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A Multiple Perspectives Analysis of the Influences on the School to Prison Pipeline in Virginia
Report of Qualitative Findings

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Abstract

The study supported by award #2015-CK-BX-0007 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice National Institutes of Justice grant consisted of both qualitative and quantitative investigation of the influences on the school to prison pipeline (STPP). For the qualitative component, we conducted interviews with the principals, administrators, school resource officers, and/or school counselors from schools that are exemplars for preventing students' entry into the STPP, and schools that have very high referrals to the STPP. Interviews were coded to identify themes common among participants regarding the STPP, and to answer specific research questions. The themes regarding school discipline decision making emerged as, Human Connection in Schools and Communities, Discipline Process, Complex Contributors to Students' Actions, and School Aspirations.

Data Sources

For purposes of this study we identified exemplar schools in Virginia that either had especially low rates of exclusionary discipline and referrals to the juvenile court system, or especially high levels of the same. We contacted each of the schools hoping to interview teams of administrative, counselors, and school resource officers within each school. Ultimately, we secured the participation of 34 individuals, representing Principals (n=17), Assistant Principals (n=11), School Resource Officers (n=4), and School Counselors (n=2). For 12 schools we were able to interview more than one stakeholder within the school, and in seven schools we interviewed only one stakeholder. Interviews followed an interview protocol which allows for a structured conversation on the topics of interest, and flexibility to be able to address emerging issues within the interview. Interviews were conducted by four members of the research team over a period of approximately 4 months. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 23 and 79 minutes. The recordings were professionally transcribed and the transcriptions were verified by one of the research team members who would fill-in ambiguous phrases that were unclear in the recording, and mask the transcripts to be sure that no identifiable information about the individual or the school where they worked appeared in the final transcript. The final transcripts ranged between 9 to 28 pages in length.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was initiated after each transcript was verified. Verified transcripts were distributed among a team of three doctoral-level research assistants. A sample of transcripts was coded by each team member followed by a collaborative research meeting with the coders and two project leaders. These meetings consisted of discussion about the codes that had emerged, with the goal of achieving consensus on how different interpretations could be standardized. This meeting also allowed for an audit process to enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the analysis (Goodell, Stage, & Cooke, 2015). After initial open coding of the first six transcripts, a codebook was developed to complete initial coding for the remaining transcripts. After initial coding, we engaged in a focused coding process in which all transcripts and codes were reviewed and refined. One team member then refined the focused codes for all transcripts to ensure saturation. Categories from the focused codes were developed, and these categories were used to answer the qualitative research questions (Charmaz, 2006).

Findings by Research Question

What factors inform decision-making about exclusionary discipline practices and law enforcement referrals in Virginia schools?

Administrators are responsible for determining how students are disciplined within the school as well as when to involve law enforcement in this process. Interviews with administrators, school resource officers, and school counselors in Virginia revealed the complex decision-making process upon which these decisions are based. Multiple categories emerged during analysis that spoke to the factors influencing exclusionary discipline practices and law enforcement referrals. Participants expressed a need for consistency in the discipline process for

students while acknowledging the importance of making decisions on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, the responses were layered and multifaceted.

Individual characteristics were often referred to as a primary influence on the decision-making process. Discipline was approached situationally with multiple factors considered prior to delivering consequences. Participants often considered the disciplinary history of students with first offenses viewed less harshly and more frequent infractions handled with increasing severity. Jill stated her decision-making is affected by whether a situation occurs for the first time or if it is “habitual” while Paul noted that a history of multiple referrals will lead to “harsher consequences.” Hope also described this by saying:

In terms of figuring out what the adjudication process is, I’m going to look at the student’s prior disciplinary record for this school year...I’m determining whether it’s the first offense for that violation. Second, third, what have you. Then if it’s happened more than once, then we do step up the discipline a bit.

