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Leading Schools Under Pressure: Considerations of Systems Theory and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support Efforts During School Actions

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Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) for the staff of one middle school that implemented SWPBIS during a districtwide strike and school merger. The researchers developed a qualitative case study based on focus groups and interviews with the staff who remained at the school following the merger. Analysis focuses on the nuances of supporting a school implementing SWPBIS during a season of anxiety-producing events. Systems theory is used both to identify the possible benefits of implementing SWPBIS during challenging seasons and to describe nuances for coaching schools during the SWPBIS process. Results indicate that SWPBIS implementation may provide much-needed support for staff during times of anxiety. Additionally, the findings suggest that systems theory components should be considered to ensure more effective implementation to strengthen a school community during seasons of high stress.

Key Words: school community, schoolwide positive behavior support, systems theory, coaching, school closures, school mergers, staff, co-location, stress

Introduction and Literature Review

Schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) is a whole-school approach to preventing problem behavior and providing

increasingly intensive supports based on students' needs. While SWPBIS is an evidence-based practice, implementation can be challenging in urban environments (Bohanon et al., 2012; Nese et al., 2016). The school that is the subject of this article is in an urban setting and was implementing SWPBIS. It had recently experienced several externally driven, anxiety-producing stressors including a 10-day school strike and a co-location and merger with another school. This present study focuses on supporting a middle school that is implementing SWPBIS and discusses the potential value of implementing SWPBIS for school staff during times of stress. The purpose of this article is to describe the lessons learned from the implementation of SWPBIS in this school setting.

One way that leaders can create a sense of community is through implementation of schoolwide approaches. By providing staff, students, and families with common schoolwide events (e.g., instructional strategies or common language), leaders can create common experiences for all members of the school community (Redding, 2001). These common experiences, similar to what was witnessed a generation ago in one-room schoolhouses, provide opportunities to create common associations. These associations in turn encourage the members of the school community to develop trust and to behave in ways that improve the common good of the group (Redding, 2001).

School staff are part of an economy of social capital comprised of the expectations, norms, and trust that develop between people who work together based on a set of common values (Coleman, 1987). Effective education leaders also enhance a sense of school community by identifying the alterable variables that help students, staff, and families reach a shared set of corporately specified outcomes, including academic, behavioral, and social/emotional (Redding, 2001). Having a universal or schoolwide approach calls on the school staff to set clear expectations for how everyone should behave in the school environment. Establishing clear schoolwide expectations leads to clarity of principles and objectives for a system that can aid in guiding an individual's work (Meyer, 1982), including teachers and administrators. One such system for schoolwide processes is SWPBIS.

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

SWPBIS is an evidenced-based approach that has led to improved academic and behavioral outcomes (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011). Over 20,000 schools have adopted it across the United States (Horner et al., 2014). The SWPBIS approach includes interventions and organizational structures aimed at improving the overall social and learning climate of the school setting. It also includes tiers of support that address universal, group level, and individualized interventions (Sugai et al., 2010). Teachers who have implemented components of SWPBIS

have seen decreases in their emotional exhaustion and have displayed higher teaching efficacy (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013).

Significant reductions in disciplinary problems have been related to increased teaching behavioral expectations, acknowledgement of student performance, and implementation of consistent policies based on a continuum of responses for problem behavior (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013). Studies have found that SWPBIS is effective for improving academic and behavioral outcomes (Nocera, Whitbread, Nocera, & Bristol, 2014). Large-scale studies have evaluated the effectiveness of SWPBIS. However, fewer studies have examined the validity of SWPBIS approaches when applied to specific target populations (Stuart, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2014). Large urban settings provide unique implementation nuances that reformers should consider (Bohanon et al., 2012). Further, few studies consider SWPBIS implementation within the contexts of strikes, school closures, and co-locations—all of which can have a negative impact on staff morale.

Strikes, School Closures, Co-Location, and Morale

This section provides a brief overview of the external factors related to stressors for school staff during collective bargaining and school mergers. It also provides an explanation of the effect of school climate on morale, which can affect simultaneous implementation of SWPBIS or other improvement plans. These situations may increase or decrease the level of anxiety among district staff, school administrators, and school staff.

Collective Bargaining

In many states, collective bargaining is an important part of the professional process for teachers and staff. Teachers' unions in these states negotiate contracts for all of their constituents within a particular school district. Some research exists on the effects of collective bargaining on teachers and students, inclusive of strikes (Eberts, 1984; Lindy, 2011; Zwerling, 2008). Collective bargaining in the present study involved the contractual negotiation between a large urban district and members of the local teachers' union. Issues of duties, staff responsibilities, evaluation of teachers, and tenure comprised the core of these deliberations. As a component of the collective bargaining process, all instructional members in the present study participated in a 10-day strike at the beginning of the school year. The possibility of school mergers, including closures and co-location, was an ongoing issue impacting the bargaining process at the time the study was conducted.

