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Impact of Responsive Classroom and PBIS on Behavior Choices in the
Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

Effective teaching encompasses more than instructional strategies, content knowledge, and assessing; effective teachers must be able to manage their classroom and build relationships with the students they work with in order to foster student growth. This study examined what effect Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) strategies had on reducing negative student behaviors and improving student attitudes towards school. Over a seven-week period Responsive Classroom and PBIS strategies were utilized as the primary classroom management strategies in a suburban first-grade classroom in Minnesota. Student attitudes towards school were surveyed at the beginning and end of the study in addition to daily data collection on Take-A-Breaks (Responsive Classroom), student support center referrals, and a teacher reflection completed every other day. The data showed a correlation between the implemented strategies and improved attitudes towards school as assessed by the student survey. Over the course of the study, the number of breaks taken each day decreased overall as did the number of students that took breaks in a day. The positive results from the study indicate the effectiveness of the strategies used and encourage future use of both programs. Peer to peer relationships was the primary area that did not experience growth or positive results during the programs, so future research or implementation of other programs should be done in order to fill that gap.

Keywords: Responsive Classroom, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, behavior, student attitude

A famous quotation by Maya Angelou states, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” This statement rings true in every facet of life, but is especially relevant to where students spend most of their time: the classroom. During this time it is the tone, attitude, and language of the adult speaking to them that will build their feelings about themselves, others, and school in general. As adults, it is important to us that our work is appreciated, feedback is constructive, and we are spoken to with respect. All students deserve the same. To this point, there are a variety of classroom management philosophies that drive how teachers form their classroom environments. From these philosophies stem an ever-growing list of management tools and systems such as Class Dojo, clip charts, Restorative Justice, Love and Logic, as well as many others. The choices teachers make in how they build expectations, choose systems, speak with students, manage behaviors, and hold students accountable, directly affects the environment in which students learn which in turn affects academic outcomes. This study will look at the interaction between two well-known classroom management theories: Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports. Both theories place a strong emphasis on commending positive behavior choices, creating a classroom environment where students are welcomed into the classroom, and helping students see positive choices while processing through undesired actions.

A large concern in classrooms across the United States is instruction time. Teachers are highly protective over their time to instruct students work to minimize disruptions. Inattentiveness and off-task behaviors account for the greatest loss of instructional time (Godwin et al., 2013). Responsive Classroom strengthens the bond between social and academic

learning in order to maximize instruction time and further social skills as a means of lessening undesired behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Furthermore, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports works as a preventative technique for undesired behaviors by using positive prompting in the classroom (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Both philosophies have seen positive impacts in the classroom on a social level with academic implications as well.

This study was built as a response to a teacher searching for the best classroom management approach that follows a philosophy containing the need for positive interactions, all students feeling welcome, redirection of undesired behaviors, and a strong classroom community. In this study, a teacher used Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports with high fidelity in order to observe the effects of both approaches on her students, their behavior choices, and classroom environment. This research was conducted in a suburban, first-grade classroom of 22 learners, including 11 boys and 11 girls ages six and seven. Through surveying the 22 learners, looking at their frequency of using the Take-a-Break (break) system from Responsive Classroom, tracking behavior referrals outside of the classroom, and a teacher self-reflection, there was a deep look into the effectiveness of these classroom management approaches. Key Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support actions included positive comments towards desired behaviors, reminders given in positive terms, and a token system for positive behaviors seen in the classroom. Responsive Classroom techniques employed during the study include Morning Meeting, Quiet Time, Take-a-Break, Closing Circle, and more. Through this work indirect observations included types of undesired behaviors seen in the classroom, instruction time spent on behaviors, general classroom environment, and student engagement were all noted but will not be directly spoken on due to data collection methods. The

purpose of this study was to see what effect Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports have on reducing negative behaviors and improving student attitudes in a first-grade classroom.

Review of Literature

Impact of Responsive Classroom and PBIS on Behavior Choices in the Elementary Classroom

Instructional time is sacred to teachers to maximize growth for the students in their classroom and allow all students to learn in differentiated ways. Instructional time can be lost due to a variety of reasons including special events, interruptions, weather, and more. According to Karweit & Slavin (1981) as stated in Godwin et al., the factor that counts for the greatest loss of instructional time student inattentiveness and off-task behavior (Godwin, Almeda, Petroccia, Baker, & Fisher, 2013). Negative behaviors affect more than just class time. There is a clear link between academic achievement and problem behavior. A 2005 study conducted by Kent McIntosh found that not only were students with problems behaviors more likely to have literacy skills significantly lower than their peers, but low end of the year kindergarten achievement was a predictor for problem behaviors to be seen in fifth grade (Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine, 2006). On average when a student leaves a classroom for a behavior report, they are missing 20 minutes of instructional time, and a suspension is a full day of instructional time lost for that student (Putnam et al., 2006). What effect will Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) have on reducing negative behaviors and improving student attitudes about school in a first-grade classroom?

Defining Problem Behavior, Responsive Classroom, and PBIS

Problem (negative) behaviors are known to not only impact that child's academic achievement but impact instruction time for all students in their classroom (Godwin et al., 2013). Common negative behaviors seen in elementary schools are fighting, harassment, disruption, and defiance (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). The most prevalent and challenging negative behavior seen in schools - that accounts for a loss of instruction time - is off-task behavior. Studies have found that children spend 10 to 50 percent of their time in a general education classroom exhibiting off-task behavior (Godwin et al., 2013). Classroom environment, building factors, environmental elements, classroom decor, and instructional format can all impact off-task behavior. Research shows that teachers' perceptions play into defining and recognizing behaviors. For example, elementary teachers view verbal disturbances as more problematic than high school teachers, but African American teachers viewed verbal disturbances and less problematic than all other racial groups (Alter et al., 2013). Furthermore, male teachers struggled with student inattentiveness while female teachers paid more attention to disrespect from students (Alter et al., 2013).

