work hard, and learn to lead. PA serves 74 students Grades 6-12 with 36% of students receiving special education services, 98% on free and reduced-price lunch, and an average daily attendance of 75%. The school's 2015-16 data reported 403 ODRs per 100

students, and students' core effectiveness indicated 47% of students responding positively at Tier 1, 44% at Tier 2, and 9% at Tier 3. They scored 82% on the Benchmarks of Quality (Kincaid et al., 2005) implementation fidelity measure. Their outcome data indicated both a decrease of 7% in ODRs and a decrease of 96% in out-of-school suspensions from the previous year. Due to PA's commitment to keep students in school, there was a 75% increase in ISS (yet this accounted for only a difference of six additional ISSs from the previous year) due to a district-imposed policy change.

Beatriz was placed at PA as a last resort effort, as her behavior had begun to be a threat to other students at her high school. Upon transition to PA, Beatriz had a behavior education plan established, targeting her severe internalizing self and other-harming behavior which had resulted in her exclusion from her traditional school setting. In addition, Beatriz's behavioral and academic data were transferred to PA and reviewed as a part of the enrollment process. As is procedure for PA, when the PBIS Team meets students—such as Beatriz—who have shown poor responses to Tier 2, interventions are identified and discussed. Although Beatriz recently transitioned to PA, the team decided that more intensive supports were needed at PA. Beatriz moved to more intensive Tier 3 supports during which time she received individual interventions on a weekly basis. Since Beatriz is a student identified with EB/D, an IEP team meeting occurred prior to her transition and will continue to meet frequently to monitor her progress and interventions during her time at PA. However, at PA, if a student without a disability does not respond to Tier 3 interventions and is being considered for special education services with a need to develop an individualized education plan, a checklist is completed to ensure that all Tier 3 components were implemented with fidelity.

### Limitations

The results from this study sought to extend the literature on data collection and data transferring protocols for students with EB/D. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge limitations. First, although we had 87 individual respondents attempt the survey, 15 completed all questions allowing for a full analysis of their data. While this percentage represented 23% of Florida's school districts, the small number of respondents included in the analysis is limiting in generalizing results. Second, the survey developed from a need to understand the protocols and current practices of data transfer and was not psychometrically tested (i.e., the survey was not validated). We believe the results provide insight into the current practices of behavioral and academic data collection and transfer protocols and highlight the need for systems to reconsider how to best support students with EB/D. Therefore, the potential insights outweigh the limitations.

### Implications for Future Research and Practice

As the outcome data from this study and the exemplars provided, there is a need for a standardized or statewide behavioral data system that would allow for the fluid transitioning of students' behavioral data to and from as well

as within and outside of district settings. With the myriad of data-tracking systems seemingly inconsistent across the small sample of schools that had the data to complete the survey, there is the possibility that data is being lost in transition. Future technical assistance and/or professional development on such data-tracking systems is paramount in reversing this trend. Researchers should expand on this study to hone in on similarities of districts who have implemented successful data-tracking systems. The successes with such data-tracking systems can shape the future implications of district systems-level and school-level protocols to increase the successful transition of important behavioral and academic data to and from various educational settings.

Additional implications for practice are the possible use of the RtI:B Database as a system for tracking and moving ODRs. For schools outside of Florida, a similar database available is School-wide Information System (SWIS; May et al., 2002). Regardless of the tracker, until there is a universal tracking database, districts and schools can implement the use of a data tracker that will aid in the transfer of important behavioral data. Support for the implementation of and consistent prioritizing of the use of such behavioral data-tracking systems lies with the school and district administration, making the role of the administrator of utmost importance in understanding and mediating the need for data collection and to avoid the data-dumping model.

### Conclusion

There is a clear need to support the successful academic and behavioral outcomes of all students. Behavioral difficulties are a clear challenge for such success, often leading to the transiting of some of the most challenging students (e.g., often those with EB/D) to alternative or other education settings. Implementing and using effective tracking and monitoring procedures for academic and behavioral data are very important. This study sought to add to the research on the processes and protocols for the transitioning of student data to alternative settings and back to their sending schools or to their next placement and the implications on district and/or state systems in supporting students.

This study surveyed active PBIS districts across Florida to describe data-tracking systems in place, or the lack thereof, for students' behavioral data within alternative settings and their sending districts. Results of the 15 respondents analyzed showed that when a data-tracking system is in place, data are successfully transitioned to and from LREs within district placements and data are subsequently used to make decisions on LRE placement. Of the 82% of respondents who could not answer the entire survey, all indicated that they did not have the needed data. This might be the most telling statistic of the study, reiterating the need to have a district, if not state and universal, data-tracking system in place and prioritizing the need of implementation of such a tracking system by administrators. The success of our most challenging students relies on the tracking and use of their data, not on the erasing of it.

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