School Closures and Co-Location

School closures can sometimes involve co-location, that is, the combining of school staff from multiple buildings into one physical setting, thus condensing

operations. Despite sharing the same building (including the cafeteria, library, etc.), schools retain separate budgets, administration, and teaching staff. Typically, co-locations are the result of school closures and decreasing enrollments in urban settings. In these cases, districts have schools with low student enrollments and high building maintenance costs. One solution which addresses both problems is the consolidation of schools from multiple locations into one site. As schools are centers of social interaction, public health, and recreation (Lytton, 2011), school closures and mergers can have devastating impacts on the financial, material, and human resources within a school community (McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). Closure and merger situations may thus place stress on people, leading to emotional reactions rather than rational thought. This can be particularly true when school actions affect school staffs' incomes and job security.

Climate and Morale

School climate is positively correlated with a mutual commitment between students and teachers to work together toward common goals such as improved academic outcomes or the creation of a more engaging learning environment (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). When both students and staff are supportive of the learning process, their reciprocal commitment to the teaching arrangement is mutually encouraging. Alternately, the lack of mutual reinforcement in terms of commitment can negatively and cyclically impact engagement between students and teachers (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). The level of positive commitment can be influenced by respect, relevance of instruction for students, support, expectations, and influence (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). When teachers are committed to the education process, their commitment prompts them to look for more effective teaching methods to address situations where students engage in problematic or "unmotivated" behavior (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011).

One approach to improving student and teacher interactions can be administered at the schoolwide level. As we have seen, schoolwide approaches—including those related to behavior—can create common experiences for all members of the community (e.g., staff, students). These approaches can include developing common standards, curriculum, and expectations, which can in turn articulate a school's unique character. Common schoolwide approaches can include policies (e.g., all staff teach behavioral expectations, clarifying behaviors that are managed in the office and classroom), instructional strategies (e.g., all teachers are instructed on how to teach expectations, acknowledge students, and redirect problem student behavior), and curricular threads (e.g., all students are taught common expectations for behavior based on a matrix

of expectations and locations). Schoolwide programs that address these areas can lead to a sense of connection to the school community's educational values for all students and staff (Redding, 2001). Anxiety-producing events such as school strikes and co-locations may have a negative impact on staff morale. It can be impossible to prevent the factors that cause the stress; however, it may be possible to address the staff's anxiety produced by such events. Agents charged with supporting the setting might consider how staff anxiety could be addressed by assessing the school as a system, focusing on common goals, and providing supportive coaching.

Systems Considerations

Human systems involve relationships with continuously operating forces and counterforces (Bowen, 1976; Noone & Papero, 2015). Interactions within a system implementing SWPBIS during a season of anxiety-producing events may be driven by feeling rather than thinking. Regrettably, many systems crises cannot be resolved immediately; they must instead be managed until they are worked through (Friedman, 2007). When implementing SWPBIS during seasons of anxiety, members of the system may begin to collectively give up hope that they have any control in improving or maintaining their school climate.

When dealing with a school implementing SWPBIS under pressure, it is important to identify those things that trigger the stress that drives group members' behavior (Hall, 2006). These factors can push individuals towards negative collective thinking. As in families, organizations in chronic states of anxiety may exhibit tendencies toward collective thinking and acting, for better or for worse. This interdependent response may temporarily increase the comfort level of the group by heightening the sense of membership for staff (Bowen, 1976). For example, two staff members may be drawn together to talk about a school or district administrator who seems to be creating anxiety for the staff. In this event, the two individuals in the relationship find a temporary resolution for their anxiety by focusing on another person (e.g., "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"). Unfortunately, resolving personal tension by focusing on another person does not lead to sustained change (Friedman, 2007).

When enough negative triads occur in a school, the staff may begin to establish a group thinking process that focuses on people problems rather than on issues (Hall, 2006). Crises such as school co-locations may increase the likelihood that this kind of group thinking will occur. Further, when individuals are pushed toward group thinking, they tend to focus on specific details of an issue and lose sight of the larger causes of the problem. Rather than taking individual ownership of a problem, individuals can experience increased anxiety and begin to blame others or to ignore the real issues under discussion (Papero,

1990). People who support schools implementing SWPBIS or other school-wide initiatives may need to take time both initially and throughout the event to explore the real pressures in the setting that are causing anxiety for staff (Fixsen, Blase, Horner, & Sugai, 2009).