The Responsive Classroom approach is an intervention used in thousands of classrooms across the United States which creates a tighter bond between academic and social learning (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). In this approach, the teacher creates a caring environment for their students and manages their classroom with engaging lessons and promoting positive social interactions (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu (2007) noted the seven principles Responsive Classroom is built on:

equal emphasis on the social and academic curriculum; focus on how children learn as

much as what they learn; view that social interaction facilitates cognitive growth; emphasis on cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control as critical social skills for children to learn; emphasis on teachers' knowledge of children's individual, cultural, and developmental characteristics; focus on understanding of children's families; and attention to the way in which adults work together within a school. (p. 399)

These principles have allowed specific practices to emerge. Morning Meeting is a Responsive Classroom practice that allows community building, greeting, sharing, and for students to develop of sense of scheduling for that school day (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Using the Responsive Classroom approach, teachers create their classroom rules with student voices helping to craft the rules for the year (Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Curby, 2014). Logical consequences another staple of the Responsive Classroom approach. Consequences are developmentally appropriate but do hold the child accountable in a logical way (i.e. "you break it, you fix it") (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). The Responsive Classroom approach differs from many other social-emotional learning interventions in that the focus is on how the teacher is instructing not on what they should be teaching (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) is an intervention that focuses on positive and preventative techniques towards negative behaviors. In the PBIS framework, schools set meaningful goals, collect data throughout the year, and reflect on progress towards goals to hold staff accountable for maintaining positive practices in the classroom (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Teachers use positive prompting techniques to see desired behaviors in their classrooms (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The PBIS framework utilizes a three-tiered system of

behavior supports to best support all students in the school (Kelm, McIntosh, & Cooley, 2014). The primary tier includes the majority of students with clear expectations and positive behavior acknowledgment in all areas throughout the school including classrooms (Kelm et al., 2014). The second tier of students is targeted with interventions for students that frequently display negative behaviors or are at-risk for problem behaviors (Kelm et al., 2014). The final tier is the smallest group that contains students who have not responded to second tier interventions, and appropriate behavior is targeted in one-on-one lessons with that student (Kelm et al., 2014). Another component of the PBIS approach is keeping a small number of positive rules. An example is “Be Kind, Be Responsible, Be Respectful” (Kelm et al., 2014, p. 197). These rules are posted around the school in the form of a matrix that displays what these rules look like in various areas of the school. Lastly, behaviors are positively reinforced and can be reinforced with an external motivator as well (Ennis & Swoszowski, 2011). When students display positive behaviors, staff point out the positive behavior that is displayed and may reward students with a school-wide tangible coupon or another privilege.

Responsive Classroom Positive Effects

Through anecdotal and quantitative studies, the Responsive Classroom approach has been seen to positively impact student assertiveness, prosocial behavior, student-teacher relationships, and classroom community (Baroody et al., 2014; Horsch, Chen, & Wagner, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). As well, in classrooms that use Responsive Classroom, less anxious-fearful behavior has been noted, and students report a growing love of school (Horsch et al., 2002; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). When exploring the positive effects seen from the Responsive Classroom approach, most studies agree that results are not seen when schools or

classrooms solely have the label of Responsive Classroom, rather the positive effects are seen when teachers utilize the principles and practices regularly in their classrooms. Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu found the Responsive Classroom approach to positively impact three out of their eight social outcomes (assertion, prosocial behavior, and closeness) (2007). Two goals of the Responsive Classroom approach are student assertiveness and prosocial behaviors. In a 2007 study of 42 teachers from a variety of schools, Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu found teachers reporting greater assertiveness in the classroom. This skill, along with prosocial behavior is explicitly taught in the classroom, typically in the Morning Meeting section of the day through sharing their opinions and experiences, and students are given additional opportunities throughout the day to practice and develop these skills (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Fearfulness and anxiety are reduced in a Responsive Classroom setting. The format of Morning Meeting allowing students to share topics that matter to them in short and positive interactions, in addition to the sense of community that is built during Morning Meeting time, is credited to the reduction of anxious and fearful behavior (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007).

Teachers that use the Responsive Classroom approach regularly report increasing closeness to their students, allowing them to work more effectively with difficult students (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Students that feel closer to their teachers are more comfortable following the classroom rules, feel better about making mistakes, and will take risks that allow for greater learning (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). While there was no positive relationship between Responsive Classroom training and student-teacher closeness, the actual use of Responsive Classroom practices did see a strong jump in student-teacher closeness (Baroody et al., 2014). The practices used daily in this study included were Morning Meeting, interactive

modeling, rule creation, and academic choice (Baroody et al., 2014). Lastly, an anecdotal-based study on three Responsive Classroom schools found a growing love of school and increased classroom community (Horsch et al., 2002). The study noted that increased community stemmed from Morning Meeting and the ability for students to learn more about their classmates (Horsch et al., 2002). In one example, a girl felt like there was too much attention on her insulin pump that she used to treat diabetes. When she used her time during Morning Meeting to share about the disease and answer many student questions, she felt more respect from her peers and less embarrassed about her pump (Horsch et al., 2002). The community that is built in the morning continues throughout the school day because of the rules that are held and the connections that are built (Horsch et al., 2002). The Responsive Classroom approach is seen as creating “happy” classrooms with students that want to be in school and learn every day (Horsch et al., 2002, p. 379).

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports Positive Effects

Similar to the Responsive Classroom approach, PBIS is credited with increasing prosocial behaviors from students and reducing problem behaviors. A 2014 study of one Canadian school found that with consistent PBIS implementation school-wide, behaviors requiring disciplinary action were reduced by over fifty percent (Kelm et al., 2014). Out of school suspensions were cut in half as well. The staff noted that not only were the disciplinary actions decreased, but the decrease in referrals equated to 8 eight-hour work days saved, and students regained 17 six-hour school days of instruction time (Kelm et al., 2014). Another 2012 study found significant reductions in problem behaviors after implementing school-wide PBIS practice. This study went further to look at the way poverty played into the effects of PBIS.

While there was a reduction in problem behaviors from all socioeconomic categories, treatment effects were not as strong when the school's poverty level was higher (Benner, Nelson, Sanders, & Ralston, 2012). In the same study, on-task behaviors saw a 2.56% increase in PBIS schools (Benner et al., 2012). A final indicator of the effectiveness of PBIS is the growth in academic achievement seen by PBIS schools. In the 2014 study of PBIS implementation, the school saw results including a 44% increase in reading scores, 25% in math, and 56% in writing (Kelm et al., 2014). This school made significant academic growth compared to their counterparts in the district which saw a 3% drop in reading scores, virtually no change in writing scores, and a slight jump in math results (Kelm et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Based on my findings in this literature review, PBIS and Responsive Classroom are two theories of classroom management and environment that create positive behavior results in the classroom. Responsive Classroom has a large focus on how students are learning and creating a collaborative environment that cares about community and social development. Through Responsive Classroom students see changes in their social skills such as assertiveness and teachers see changes in their students and environments. PBIS has been found to minimize negative behaviors seen in the classroom. From this reduction of negative behaviors, teachers are afforded more teaching time and students who may have frequently been out of the classroom now spend more time learning amongst their peers. While some small portions of these two theories do not coincide well, overall both theories can work in a classroom to create a positive learning environment for all students. These theories are both highly supportive of student needs and work to make classrooms a successful place for all learners.