Dennis echoed the concept of handling discipline infractions according to disciplinary history by stating, “If it’s a first offense, we wouldn’t treat it as a fourth offense.” Additional individual characteristics considered in the decision-making process were influences outside of a student’s control. Participants reported they sought awareness of context, such as a student’s home life and their learning needs, when deciding upon consequences. Mathias reported that he attempts to understand this through conversations with students by saying, “External circumstances...that may have impacted the student’s decision-making at the time. That could be anywhere from a student with a disability to a student with multiple crises in their home life or multiple childhood traumas...” Within these conversations, Mathias also seeks to cultivate empathy and reduce the

severity of discipline, although he continues to feel that exclusionary discipline practices teach natural consequences:

An important part of due process for us is walking through with that student what their emotions were at the time, what may be happening outside of school, why they made that choice, what choice could they have made that's better. But we're also believers that actions have consequences, and so I may talk to that student and I may get to the bottom of it. And I may have some empathy and say instead of kicking you out of school for two days, I'm going to give you two days of ISS, in-school suspension. But at the end of the day, you made a poor decision, and in life when we make poor decisions...I often reference me and I'll say if the superintendent comes up and gets mad at me and I cuss at him, I'm going to lose my job, whether my wife just left me or I had a fight with my kids that morning, or my car broke down, I probably am going to lose my job. So, that's an important part of the process for us, is to have that conversation with students.

Despite the value placed on understanding context, participants reported their efficacy in discipline involved looking past external circumstances. Peter expressed the importance of knowing students' life situations despite their minimum influences in his decision-making process:

I need to know that you're homeless, living in a hotel and that your parent was just arrested for selling drugs. I need to know that, because somebody needs to be very sympathetic to that, because it's a lot of stress on you. But when we're talking about how to guide kids and how to get them to make better decisions, that's not going to be the factor that's going to be key in how to assess the support of the decision-making.

Peter continued by saying, “ I understand all those other things that are happening in their life. But if we cloud our actions with all of that and we blend it all together, we’re not being effective.” Context may also be used to support exclusionary practices within a school setting. Participants acknowledged the struggle that students with specialized needs may experience in the classroom. Mathias also describe more extreme discipline practices due to contextual issues when stating, “I have some kids that we have to up the ante because but a lot of our traditional discipline things don’t work very well, and that’s because we’re trying to treat a symptom and not really the underlying cause.”

In addition to the life and discipline history of the student, participants also considered the type of offense and severity of the case. Rather than adopting a standardized approach, they asked themselves how the incident fell on a spectrum. Dennis spoke to the nuances of a students’ past offenses and the current offense by stating, “I think you have to take a look at a fourth offense of something minor. It’s very different than a first offense of something major.” Similarly, Mathias accounts for others involved in the situation by considering “the infraction and the severity of that infraction, the impact it has on the learning environment, the impact it has on the safety of other students in the building.” Participants also addressed the role that students’ perceptions play in exclusionary discipline practices and referral to law enforcement. They identified a need for consistency in decisions of discipline due to students observing how other students are treated in particular situations. For example, Reanna described an incident in which she allowed a student to be arrested for fighting to “set an example and create consistency.” Dennis also reported consistency is important because of students’ perceptions when he stated, “...at least use some consistency so that it doesn't appear that, well, you did this

for one, didn't do it for everyone." Mark offered an additional perspective when discussing the importance of students' awareness that they can be removed from school:

That is held above the kids, and they know it, and I think it's effective. If you go out here and talk to the kids they know if they do something over and over, and do something bad enough they won't be able to come back to school.

Sue, a school social worker, also described her belief that students must be aware of the potential consequences of their actions:

...it's important that kids have consequences for the behavior and that they are connected to the infraction. That there is a chance to mend, but they need to know there is a line in the sand and there is behavior that is not appropriate because it impedes on the educational environment of others around them and on the safety of others.

Participants are not making discipline decisions blindly. They referred to decision-making tools, specifically a *discipline matrix*, that provides guidance in determining student disciplinary consequences. Connie described the discipline matrix as a "starting point" in determining "appropriate" discipline. Amber also described it as a "reference" while Craig stated the discipline matrix is less useful for situations more complex than tardies. Other participants, such as Paul, placed more value in their versions of the discipline matrix when stating:

I guess an unofficial matrix, that we've been using for about six years, I guess, and we just, we make notes, and certain things are, for me, are non-negotiable. If you do X, Y is gonna happen, regardless of who you are. Other items, we'll take into account the student and past behaviors. If it's first-time referral, first time the kid's ever gotten a referral, some items are more we're gonna have just a conversation; "Hey, you can't do that. Knock it off." Others, if it's a student who's had multiple referrals, then we will do

harsher consequences...we created it based on one we got from another school. I have no idea what school it came from, and we just took theirs and looked at things we had been doing, and then tailored it to what we had been doing. So for example, profanity directed at a teacher is automatically – there's no discussion – it's a three-day out of school, regardless. I mean, I don't care who you are; you can't cuss a teacher, you can't cuss an adult out. However, profanity towards a student is usually an I.S.S. And those were things we were doing, and so we just started making notes, and it was kinda a year in progress. "Okay, we did this to this child," so then we wrote it down. And it's been helpful. When you have those oddball actions that happen every once in a while, we'll really pull it out then and see. "Okay, what do we do when we have this?"