As anxiety increases, people are sometimes unable to distinguish their own beliefs and preferences from those of others (Bowen, 1976; Noone & Papero, 2015). As staff become unsure of their own beliefs, it can become more difficult to redirect them from concerns with school and district administration to shared problems within their own school. A lack of clarity with regard to personal position causes individuals in this scenario to become more susceptible to the influence of others within their environment. However, school staff members can remain more responsible for their decision making by focusing corporately on the overall functioning and goals of the team (McCain, 1982).

Using data like those included in the SWPBIS system can also help staff determine whether they are acting upon—or reacting to—problems in schools. For example, staff reactions may be based on tradition-directed approaches (e.g., how we have always operated), inner-directed approaches (e.g., what I believe), or outer-directed approaches (e.g., what others expect; Redding, 2001). Reviewing data such as patterns in office discipline referrals or other school climate issues provide a mechanism for staff to take an objective view of the circumstances of their setting.

Common Goals

Focusing on a common goal for a school implementing SWPBIS under pressure instead of identifying a shared enemy has the potential to create more effective interactions between members of the system. For example, relationships based on common goals might provide a more stable foundation that would allow individuals and organizations to work together. Hall (2006) has suggested that focusing on common goals, like improving school climate, enables individuals to enhance their functioning powers by decreasing emotion-based responses and centering their efforts on problem solving. The key to guiding schools during times of anxiety is to allow principles, rather than emotional responses, to drive actions (Hall, 2006). The SWPBIS process provides a mechanism for schools to focus on common goals rather than spending energy blaming others. SWPBIS is based on a set of principles of behavior that can guide staff towards improved climate goals (Kincaid et al., 2016). Further, Gilbert (1992) has suggested that leaders are more effective when the consideration of principles over immediate personal reactions guides them. Coaches may be needed to help staff focus on goals and to help support schools, not only in implementing SWPBIS, but also in managing the staff's anxiety.

Coaching

The quality of the implementation of an intervention is dependent on the effective support systems surrounding the approach. This support can include staff training along with coaching through consultation and supervision as staff move through successive stages of implementation (Goense, Boendermaker, & van Yperen, 2016; Simpson, 2009). Coaching within organizations can take at least two forms, among them external and internal coaching. External coaches are individuals connected with a school setting who lead participants through a theoretical process or blueprint. Internal coaches are preexisting staff or community members who are given the time, resources, and authority to lead their fellow team members through an implementation process such as SWPBIS. Although systems theory applies to both roles, this article focuses on the external coaching approach.

Individuals can refrain from operating based on emotions when they consciously observe and adjust automatic participation in surrounding events (Noone & Papero, 2015). The goal of coaching, then, is to encourage at least one person (preferably more) within the organization to observe the behavior of the system and to control reactions from the inside. Someone who can manage responses to anxiety can influence the larger system (Kerr, 1982; Noone & Papero, 2015). Motivated members of a school staff can learn to control their own responsiveness and therefore can influence the entire system (Noone & Papero, 2015). Regrettably, changes such as school mergers can produce anxiety for staff. The resultant anxiety can harmfully redirect focus from the school's collective goals toward the group members' own personal anxieties.

Considering and exploiting the interplay between emotions and intellect is a potentially valuable component of helping staff develop an SWPBIS approach that supports and balances individuals in relation to the group. In a systems approach, a coach's own consistently low-key presence can help individuals manage their own anxiety. This calm approach helps the coached staff members to learn to manage their own reactivity to others (Bowen, 1976). Although coaches cannot operate completely outside of the system, they should remain in contact with the group while refraining from participating in its general anxiety (Papero, 2015). Rather than avoid the school during times of anxiety, external coaches can stay connected while observing their own reactions to the situation as objectively as possible (Butler, 2015).

Effective coaching within a systems model encourages responsible functioning on the part of those being coached (Sobel, 1982). Responsible functioning of individuals occurs when members of the system are aided in balancing their own emotional responsiveness with an intellectual understanding of their situation (Papero, 2015). The coach teaches members of the system to observe their

own reactions and to avoid participation in unproductive content discussions that can increase levels of disturbance and tension. As we have seen, coaches supporting schools on SWPBIS implementation can direct the staff towards data rather than people or specific events. To this end, Gilbert (1992) has suggested that the most functional relationships are those characterized by open communication, equity in positions, and the emotional separation of partners.

In order to encourage personal responsibility, invite open discussion, and hear private concerns, a coach must stay in personal contact with the most divergent groups within a system. This allows the coach to clearly map the interpersonal connections and relationship patterns existing between community members (Bowen, 1976). However, a primary task of the coach is to manage one's own personal anxiety levels (Papero, 2015) and to provide a calm presence within the system (Friedman, 2007).