Research Question

What effect will Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) have on reducing negative behaviors and improving student attitudes in a first-grade classroom?

Methodology

The research began with approval of the project by the researcher's principal in July. From there, the researcher attended a four-day Responsive Classroom training in August and received two books which further detailed Responsive Classroom practices. The researcher was a member of the school's PBIS committee, helped create a review slideshow for staff regarding PBIS practices, and participated monthly school site meetings regarding PBIS. At the start of the school year, parents received a letter (Appendix A), acknowledging and explaining the project. All students' data would be collected unless parents returned the form with a signature, thus opting their student out of the project. One student was opted out of the project. While teaching methods did not change for that student, their data is not included in this report. Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices were naturally implemented from the beginning of the school year due to the teaching style and philosophy of the researcher. However, the fidelity in both programs, student attitudes towards school, and other sources of data were not tracked until after MEA break.

The official research began on October 23, 2017. That morning, the first-grade students participated in an anonymous survey that included seventeen rated statements (Appendix B). To keep the survey anonymous, students were given a random number on their survey that was also written on a class list. The researcher only looked at the numbers twice - once when handing out

the pre-survey and once when handing out the post-survey. These statements asked students to rate their feelings about school, staff, peers, expectations, and environment, using a thumbs up, a thumbs middle, and a thumbs down scale. A class average was calculated by giving two points to each thumbs up, one point to each thumbs middle, and zero points for each thumbs down. Students were made aware of the anonymity of their thoughts and were separated from other students while completing the survey to ensure privacy.

From the first day of the research until December 8th the researcher used PBIS and Responsive Classroom practices in daily teaching with as strict of fidelity as possible. PBIS practices included using positive redirection, reminding students about the three school rules (be respectful, be responsible, be safe), commending positive behavior, stating expected behaviors, and rewarding students with a paper token that recognizes positive behavior. These paper tokens are used for class drawings of rewards in addition to a monthly, school-wide drawing. Responsive Classroom practices used during the study include Morning Meeting, logical consequences, interactive modeling, interactive learning structures, Energizers, Quiet Time, and Closing Circle. Principles stemming from Responsive Classroom that were focused on during the study include equal parts social and academic learning, focus on how children learn as much as what they learn, emphasis on the teacher's knowledge of individual student's characteristics, focus on understanding each student's family, and an emphasis on critical social skills for students such as responsibility, assertion, cooperation, self-control and empathy. Lastly, the take-a-break practice from Responsive Classroom was the primary model for behavior redirection. Many concepts from both PBIS and Responsive Classroom were used throughout the

day without specific recording. The teacher reflection (Appendix C) was completed every other day and was used as a means of tracking fidelity to both programs.

A typical day in the classroom began with morning work time followed by Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting included a greeting, sharing time, a class game or movement activity, and a morning message. During the Morning Meeting the teacher would provide an overview of the students' day, give important updates, and answer a variety of student questions. Most social skill explicit teaching was imbedded in the morning reading and writing block during teacher-selected reading alouds that frequently included central messages surrounding ideas of empathy, self-identity, self-control, kindness, responsibility, respect, as well as others. After students returned from lunch and recess, all students participated in Quiet Time. During Quiet Time most of the lights in the classroom were off and silence was the expectation. Students could rest on the floor, draw and color pictures, read books from their book bins, or complete class work from their folders. The teacher would use this time to monitor, connect with students, or occasionally provide one-on-one academic support to a student. At the closing of the school day, a Closing Circle was held. During Closing Circle, students used a Fist to Five method to show their feelings about the day. Five was an amazing day, three was average, and one was a very bad day. The teacher would privately check in with any students that were a one or a two after the Closing Circle was finished. Closing Circle included a question that students had the option of answering and usually reflected on a part of the day, as well as a game.

When any undesired behavior occurred in the classroom, take-a-break was the typical response from the teacher. At the beginning of the study, reminders were given occasionally, but they lessened as students fully learned the expectations in the classroom. Breaks were set up, not

as a punishment, but rather as an opportunity to reset and rethink choices. When a student was asked to take a break, they would walk to the break chair in the back of the classroom.

Depending on the reason for the break, they would either turn over a colored timer based on teacher request (times varied based on the color from 30 seconds to four minutes), or students would return to the class when they felt they were ready. While students were in a break chair, they could hold a fidget, but needed to be focused on the instruction at the time. If breaks were numerous or the behavior escalated, students would occasionally visit a buddy classroom. They would walk or be escorted to the classroom next door for their break as a means of helping reset the behavior and having a few minutes outside of their environment. In the most serious cases, students may visit the student support center where they would fill out a referral form, which also meant a parent phone call. That visit is tracked in the school's learning management system.

The teacher used a few methods of tracking the effectiveness of Responsive Classroom and PBIS. Take-a-break data was collected daily. When a student was asked to take a break, the teacher would record the name of the student, the time, the reason and when necessary, the length of the break. Data was hidden from students due to a covered clipboard. At times, the data was recorded later due to the interruption it would have caused to teaching. Data was only recorded when the students were in the teacher's care (in the classroom, when the teacher took them for an extra recess) and times they were not with the teacher were not included (recess, lunch, specialists, substitute days). Another source of data was a teacher reflection (Appendix C) that was filled out every other day. On this survey, the teacher recorded what Responsive Classroom principles and practices were seen in the classroom that day, rated fidelity to PBIS, recorded thoughts on behaviors, and noted the feel of the classroom community. Lastly, any

referrals to the student support center during times when the students were with their classroom teacher were pulled as additional data. On December 8th, students received the same survey as they did at the start of the study. They were reminded about their anonymity and were rated the same statements at the start of the study. The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes each time it was read to the students.

Data Analysis

Attitude analysis

The study began with a survey given to students in the afternoon of the first day of the study. Students selected an answer that best fit their feelings for 17 statements. The students filled in a thumbs up, middle, or down (Appendix B), to signify that they agree with the statement most of the time, sometimes, or that they don't agree with the statement. Students were given the same survey in the afternoon on the final day of the study. The chart below shows each statement along with how many students answered most of the time, sometimes, or disagree in both the pre-study survey and the post-study survey.