Brad discussed the role of the discipline matrix when referring students to law enforcement as well as when striving for consistency. He also noted concern that the school and its administrators would be held liable if certain incidents were not reported. He stated:

In order to have consistency, we have a matrix...And within our matrix, drug violations are required to be reported. Assault and battery has to be. Alcohol use has to be reported. So we don't have a choice. If we don't file a report, we'd be breaking the law.

In fact, many participants were often forced to look beyond situation-specific information and tools for guidance in their decision-making process. Specific laws, policies, and codes dictated the point at which administrators must remove a student from the classroom and/or refer to law enforcement. Jane identified that primary factors in her discipline decision-making process are policies created by the school board. She said, "Well, certainly one factor is, what is the school board policy and discipline protocols that have been developed in alignment with that." The majority of participants also indicated a boundary exists between what constitutes a school

discipline issue and what requires law enforcement involvement as a result of these school board policies and legal obligations. Mathias delineated that law violations necessitate the involvement of law enforcement in the form of the school resource officer by stating, “School discipline issues are school discipline issues, and unless they turn into legal issues that can’t be solved any other way, then the school resource officer doesn’t get involved.” Dominic also stated that he avoids involving the school resource officer except when required by law:

...he doesn't really get involved unless it is a situation that involves the law. Telephone misuse, he's not gonna get involved in, but somebody brings drugs, yeah, he's involved. Somebody brings a weapon, yes, he's involved. If there's a fight, yes. If there's tobacco, yes. So things that actually have laws prohibiting, then he gets involved.

Regardless of participants’ desires to help students, many felt referrals to law enforcement were out of their control. Dante described directly informing students about this loss of power by saying, “...there are certain things – what I tell the students is if it's a situation where I can't help them...if they have drugs, a weapon, something like that...I just tell them, ‘I can't help you on this.’” Will spoke to the fixed process upon which the school resource officer becomes involved in discipline issues as well as an inability to assist students based on the type of behavior:

If it is something that breaches the law, it's pretty much predetermined what happens. Our SRO handles that situation. I don't think there's a lot of discussion as to what we need to do. I mean he has his protocol at that point. If it's something that's dealing with drugs or weapons, that's automatic. We can negotiate more on the lesser problems that we see but there are some that are just automatic and those decisions we don't have a lot of control.

Ronald echoed the sentiments that certain actions require disciplinary collaboration with the school resource officer. He stated, “You certainly have certain policies in the state. We're

required to inform law enforcement of certain offenses. That's the state law. So there's a list of things that I have to tell a law enforcement officer..." Brad voiced an identical process when he said, "We have mandatory – certain disciplines require that we report...And we follow the – I'm going to call them state policies, but I guess it's probably law....required to be reported to law enforcement."

School resource officers provided insight into their understanding of how an incident is reported to them as well as their decision-making process in pursuing charges. Hank, a school resource officer, described the incidents that he encounters as, "reportable--something that has to be reported...something that meets the level." He went on to declare that his actions after report are dependent upon the severity of the incident, the policies and requirements of his department, and the rights of those harmed as a result of the student's behavior:

And dependent on the severity of it...if it's reported to me, I do report because that's what we're required to do for my departmental policy, anything that's reported to us, we're required to do a report and whether there's any action on it...for instance, assault and battery. If there's any action on it, it depends on if that victim...if that parent wants something done, then it's offered to them because it's their right and they have the right to do something if they want.

Vince, also a school resource officer, described the role of his values and belief in the court system when determining how to handle law violations, specifically drugs and violence. He stated:

I pretty much have a hard and fast rule when it comes to violence...There are certain things that, drugs and violence...I don't believe in it. I would really teach children before

they turn 18 that it's not acceptable. And if that, you know, if that involves referring them to the court system to get their attention, then that is what it is.