Methods

The research question for the present study asked if there were connections between districtwide collective bargaining, co-location processes, staff morale, and coaching staff during SWPBIS implementation. In order to describe a real-life context, the case study for this project was a descriptive case in which SWPBIS implementation occurred (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). A holistic single case study approach (i.e., only one case is included) was used to describe the unique factors within a building where staff were implementing SWPBIS during both a districtwide strike and a co-location with another school. Purposeful sampling was used for the selection of the school that participated in this present study. Specifically, single significant case sampling (i.e., the case includes important features related to the research question; Patton, 2014) was used to identify a school implementing a schoolwide approach to behavior support and in which a significant change (or changes) occurred. The changes at the school under study included: combining schools from other settings (i.e., co-location), downsizing, and a prolonged staff strike. While the school in this study was not officially closed, it was targeted to have an enrollment decrease from 480 to 180 students. The school was co-located with a magnet school slated to grow from 250 students to over 800 students within the next few years.

The scope of this research project covered a three-year period. The school had been implementing SWPBIS for one year without experiencing significant external events. During year two of SWPBIS implementation, they faced a districtwide 10-day strike. This same year, the staff was also informed of an upcoming co-location with another school in the district. The actual co-location with the new school occurred during year three of SWPBIS implementation.

This middle school was situated in a large urban district in the Midwestern United States. The majority of the students were Hispanic (87%) and came from low socioeconomic status households (98%). Additionally, a large percentage of students had individualized education plans (19%). Approximately half of the students resided in the local neighborhood, while the other half were bused from other communities within the city. During the first year of the study, there were approximately 20 teachers at the school. This number decreased to approximately 10 by the end of the third year. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with school staff members who remained after the downsizing resulting from school actions, including co-location and changes in attendance boundaries during year three of the study.

Critical case sampling (i.e., selecting participants who had the most information and greatest impact on the development of knowledge; Patton, 2014) was used to select participants within the school. Participants included faculty who were employed at the school during year two of the SWPBIS implementation and were still working at the school during year three. The staff and administration had selected SWPBIS based on their priority to prevent student problem behavior in their setting. SWPBIS implementation predated the school actions, including the merger and school strike. Additionally, key informant sampling (i.e., selecting people who are most knowledgeable about the setting; Patton, 2014) was used to identify two school administrators who had been employed at the school during all three years.

Following human subjects approval, two school administrators and eight teachers agreed to participate in the study. The staff was balanced in terms of the members' number of years of teaching experience, including those years during which each member had worked at the school. Four participants had been teaching in their current role for at least seven years, three had been in their role between two and six years, and three had been in their role one year or less. In terms of years at the school, four participants had worked at the school for seven years or more, four had been at the school between two and six years, and two had been at the school for one year or less. The time that each participant had spent at the school was important for several reasons. First, several of the interviewed school staff had arrived only five years prior due to another school merger with the case school. Second, some research suggests that after seven years or more of teaching, the perspectives of teachers can be set in terms of their approaches to students (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988).

Data Collection

In the hope that faculty would be more likely to speak in the absence of supervising individuals, interviews with administrators were held separately from

faculty focus groups. Both the focus groups and administrator interviews were conducted in a school setting by the lead researcher and a student assistant. The focus groups lasted approximately 1.5 hours, and the individual interviews were each one hour in length; all were audiorecorded. The focus groups occurred across two sessions. The first included members of the leadership team who were responsible for guiding the SWPBIS program. The second group included teachers who were not necessarily a part of the core team but were implementing SWPBIS at some level in their classrooms. The questions used to guide both the individual administrator interviews and focus groups followed Krueger and Casey's (2014) suggestions regarding content and format. Focus groups occurred during the late fall and early spring of year three of the study. Each administrator was interviewed separately using similar questions as those used in the focus groups. At the end of the interviews and focus groups, participants were provided with a packet that included the questions used during the interview or focus group sessions and a self-addressed stamped envelope to give them the opportunity to provide additional comments.

The audio files were transcribed and analyzed using a multistage process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, a broad set of descriptive codes were developed based on a review of the literature and an initial analysis of the transcriptions from the focus groups. Themes were then constructed in cases where two or more data points supported a construct. These constructs were the foundation for the development of themes in the data. The procedure involved four operations: unitizing (i.e., identifying small "chunks" of information that could stand alone), categorizing, filling in patterns, and case study construction (Skrtic, 1985). Identified units of information were coded using NVivo software. The organizational scheme was formulated, reformulated, and subdivided into categories using a constant comparative model (i.e., initial development and then revisiting themes based on new data; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The case study report served as a mechanism for further analysis and synthesis of data during the writing process, as well as a mechanism for reporting the data that were collected, analyzed, and synthesized (Skrtic, 1985).