Figure 1: Student Survey Results

Statement	Pre-Study			Post-Study		
	M	S	D	M	S	D
I like being in my classroom.	8	10	2	13	7	0
I feel welcomed in my classroom	12	6	2	16	2	2
I like being at school.	9	5	6	10	8	2
The students in my classroom are friendly towards me.	10	8	2	10	9	1
Other students respect me.	13	5	2	11	8	1
Other students listen to me.	5	12	3	13	4	3

People at school care about me.	12	6	2	12	7	1
My teacher treats me fairly.	15	5	0	20	0	0
My teacher listens to me.	17	3	0	18	2	0
My teacher praises me when I follow the rules.	15	5	0	17	3	0
I know how I should behave in the classroom.	19	1	0	18	2	0
The rules are fair at school.	15	3	2	16	4	0
I know what the consequences are if I do not follow the rules.	16	2	2	17	3	0
I try my best at school.	17	3	0	18	2	0
It is okay to make mistakes in my classroom.	18	2	0	18	2	0
I feel safe at school.	13	5	2	17	3	0
I feel happy when I am at school.	10	7	3	11	8	1

Key: M = agree most of the time, S = agree sometimes, D = disagree

When looking at the results from this survey, it was hard for the researcher not to take a lot of the answers personally, especially when many of the statements are about the environment they cultivated: how welcomed students feel, how they feel about their teacher, and their happiness at school. Positive changes are viewed as transitions away from “disagree” and towards “agree most of the time.” All categories experienced some sort of positive shift, although a few categories, such as peer relationships, saw negative shifts as well. There are a few statements whose changes seem especially important and deserve to be highlighted.

The first major change was “Other students listen to me.” At the beginning of the study 5 students believed that as true most of the time, by the end of the study 13 students believed that as true. This may be attributed to the rise in other students listening to active engagement lessons and sharing times in our opening and Closing Circles. During this time students are taught how

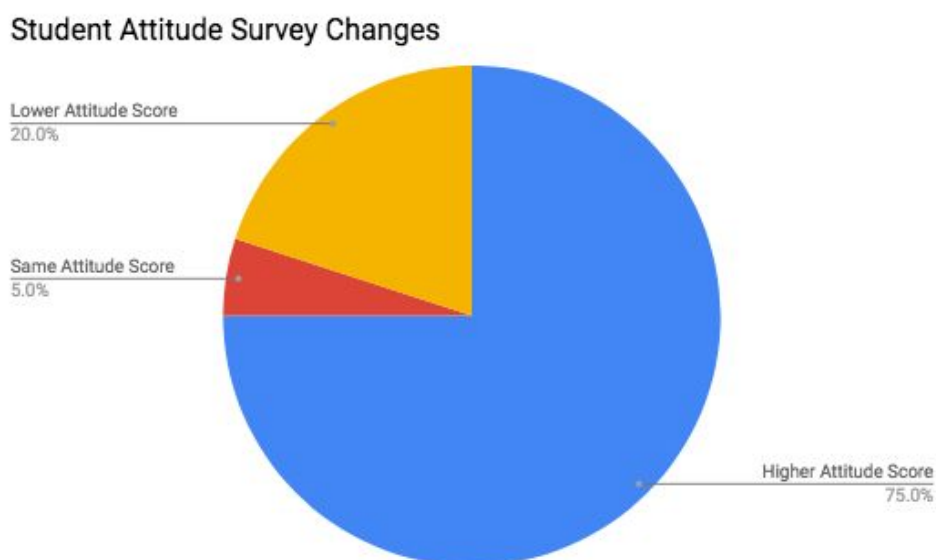
to listen, engage with their peers, ask follow-up questions, and maintain eye contact. In contrast the number of students that felt respected by their peers most of the time fell from 13 to 11. While the change may seem small, it shows that not all peer relationships in the class were solved. The lack of peer respect can be due to a number of factors. One that is seen frequently in the classroom is fast and frequent changes in friendships and friend groups.

Another statement that stuck out was “My teacher treats my fairly”. It is the only statement that all students felt most of the time. The researcher began the year by setting up their rules with their class, talked in great detail about how to act in the classroom, and used interactive modeling to practice all expectations. Positive reinforcement of desired behaviors was utilized daily as a part of PBIS practices, and students that were exhibiting behavior deemed “above and beyond” could earn school-wide tokens. Consequences were clearly stated at the beginning of the year as well such as a break, buddy room visit, student support center visit, and/or a phone call home. In addition to the set-up, when students took breaks, the teacher connected with them at some point in the day to remind them about teacher expectations, talk about the student’s behavior, and reteach any skills that may be needed. The process helped build an environment where students understood what was expected, and what would happen. Breaks were given primarily for a student not having their body in control or in their own space, talking when others were talking, and not completing work during work time. Breaks could be given if students were not following our three school rules: be respectful, be responsible, be safe. While students had the option to request a Take-A-Break, none were requested during the time of the study. In depth conversations as a whole class about each student getting what they need helped build an environment where students knew the teacher was supporting each of them in the way

they needed. Lastly, the number of students feeling safe most of the time jumped from 13 to 17. A supportive environment and trust leads to feelings of consistency, security, and safety. Over time students became more comfortable with their environment, their peers, and their teacher.

When analyzing the data further, student surveys were given a score out of a possible 34. They received two points for every “most of the time” answer, one point for every “sometimes” answer, and zero points for every “disagree” answer. Surveys were coded so students’ names were left off, but so the researcher could compare their results from the first survey to the second survey. The numbers that students were coded as were kept in a separate document so the researcher would have no knowledge of the responder. The coded numbers were only used to pass each survey out to the correct student and analyze student responses after the school year was done. The following figure shows the changes in overall scores. If a student’s score out of 34 was higher at the end of the study, their results are in the blue section, scores that stayed the same were red, and scores that lowered were yellow.

Figure 2: Student Survey Change Results



Out of the 20 surveys that were coded and scored, 15 students had an overall higher score. The largest jump was 10 points from an original score of a 24 to a 34. The student that made that gain had a major decline in the number of breaks they took as well. The student was new to the school this year and an immigrant to the United States within the past 15 months from the start of the study. The start of the year was difficult emotionally for the student, language was still developing, and their school the previous year had frequent teacher turnover throughout the year. All other students with gains fell into the one to eight-point range. The largest student drop was from 34 to 25, a nine-point difference. Specifically, statements about feeling welcome in the classroom, their peers respecting them, people caring about them, rules being fair, and feeling happy about school, were all scored lower by that student on the final survey. There is no easy explanation for the change as that student's behaviors did not change throughout the time of the study, however that student's demeanor began the year extremely enthusiastic and settled to fairly enthusiastic/pleasant as the study time continued.

The following figures take a deeper look into the top statements that students agreed with at the beginning of the study (Figure 3) and the top statements students agreed with at the end of the study (Figure 4). The average score took the score out of 2 that each student gave the prompt and averaged them together.

Figure 3: Top 5 Statements at the beginning of the study.

Rank	Statement	Average Score
1	I know how I should behave in the classroom.	1.95
2	It is okay to make mistakes in my classroom.	1.9
3	My teacher listens to me.	1.85
3 (Tie)	I try my best at school.	1.85
5	My teacher treats me fairly.	1.75
5 (Tie)	My teacher praises me when I follow the rules	1.75

Figure 4: Top 5 statements at the end of the study.

Rank	Statement	Average Score
1	My teacher treats me fairly.	2
2 (Tie)	My teacher listens to me.	1.9
2 (Tie)	I know how I should behave in the classroom.	1.9
2 (Tie)	I try my best at school.	1.9
2 (Tie)	It is okay to make mistakes in my classroom.	1.9

Many of the statements that started in the top five ended in the top five, however their scores and positions shifted. Students knowing how they should behave in the classroom dropped slightly. At the beginning of the study the teacher was reviewing routines on a daily basis. The end of the study was near winter break. Expectations are still held high at that time of year, however a full review of rules and expectations is taught right after winter break. The scores in the top five at the end of the study overall had higher scores than the beginning, and a four-way tie on which statements students agreed with the most. In both sets of data, students rated

statements that focused on themselves and their teacher as the highest statements. Statements about general feelings towards school and their peers were not rated highly at the beginning or end of the survey. Responsive Classroom focuses on strong relationships as a classroom community, but also between teacher and student as teachers should be taking a strong interest in their students academically and socially. Following PBIS practices, students should frequently feel praise from their teacher and know that their teacher is complimenting their work. Another large part of Responsive Classroom is setting up expectations, as was discussed before. A strong expectation of the teacher is that students are always trying and that they have a classroom environment where it is safe to make mistakes. That teaching is evident in students feeling safe to make mistakes as shown in the survey.

As a final thought on the surveys, the first survey generated a student average score of 26.8 out of 34. At the conclusion of the study students scored 29.2 out of 34 on average. This is a seven percent increase in attitudes towards their school, classroom, teacher, and peers over the time of the study. Students have showcased improved attitudes about school in the time period of the study where Responsive Classroom and PBIS strategies were implemented.

In addition to the student surveys, the teacher completed a teacher reflection (Appendix C) every other day that asked them to reflect on the classroom community and student attitudes. While the reflection process was helpful in the moment to make changes in their teaching, it was difficult to find large trends in the data. One part of the reflection that was most helpful was reviewing the Responsive Classroom principles and practices each time the survey was completed. In the process of checking off which practices were used, the teacher was able to re-center themselves around their principles and practices in order to imbed them in their teaching

with more fidelity. In terms of the response portion of the survey, many of the comments noted the general dynamic of the group this year. The researcher frequently referred to how kind, helpful, respectful, caring, and compassionate this group was in the classroom. It was also noted several times that students would remind the teacher of Responsive Classroom practices or parts of our Morning Meeting and Closing Circle if they were to be left out. This showed that students enjoyed these parts of the day and saw value in them.

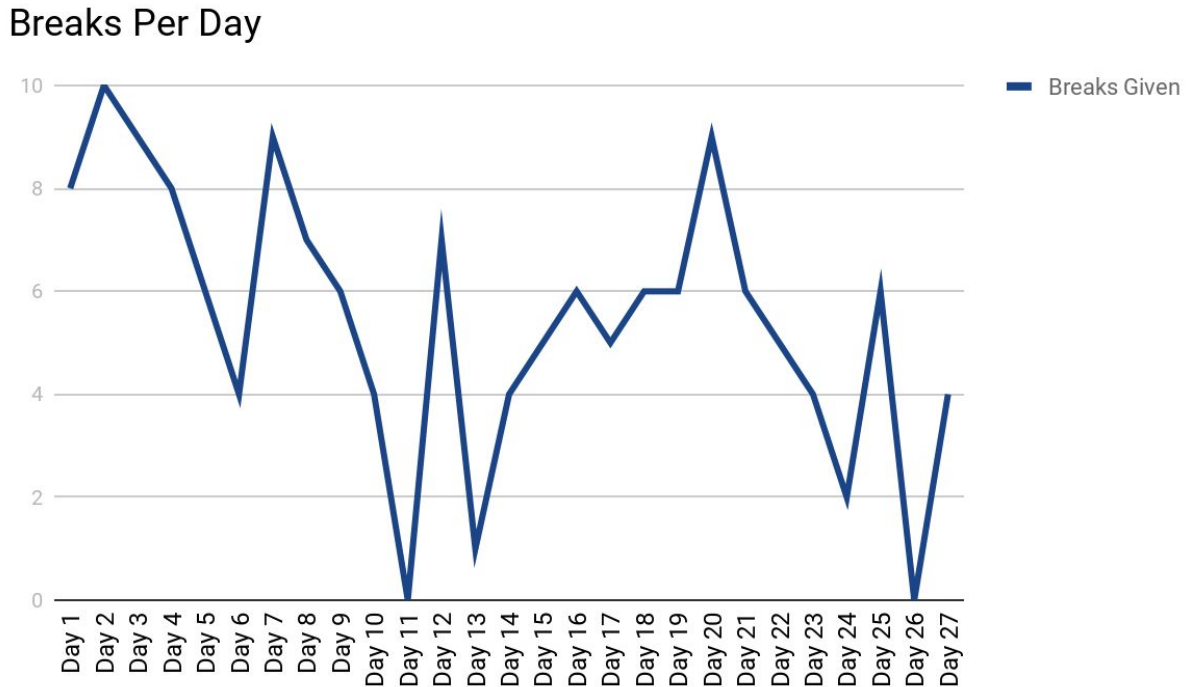
Over the course of the study, student attitudes towards school grew as Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices were implemented. While not every student followed that trend, in general the class had stronger positive feelings about their teacher, safety at school, and overall classroom experiences. The teacher felt more confident in their focus on social learning during the time of the study and taking the time necessary to set up the proper classroom environment and expectations.

Behavior Analysis

While part of the research question addresses the impact on student attitudes towards school, the other part of the question looks at the impact of Responsive Classroom and PBIS on behavior. The best method to measure behavior were classroom breaks. Take-a-break is a Responsive Classroom practice which has a student go to a particular spot in the classroom in order to adjust their behavior. Breaks should not be seen as a punishment, but rather a way to reset behavior. During a break, students were still to be watching instruction, but it temporarily removes them from their unsuccessful environment so they can come back and be successful. A majority of the breaks were given for talking during non-appropriate times (silent work time, instruction, blurting), having their body out of control, or lack of working during work time. The

graph below shows the number of breaks that were given out in the classroom on a particular day during the study. The highest number of breaks given on any particular day was 10 while the lowest number was zero.