Trustworthiness that the findings were sound and grounded in the data included credibility. Credibility is an analog to internal validity or truth-value in quantitative research. In accordance with the previously mentioned standards, the researchers used three key features to establish trustworthiness for this study: (a) triangulation of all themes (i.e., support from two or more data sources), (b) member-checking the final case study with participants for feedback and modification as necessary, and (c) an external audit of the case report. All participants were provided with a copy of the final case report as a member check. The purpose was to ensure that the report was grounded in the

participants' data. All participants were provided with a copy of the report and asked to respond within two weeks; one participant followed up with feedback. The feedback stated that the participant viewed the case report as an accurate reflection of the situation.

To address transferability, how well the knowledge generated in this study could transfer to similar settings, the researchers provided a detailed description of the setting in the case report. The researchers cannot deduce the nature of all possible settings *a priori*. Therefore, the thick description of the setting and participants allows readers to determine if the findings transfer to their own settings. To address dependability (i.e., how well the researchers conducted the study over time), the two primary researchers independently coded transcripts and met to discuss emerging themes. Additionally, 25% of codes from all transcripts were reviewed independently and at random by each researcher to identify any possible discrepancies in coding. Three researchers revised the codebook based on group discussion of points in which individual differences occurred. The use of a team of coders was an attempt to address issues of self-reflexivity—that is, how the researchers' experiences and biases impacted interpretation and knowledge development.

Since the lead researcher was also the coach in the processes of implementation of SWPBIS, there was concern regarding the confirmability, an analog to objectivity or neutrality, of the case report data. To address this concern, an external audit using an audit trail was conducted by a researcher, independent of the project, who was trained on qualitative methods. The audit report confirmed the case report was grounded in the data using triangulation and did not reflect undue bias on the part of the researchers. Furthermore, the case report reflects both support and concerns around the implementation of SWPBIS, further indicating a lack of bias in reporting (Skrtic, 1985).

The researchers were also concerned with the level of SWPBIS implementation during the study. As outlined above, the staff had been implementing SWPBIS for at least two years prior to the final year in which the interviews occurred. The Schoolwide Evaluation Tool (SET) was used to determine the overall level of practice fidelity related to developing a positive school climate (Horner et al., 2004). A trained observer using a standardized protocol collected the SET data. The date range for the SET data include years one and two of the study. The data indicated that the school lacked structure in key prevention components during baseline, but improved by year two in the areas of (a) communicating expectations to students (from 20% to 100%), (b) having a clear system in place for addressing problem behavior (from 38% to 63%), (c) using data for decision making (from 38% to 100%), and (d) having a team in place to prevent problem behavior in the school (from 63% to 81%).

One of the lowest areas of implementation was having a clear system in place for addressing problem behavior. This marker includes a discrepancy between administration and staff regarding which party is responsible for addressing certain types of discipline violations. It also identified the level of common experience for the staff as it related to a key disciplinary policy (Redding, 2001).

A key to overall fidelity is full implementation. That is, when a school attains 80% of the staff teaching expectations and an overall score of 80%, the school has reached full power for the intervention and should expect maximum improvement in overall climate (Horner et al., 2004). The overall implementation score in the case study school changed from a baseline score of 59% to 92%, indicating that the school moved to full implementation status during year two. Unfortunately, due to the decrease in SWPBIS team members and subsequent issues with co-location, data on SWPBIS fidelity were not available during year three. Because members of the leadership team transitioned out of the school, outcome data (e.g., office discipline referrals) were not collected in a reliable way that would allow for reporting during the final year of the project.

Results: Experiences Related to Staff Morale

The purpose of this study was to identify the connections between collective bargaining, co-location processes, staff morale, and coaching the staff on SWPBIS implementation.

Experiences With School Actions and Staff Morale

There was a sense on the part of the staff that the district's decision to merge their school was made behind closed doors. The information the staff did receive appears to have been hearsay, and thus did not prove particularly accurate or helpful.

Attribution for the School Actions and Staff Morale

One rumored theory behind the school actions was that the district was attempting to eliminate teachers with higher salaries (i.e., more experienced teachers) instead of addressing student needs. The idea of removing tenured teachers was connected to the district's expansion of the new teacher evaluation system. Another perceived reason for the co-location was that the district was expanding the magnet school system. By closing schools that were considered to be underperforming, the district would have more opportunities to reopen magnet schools in their stead.