Figure 5: Number of breaks given in the classroom per day



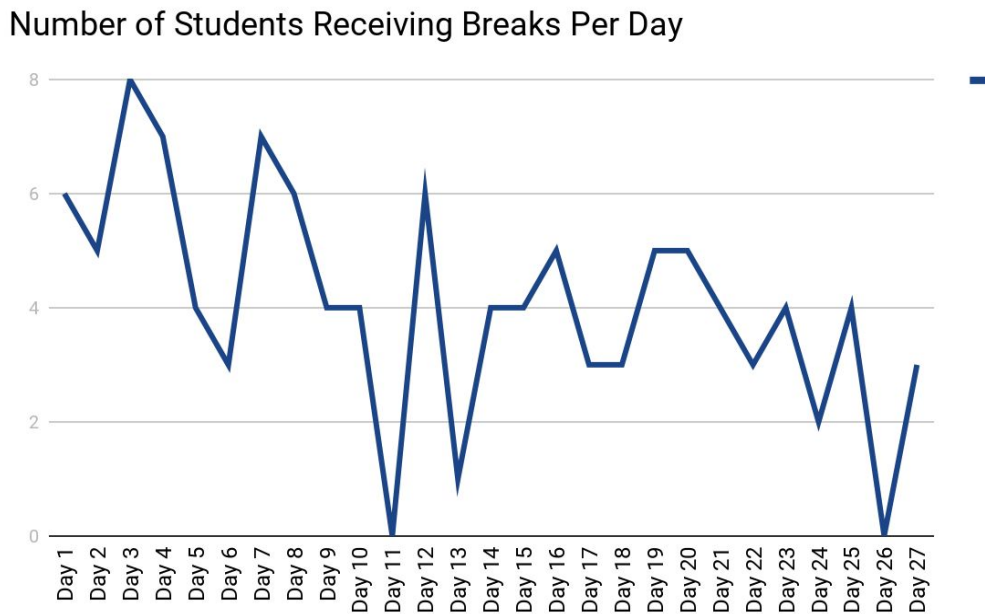
While there was fluctuation on a day-to-day basis regarding the number of breaks given, the overall best-fit slope for the graph is -0.16 . This number illustrates that beginning of the study to the end of the study, the average number of breaks students were taking each day decreased. It is important to note that while every effort was taken to compile a complete list of breaks in a day, there is an urgency to the profession of teaching. Due to this factor, among others, there is a strong possibility that not every break was recorded during the study. The above

graph shows the best faith effort to record breaks, but factors such as timing, flow of instruction, and out of the classroom activities may have impeded the ability to record every break.

When looking even closer at the data, the majority of the breaks were given in the morning. Just as teachers need to start off the school year with strong expectations, the teacher starts every morning with those same strong expectations. Some students have trouble transitioning between excitement, play, family hardships, etc., and the classroom environment. While the teacher always starts with a reminder, a few students would be asked to take a break to remind themselves of classroom behavior in the morning. Another factor that led to more breaks in the morning was subject matter. The vast majority of the morning time included reading rounds. During reading rounds, the teacher worked with a group in their classroom as did the EL teacher. With two instructors in one room, it was important to have a calm and quiet environment. The teacher led their guided reading groups from their teacher table which allowed them to see the work all students were completing. It was easy to spot an off-task student and redirect or ask for a break. In the afternoon, the majority of the time was spent on math instruction. In the teacher's classroom math is much more interactive which lends itself to more peer communication and a louder learning experience. In addition, the teacher teaches their math groups on the floor in order to allow space for more manipulatives, which decreases their ability to see all students work habits. These two factors impacted the number of breaks given in the afternoon.

The following graph shows the number of individual students that were asked to take a break during a given school day. The highest number of students asked to take a break in a day was eight while the lowest number of students asked to take a break was zero.

Figure 6: Number of students that were asked to take a break each day



In contrast to Figure 5 which shows the total number of breaks given, Figure 6 looks more closely at how many students these breaks were impacting. The negative slope of this graph is more evident than the last one, showing an overall decline of how many students were asked to take a break on a given day. As it neared the end of the study and less students were given breaks, the trend went towards several of the same students receiving breaks every day, but it was not exclusively the same students receiving breaks on a daily basis. With the decline in the number of students taking breaks, three individuals stuck out to because of their trends. Aside from those three students, other students saw shifts in their number of breaks due to greater confidence being gained in the classroom, developing of relationships with peers (both positively and negatively), and difficult home situations developing to be more unsteady.

Student A was noted earlier in the analysis because they had the greatest growth on the attitude survey. As noted earlier, Student A was a fairly recent immigrant to the United States,

was still learning a lot of language, and had a school experience with frequent teacher turnover the year before. In the first week of the study, Student A took six breaks, including two that were over ten minutes long. During the longer breaks, Student A was crying in the take-a-break chair and did not want to participate in class activities. Student A took their last break on November 14th, and did not take a break at all the last 11 days of the study. By that point Student A felt comfortable with myself and their peers, was no longer frequently crying in the classroom, and was eager to participate in all classroom activities.

Student B saw an opposite trend in their data. This student needed frequent breaks in their classroom the year before and had spent a large part of the previous year working on peer relationships and how to treat their peers. In the first week of the study, this student was asked to take one break during the week. During week two of the study their breaks slowly started to increase with a large jump in week four. Many of their breaks were given for not paying attention during instruction or not treating others in the classroom with kindness or respect. Some of their behavior shifted as they became closer with particular students, but overall their increase in breaks does not have a clear source. Unfortunately this student was unable to complete the survey in order to compare their student attitude shifts with their behavior shifts.

Student C was fairly consistent in the number of breaks they were given throughout the study. There were very few days in which Student C was not asked to take a break. This student exhibited tendencies that are consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder as well as ADHD. The student had no official diagnosis nor did we believe one was necessary for the child at this point. Rather, many accommodations were used in the classroom to make the student as successful as possible. Some of their tendencies included racing thoughts, difficulty staying on task, difficulty

listening, repetitive behaviors, and difficulty with emotional understanding of others. Breaks were a successful tool for this student to reset and refocus themselves, as well as give them greater ability to move and more space during instruction. Breaks during our Morning Meeting were frequent for this student as they adjusted to school expectations in terms of body and voice control. Despite the fact that Student C's breaks did not increase, there was not a great increase either, meaning other accommodations were effective for helping the student manage.

When behaviors escalate in frequency or in action such as physical harm, intimidation, threats, or other highly concerning behavior, students are sent to a student support center in order to meet with a behavior paraprofessional and talk through their actions. The behavior paraprofessional staffs the student support center and completes a reflection with all students who are referred. During the study, no students were sent to the student support center during their time in the classroom. When looking at data from the previous year, no students from this classroom had referrals during the same time. Part of the referral data reflects on the behavior of the students in the classroom. If behaviors were not violent or concerning in nature, students were not sent. In this classroom students were not sent to the behavior specialist unless the student's actions caused too many distractions, were physical or especially concerning in nature, showed a complete lack of disrespect, or created too much tension between student and teacher which negatively impacted instruction. The behaviors that were witnessed during this time never came from a place of being intentionally disrespectful but rather from a lack of control or a need to express another emotion. Based off of the relationships that were built with students and parents alike, the teacher was typically informed of tough mornings, home changes, or other major incidents that may impact behavior in the classroom. In these cases, the teacher was able

to provide the student with more time to process, alternative activities, or more leniency was allowed in the number of breaks taken in the classroom. It is important to reiterate however, that any behavior that is threatening or violent to that student, another student, or an adult would automatically be sent. None of those behaviors were witnessed.

When analyzing behavior data, the tool that helped ensure fidelity to the programs was the teacher reflection (Appendix C) that was filled out every other day. The teacher opted to give themselves a PBIS rating on a daily basis because at the beginning of the survey they felt as though this would be their weakest area of implementation. On a rating of one star meaning inconsistent PBIS use and five stars meaning consistent PBIS use, the first week the teacher ended with an average of three stars. By the final week their average was 3.75 stars. This shows that they still have work to do in full implementation of PBIS. The teacher believes that they scored themselves slightly lower than someone who was observing them would have. Part of the difficulty in scoring is remembering thought versus action. While they did their best to work over habits that would not always redirect by stating the positives, the thought of “you need to stop that” or similar sayings will still run through their head. Overall this area could improve in order to see even greater gains in terms of behavior.

The teacher’s reflections of “behaviors seen” from the survey were not as helpful as they had hoped when setting up this form. In large part they ended up being a great reflection for the teacher to use in order to change their practices with particular students in the next couple of days, but did not reflect major trends as they had hoped. It was interesting that the number of breaks and the teacher’s own impressions of the day did not always correlate. There were days with many breaks when the teacher felt like overall the behavior was good, while other days the

opposite happened. In large part, when reflecting on behaviors seen the teacher was able to take into account the students that were not given breaks. Therefore days when the students who did not take breaks were close to receiving breaks, behavior may have felt tougher, but days where many breaks were given the other students were especially well-behaved. The researcher noticed through the data from breaks and the teacher's own reflections that particular times were peak times for behavior such as the day after Halloween (a mix between students not paying attention and students with overly active bodies and voices), and the days leading up to the Thanksgiving Break where most students had gone without a day off for a little over a month.

Many of the reflections included thoughts about why behaviors were occurring in the classroom. Some specific notes included phrases such as, "Should this group begin to use assigned seating during our Morning Meeting circle? I prefer for students to connect as they see fit at the beginning of the day to create a student-led environment but want to ensure I am making the best choice for their success throughout the day." Another entry stated, "After moving table spots last week, I have seen a decline in breaks during reading rounds. I wonder what the best frequency is to rotate table spots so students have time to develop relationships with everyone but are not so comfortable that they begin to neglect their work." Lastly, during the week with the lowest number of breaks the teacher wrote, "It feels as though we have really hit the sweet spot of the year. All students know what they should be doing in the classroom and have begun to adjust to the difference in academic demands this year. Positive friendships have begun to form and students are comfortable reaching out to others for help. I look forward to using PBIS and Responsive Classroom strategies to hopefully maintain this environment."

Overall negative behaviors in the classroom decreased during the length of the study. Not only were less breaks taken on a daily basis, but fewer students were being asked to take breaks. Many factors contributed to the decline in breaks, but most credit goes to Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices for allowing the teacher to set up a community, expectations, and systems that help students feel welcomed, feel empowered, and want to be learning in the classroom with the group. While the dynamics of this group helped keep referrals low, the group still experienced positive effects from strategies that were implemented.

Action Plan

The goal of this study was to observe what effect Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices would have on reducing negative behaviors in the classroom and increasing student attitudes about school. The study aimed to show that these programs, which address the importance of social-emotional learning and positivity in the classroom, would improve classroom climate in a first-grade classroom, as seen by decreasing negative behaviors and producing more positive attitudes towards school. Responsive Classroom strategies such as Morning Meeting, Closing Circle, Quiet Time, Energizers, a focus on social-emotional learning, and many more were experienced by students on a daily basis. The teacher used positive reinforcement for positive behaviors, a token reward system, and adhered to three school-wide rules in the classroom in order to implement the PBIS side of the study.

In order to observe the changes in behaviors and attitudes, students completed a pre- and post-survey that addressed their attitudes about the classroom, school, their peers, and their teacher. Any breaks (Responsive Classroom strategy) that students were asked to take were

tracked on a daily basis, in addition to any student support center visits, and a teacher reflection on implementation and classroom environment.

The findings showed improved attitudes towards school in 15 out of 20 students, with one student remaining at the same score on their attitude survey. Overall students had the best attitude scores towards statements regarding how they were treated by their teacher, expectations in the classroom, effort in the classroom, and knowing mistakes are important for learning. Out of a possible 34 points on the survey, the average score was 29.2. A few students had decreased attitudes about school at the end of the study. None of the students with a decrease in attitude were frequently requested to take breaks and overall acted respectfully, responsibly, and safely in the classroom..

Positive results were seen in terms of Take-A-Break numbers as well. Over the course of the study, the number of breaks per day decreased overall, despite frequent fluctuations in the number of breaks taken per day. In addition to a decrease in breaks taken per day, the number of students taking breaks in a given day also decreased. At the end of the study, there was a trend in which students were regularly taking breaks, but it was not exclusively the same students that visited the break chair. Seeing an overall decrease in breaks means there was a decrease in the number of negative behaviors that were exhibited in the classroom. No behaviors in the classroom were severe or frequent enough to warrant a student support center referral, therefore the data from that source does not exist.