Feelings About the Co-Location and Staff Morale

One result of the co-location was loss of access to the school's gym. One participant shared, "I'm very angry my kids don't have gym…[as a result] we've eliminated our common prep." Teachers had previously used student gym time as a common planning period with colleagues. The deficit of planning time appeared to have contributed to staff frustration. Further, staff were incensed by the seeming disparities between the two schools' access to resources. Finally, many of the newer teachers who used effective instructional practices were dismissed from the school. This led to a sense that the remaining staff were not as effective in terms of discipline and instruction.

SWPBIS and Efficacy

As a group, participants were undecided if SWPBIS as an intervention supported their ability to be efficacious during the strike and co-location. Staff reported that SWPBIS gave them "a common focus" and "a common structure." As one staff member noted, "[SWPBIS is] something the teachers have in common that they're working toward." Staff was more likely to attempt practices when they believed that their peers were there to help and also embraced the SWPBIS initiatives. Having access to an external coach through the SWPBIS process was important to staff as well, but support from colleagues seemed to matter most.

Team-Level Efficacy

SWPBIS potentially improved team-level goal setting. Participants stated SWPBIS was helpful during their transition period. For example, one teacher stated, "we just kept focusing on positive interventions…the culture that was created through this initiative kept them [staff] more positive." Furthermore, staff who continued to improve their adherence to SWPBIS felt more confident about their work. Staff also thought that SWPBIS would be helpful to students who were moving to other schools by teaching those youth to anticipate and recognize expected environmental behaviors, whether explicit or implicit.

Administrators and Teacher Roles

Some teachers felt that administrators had negative impacts on staff efforts to work toward buy-in for schoolwide policies. Many teachers reported similar problems, including administrators walking students back to class without reprimanding them for problematic behavior and administrators publicly correcting teachers in front of students for not following procedures. Many teachers expressed concerns about the administration's lack of follow-up, particularly after they had attempted to deal with student behavior. Teachers also felt that the administration's actions encouraged inappropriate student behavior.

In addition, some teachers felt they had not been appropriately trained to deal with some student behaviors. As one teacher shared, "I'm not trained as a counselor; I'm not trained as a police officer…that's not my job." Some teachers did not see classroom management as their responsibility. Lack of consistency and implementation of SWPBIS in nonstructured settings also contributed to confusion about how to address problem behavior. As a result, internal disagreements and blaming began to occur over time. One critical impact on staff efforts to implement SWPBIS was the decreased size of the SWPBIS committee resulting from a reduction in staff size. As time progressed, there was no longer a critical mass of core team members available to manage the innovation effort.

Intensive Supports for Adults

Like students, many adults in the school appeared to need intensive supports. Some of the teacher participants discussed necessary intensive interventions for adults, including reminding teachers about the need to reteach expectations to students, reteaching teachers to use different tools to prepare students for transitions, and reminding teachers why they were expected to perform some SWPBIS techniques and protocols. Teachers felt that administrators could at times benefit from additional training, particularly with respect to avoiding correcting colleagues in front of others.

SWPBIS and Morale

One administrator stated that the staff benefited from keeping "the structure and supports in place like our…[SWPBIS]." Likewise, some staff found the general SWPBIS guidelines to be beneficial. For example, one staff member noted that "in particular, the calmness, the expectations, the restating…I think is very effective." The SWPBIS guidelines also prompted staff to look for opportunities to acknowledge positive student behavior. Public acknowledgment of teacher efforts by administration and peers represented a positive step toward maintaining a constructive climate for staff.

Structure and Morale

Increased structure was an important goal for staff amidst their changing environment. The idea of structure (e.g., a plan) was connected to a desire to improve outcomes for students. The teachers also discussed the importance of having "at least some unified programs in place…[to] bring teachers together… to at least keep morale up for the students' benefit." Therefore, the concepts of support and benefit were connected, in that they were working toward a common approach (i.e., SWPBIS) and outcome (e.g., student behavior).

The staff believed there were not enough SWPBIS practices in place to maintain a structure for the students during transitions between settings within the school (e.g., changing from one class to another). They sensed that the administration should have required a SWPBIS plan from the beginning of the co-location to support students with the most significant needs. This SWPBIS plan would include addressing difficulties in hallway settings and supporting students with more intense behavioral issues.

Morale and Data

A subtheme related to morale included data. For some, data were helpful in encouraging daily work and improving their overall support efforts. For example, several staff reported that receiving feedback about their SWPBIS practices based on objective outside observations (i.e., SET) was useful for improving their practices and setting new priorities. Feedback provided by the external SWPBIS coach was also a factor in encouraging positive independent observations of the school's SWPBIS implementation efforts. One participant identified which characteristics of coaching were the most highly valued: "[to be] direct and clear, but also to be positive and affirming as to what needs to happen…it really helps create…some positive synergy."