When looking at the data and the positive results seen from the study, it is implied that a combination of Responsive Classroom and PBIS strategies did in fact have the positive results that were predicted at the beginning of the study. It is important to note that the teacher was

worried about what impact was made because of the dynamics of this group. The group of students that had this study implemented were very well mannered, displayed unusually high levels of focus, respect, kindness, and in general did not exhibit many negative behaviors in kindergarten, or from the start of the year. Despite the wonderful dynamics of this group, growth was made. More research would be needed to see if the strategies will have the same, or even a greater impact, on a group of students that may need more support.

Due to the successful results of this study, I will certainly continue to implement Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices in my classroom in the coming years. Through my teacher reflection I was able to mark which practices were used consistently and therefore will continue to grow by using the practices that were not checked as frequently. It should be noted that although my fidelity to implementing PBIS increased, it is a complete mindset and language shift that I would like to continue to delve into and push for greater fidelity in its implementation. When using the teacher reflection, I found that looking at the Responsive Classroom principles every other day as I filled out the list continually ground me in their practice. From this realization I will be hanging the list of practices behind my teaching space next year in order to frequently revisit those principles.

By continuing to implement Responsive Classroom and PBIS, I predict that there will continue to be decreases in negative behaviors and increases in student attitudes towards school. As various classes fluctuate in their needs, using systems which create strong student-teacher relationships and positive thoughts about the teacher's actions will only help to engage students and create a bond with school in general. In the initial research it was noted that less negative behaviors meant more instruction time not only for the whole class, but specifically for the

student exhibiting those behaviors. In my experience some of the students that we send out of the classroom the most really need to be there the most.

One area in the study that did not see growth according to the student attitude survey, was peer to peer relationships and feelings. Looking ahead, I am looking at products or curriculums that also focus on building better peer relationships. While student to student interaction takes place during Morning Meeting and Closing Circle, these practices did not yield stronger peer to peer relationships. In addition, I would like to focus more on where students are at developmentally for peer relationships since there are ebbs and flows in development that can cause strained peer relationships as well.

Looking forward, there are two additional research questions to explore. The first is, what curriculum or program provides the best peer relationship development? Secondly, I would be interested to see what effect these programs, specifically Responsive Classroom, have on students with Autism or other disabilities or disorders that yield an IEP. In my experience students with autism tendencies or IEP conditions are slower to see growth in terms of the number of breaks taken. Is there a better social curriculum for these students or is Responsive Classroom still helpful but needs to be supplemented?

In conclusion Responsive Classroom and PBIS strategies implemented in a first-grade classroom were successful at lowering the number of negative behaviors exhibited and increasing student attitudes towards school. This study reaffirms the importance of social-emotional education in our classrooms, specifically at the primary level where many teachers are seeing unstructured time lessen in order to increase academic time. When students are feel better about school and are in their classrooms more frequently, a greater emphasis can

be placed on academic work. This conclusion supports the primary Responsive Classroom principle of an equal focus on academic work and social-emotional development.

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Appendix A

September 22, 2017

Dear Families:

In addition to being your child's First Grade teacher, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the way the Responsive Classroom approach and PBIS influence behavior choices and student attitudes towards school. School-appropriate behaviors in early grades are a strong predictor of many long-term success indicators, including reading at grade level by third grade. As well, a decrease in negative behaviors leads to an increase in instruction time.

In the coming weeks, I will be implementing the Responsive Classroom approach and PBIS practices as a regular part of my classroom management plan. All students will participate as members of the class. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the data obtained from the results of this study, in addition to last year's Student Support Center data, to determine which strategies are most effective in reducing behaviors and increase student attitudes towards school. All strategies implemented and assessments given are part of normal educational practice.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child's data from my study.

If you decide you want your child's data to be in my study, you don't need to do anything at this point.

If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in my study, please note that on this form (on the back page) and return it by 10/6/17. Note that your child will still participate in our normal classroom management plan but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Catherine's and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- A child's attitudes towards school are important to develop at an early age. The Responsive Classroom approach and PBIS are methods of maintaining a positive classroom environment and reducing instances of negative behaviors through the use of positive interactions with students and community building models. Both methods are frequently used at Normandale Hills and in many elementary classrooms across the country.
- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.
- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.
- There is no penalty for not have your child's data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

(over)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, [REDACTED]. You may ask questions now, or if you have questions later, you can ask me, or my advisor Jane [REDACTED], who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Sincerely,

Allison Kalkman
First Grade Teacher

~~~~~cut here and return to school ONLY if opting out ~~~~~

Impact of Responsive Classroom and PBIS on Behavior Choices in the Elementary Classroom  
Parental Permission Form

**OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child's data from the study, please sign and return by October 6th.**

I do NOT want my child's data to be included in this study.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Appendix B

Responsive Classroom/PBIS Student Attitude Scale- Pg 1



I feel this way  
most of the time.



I feel this way  
sometimes.



I don't feel this way.  
I don't agree.

1. I like being in my classroom.



2. I feel welcomed in my classroom.



3. I like being at school.



4. The students in my classroom are friendly towards me.



5. Other students respect me.



Responsive Classroom/PBIS Student Attitude Scale - Pg 2

6. Other students listen to me.



7. People at school care about me.



8. My teacher treats me fairly.



9. My teacher listens to me.



10. My teacher praises me when I follow the rules.



Responsive Classroom/PBIS Student Attitude Scale - Pg 3

11. I know how I should behave in the classroom.



12. The rules are fair at school.



13. I know what the consequences are if I do not follow the rules.



14. I try my best at school.



15. It is okay to make mistakes in my classroom.



Responsive Classroom/PBIS Student Attitude Scale - Pg 4

16. I feel safe at school.



17. I feel happy when I am at school.



Appendix C

## Responsive Classroom/PBIS Teacher Reflection

### Responsive Classroom Principles Used

|                                                                                                                               |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Equal emphasis on the social and academic curriculum                                                                          |  |
| Focus on how children learn as much as what they learn                                                                        |  |
| View that social interaction facilitates cognitive growth                                                                     |  |
| Emphasis on cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control as critical social skills for children to learn |  |
| Emphasis on teachers' knowledge of children's individual, cultural, and developmental characteristics                         |  |
| Focus on understanding of children's families                                                                                 |  |
| Attention to the way in which adults work together within a school                                                            |  |

### Responsive Classroom Practices Used

|                                                            |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Morning Meeting                                            |  |
| Rules and Logical Consequences                             |  |
| Co-creation of rules and expectations                      |  |
| Shift in teacher language from "praise" to "encouragement" |  |
| Interactive Modeling - social and academic                 |  |
| Interactive Learning Structure                             |  |
| Energizers                                                 |  |
| Quiet Time                                                 |  |
| Closing Circle                                             |  |

PBIS Rating



Reflection of Behaviors Seen

Reflection of Community/Student Attitudes