However, even when data demonstrated improvements in student behavior, presenting this information to teachers did not always encourage a sense of teaching efficacy. As discussed above, teacher perspectives on student performance determined their perceptions of the data. For example, teacher reactions to improvements in academic outcomes seemed to be a function of their focus on either student learning or their own instruction. When teachers were focused on student learning, they could see improvements in academics or behavior (e.g., discipline) as a positive and motivating outcome. This was true even if the same students did not always perform to high standards in their classrooms. These teachers tended to celebrate improvements of any kind. However, data that contradicted teacher perceptions of student performance were questioned in cases where teachers focused primarily on their instruction.

Discussion

As we have seen, SWPBIS offered the staff a common goal (i.e., improved outcomes for students) and common principles (i.e., those embedded in SWPBIS) rather than a perceived common enemy such as the school board (Freidman, 2007). This focus allowed the staff to remain positive and to prepare the students and each other for the future. Teachers are sometimes unsure if issues like school climate, which are outside of their content area (e.g., math, reading), are within their realm of responsibility. However, uniting the staff

would help improve their ability to maintain a sense of community during seasons of stress.

By concentrating on the process of creating a positive climate (Sugai et al., 2010) and utilizing SWPBIS rather than the content of a specific problem (e.g., strike), the staff were able to move their focus away from a common enemy and work towards a shared goal (Gilbert, 1992). Consideration of SWPBIS principles (Gilbert, 1992) like the purposeful nature of behavior perhaps helped teachers to be less emotionally reactive toward students' problem behavior. The staff also valued clear, commonly shared expectations and policies for implementation when they were provided (Redding, 2001). While these SWPBIS components were designed to help students, teachers benefited from them as well.

Based on these data, implementation of SWPBIS may have some additional potential for supporting schools during times of anxiety in the future. People with less of a sense of self tend to have the greatest fusion between thinking and feeling (Noone & Papero, 2015). SWPBIS encourages staff to look at data and establish teams (Sugai et al., 2010) and to think about behavior not as a reflection of themselves but rather as others' reactions to the environment. This process allows teams to be less emotionally driven and produces sustained change. As a result, individual team members can view the situation in which they find themselves as objective outside observers (Bowen, 1976). Having common experiences such as reviewing schoolwide data can lead to staff connections around practices, purpose, and outcomes (Redding, 2001).

Coaching Schools Under Stress When Implementing SWPBIS

Staff could benefit from additional coaching to improve morale when experiencing unforeseen changes in their schools. When individuals in the group experience anxiety, they could be encouraged to think and act similarly. This might increase comfort for some members of the group in the short run (Bowen, 1976). Unfortunately, many crises cannot be resolved immediately and must simply be managed in the interim to resolution (Freidman, 2007). Encouraging staff to develop social capital through identifying common values (e.g., clear purpose of the team) and alterable variables (e.g., teaching common expectations; Redding, 2001) could help teams in crisis to maintain a greater sense of community and to decrease general anxiety. Therefore, coaching schools on models that enhance the workplace environment could be important for staff during times of change.

It is important for coaches to identify anxiety triggers for individuals within the system. These triggers can drive the beliefs of one group over another (Hall, 2006). In our case study, systems issues related to the differential evaluation of

teachers based on tenure may have been one of these triggers. While a bifurcation between newer and veteran teachers was noted, one of the causes of this division might have been the anxiety (or lack thereof) related to the pressures of being considered underperforming based on teacher evaluations. The issue of the co-location seemed to have exposed preexisting systems-level triggers that resulted from the strike.

Factors that could impact the morale of the staff in general include open communication, equity of positions, and emotional separation from one another (Gilbert, 1992). When people are pushed toward groupthink through content discussions, they can lose a sense of the real sources of anxiety—in this case, co-location. As a result, staff in this school tended to blame others and to lose focus on their individual roles within the situation (Papero, 1990). An antidote for other schools facing this problem could include coaching the staff to unite around their shared goals and to create common experiences for all students—in this case, SWPBIS (Redding, 2001).

Decreased sense of self (Noone & Papero, 2015) can make it difficult for staff to distinguish themselves from other members of the school, particularly if the cohort (new vs. veteran teachers) holds a common belief system. In our case study, the discussion in the focus groups involved considerable dialog centered around the differences between veteran and newer teachers. This focus on the part of the staff perhaps signaled some type of conflict between individual newer and veteran teachers (Bowen, 1976). Staff members in this study with reduced self-awareness would be less likely to know when they were interacting with others based on orientations that were tradition-directed (e.g., how the school had always worked), inner-directed (e.g., personal philosophy of education), or outer-directed (e.g., what other teachers wanted them to do; Redding, 2001). Rather than randomly fluctuating across each type of approach, staff in other schools implementing SWPBIS during stressful events could make decisions based on data that included an understanding of the school culture, their own beliefs, and the pressures faced by their colleagues. To this end, staff in other schools would require access to appropriate data and guidance on how to interpret them.

Staff in schools implementing SWPBIS under stress could also benefit from coaching by an individual from outside the organization who can connect yet remain separate and not anxious. The external agent or coach would need to balance the need for active listening to the staff with the necessity of moving the intervention forward. This type of coaching relies on refraining from reacting to staff anxiety rather than focusing on problem solving alone (Freidman, 2007). It serves a similar function to that of a valve on a gas tank that allows pressure to be released without causing an explosion. In the case under

consideration in this article, the pressure was the anxiety of the staff in response to unexpected changes. The coach attempted to maintain a calm approach while assessing whether individuals were acting based on emotions or intellect (Bowen, 1976; Butler, 2015; Papero, 2015). One component of this approach included the coach remaining in contact with the school without participating in the anxiety (Bowen, 1976; Butler, 2015). Whether staff morale was enhanced as result of SWPBIS-based coaching approaches or not, evidence suggests some members of the staff were able to balance their own emotional response to the strike and co-location (Bowen, 1976; Noone & Papero, 2015).

Coaches focusing on SWPBIS can help staff to observe their own responses by prompting staff members to think about the schoolwide data and objectively consider student problem behavior (Sugai et al., 2010). It appears from this case that the principles of the SWPBIS model could be applied to ensure that the staff obtains supports needed for success. By focusing on goals, staff in this study perhaps decreased anxious togetherness and centralized their efforts on problem solving (Hall, 2006). As mentioned above, the coach needs to remain connected to the setting—in this case, the school—to observe defined trends in behavior among faculty members (Bowen, 1976). This process could perhaps also allow internal team members and external coaches in other schools to develop a stronger sense of self, which can lead to more effective functioning for the entire system (Friedman, 2007; Noone & Papero, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was small and included only one school. There is a need for more analysis based on a larger sample related to the use of SWPBIS as a support mechanism during times of change in large urban districts. Furthermore, one of the authors was the external coach for SWPBIS at the school. Several measures were put into place to address these concerns as described in the Data Collection section of this article. Future studies should also collect outcome data (e.g., number of office discipline referrals) to determine the level of change in school climate. Additional studies could also test if a coaching protocol based on systems theory was effective in supporting schools experiencing high levels of anxiety.

Implications

This study also resulted in several recommendations for coaching, whether the coaches come from inside or outside the school district:
- By focusing on common goals (Redding, 2001), staff could avoid concentration on a perceived common enemy (e.g., the co-located school, the district; Freidman, 2007).

- The coach must take time to explore the pressures within the setting.
- The coach should help teams focus on process over content during discussions.
- The coach should support the initial implementation of the innovation (Fixsen et al., 2009).
- The external coach should remain connected to the school while not participating in the anxiety of the setting. In order to accomplish this, external coaches should observe their own reactions as objectively as possible.
- In terms of efficacy, the staff would benefit from SWPBIS approaches on the part of administrators to support their own behavior. Morale can decrease when SWPBIS strategies, such as providing feedback privately, are not employed with both staff and students.
- Creating common experiences based on a shared vision could enhance the sense of community for all members during times of crisis (Redding, 2001).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the connections between collective bargaining and co-location processes, overall staff morale, and the effects of coaching the staff on the implementation of SWPBIS. As we have seen, unforeseen structural changes tend to be more commonplace in large urban school districts. These changes can impact the overall morale and climate of the school community. Implementing components of SWPBIS perhaps shields students and staff from some of the negative impacts of collective bargaining and colocation. Schoolwide approaches such as SWPBIS could also serve as a possible mechanism to infuse support for staff and students.

Coaches planning to implement SWPBIS or other improvement interventions during seasons of unforeseen school actions can consider the following steps in their process: (1) maintaining ongoing training and professional development in the implementation of systems such as SWPBIS; (2) addressing areas for improvement in the system identified prior to the change while anticipating that existing barriers will be exacerbated; (3) ensuring that policies for effective practice are clearly communicated, modeled, and implemented in ways that are congruent with SWPBIS principles; (4) focusing on common goals and experiences rather than common concerns; (5) providing coaching that minimizes anxiety levels during seasons of high stress; and (6) providing objective feedback that highlights successes and encourages next steps for the team. Components of SWPBIS might support schools and mitigate the negative impacts of school actions by affirming the humanity of the staff and

students in the schools where it is applied. Finally, systems theory may provide a mechanism to support coaches in demonstrating differentiated leadership by providing a calm (rather than anxious) presence during times of high stress.

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