In addition to referring to school resource officers, participants also discussed students' fates lying in the hands of entities beyond the immediate school building, such as the school superintendent and the school board. Will stated that, "...decisions go to the school board. They make those determinations on a child continuing school and alternatives that we may have in place." Ophelia also reported that decisions of long-term suspensions and expulsions are determined by the superintendent and the school board, according to the code of conduct: "As school administrators can only suspend for ten days....we have to make a recommendation to [superintendent] for disciplinary action for long term suspensions or expulsion. If it's expulsion, we have to go before the school board." Similarly, Ronald described students' legal and educational futures as decided by entities not directly located in the school building. He reported that law enforcement determines filing of criminal charges and the Office of Student Management Alternative Programs [OSMAP] within the Virginia Department of Education makes educational placement decisions that may result in a student not returning to school:

...it's the school court. It's basically the hearing officer. So they're deciding where the student is going to get an education...I say to the parent, "This matter was referred to law enforcement. That's not my decision as to whether or not charges will be brought forward." Then basically I say, "Your behavior has impacted your education. Therefore, I'm referring you to OSMAP because I feel that your behavior warrants a recommendation for long-term suspension, which could be anything beyond ten days to the rest of the school year or up to 365 days." Then when we go to that hearing at

OSMAP, which I go to as well, then I say, "Okay. Here's a hearing officer. Let them listen to your behavior and decide whether you can come back..."

Jane also described the involvement of external entities in a student's removal from school. She stated, "...we have an incident where a student is found to have drugs or be under the influence of drugs or alcohol or a physical fight...we are looking at definitely suspension...we're looking at a referral to the superintendent."

Participants regularly described involving outside resources in an effort to meet students' needs. The court system was one such resource. Although participants did not believe court was an appropriate setting for most students, they described minimal community supports to address student mental health. They also expressed concern that some families refused to engage students in mental health services. Participants admitted to referring students to court with the hopes that the court system would require the families to engage students with such services. Paul described charging students with more minor offenses to access court resources, stating:

Sometimes we may be overaggressive in charging a student, solely for the purpose of getting them services, getting them court-mandated services. Especially if it's a student that I know there's things, or we know, the admin knows or the school counseling office knows, that there's issues going on at home, and they need help, and the parents are not receptive. Or they don't qualify, because let's say insurance won't pay for day treatment or something like that. We will then charge for a much lesser offense, only – and I will tell the parents this. "The reason I'm doing this is if I get you in court, we can ask the judge to order these services, and then they're free," because then F.A.P.T. will pay for it. Which I hate to have to kinda play the system that way, but it works, and we have success with that.

Tori voiced a similar process when stating court referrals are often used as a way to push a student or family into mental health services. She stated the following:

...if we know they need mental health help and their parents have been not really wanting to or can't afford to, then [court] kind of forces the family to get their kid the mental health help. So that's when I kind of tell them it's a good way to give them the help and make them get the help.

Tori so strongly believed in court as a tool for helping students and families that she described frustration with efforts to minimize student referrals to the court system when saying:

And I think some of our frustrations is, because we deal with these kids on a daily basis and know a lot about them, they are taking away the mandatory mental health and helping them. So that's what we get upset in. The fact of, hey, it's not – we are not trying to get them punished, but there are services that they need and don't have access to because, one, their parents don't want them to or they are ashamed of putting them into it or things like that. And now you have cut off that route for us to get them the help. And so where courts can be a benefit, they are taking it away from us.

Tori was not alone in believing court is a valuable route for accessing services. Mathias identified, “There are not a whole lot of options to help our kids before – unless, one, they have Medicaid, or, two, they’re in the system.” Amber also described minimal options for her school county. This often forced her into removing students from school due to lack of alternative education. She reported, “There are certain kids who should not be mainstreamed into a regular school setting. But in a county like mine, where we don't have alternative ed, I [sometimes] don't have another option than to put them out of school....”

It was common for participants to express their beliefs that students were best served outside of the school setting; this often resulted in exclusionary practices such as placement in alternative education. Dominic described the need for students experiencing learning, behavioral, and emotional issues to be placed outside of the traditional school setting when he stated:

...you have this population that is not ready, they're not educated enough to excel at that level, but yet we force them to. So what are they gonna do? They're gonna tear up a classroom, because they don't have a clue what the hell you're talking about. Then there are the ones that are conduct disorders or oppositional defiant personalities, emotionally disturbed kids, and kids that are insecure, kids that have strong abandonment issues, and you're putting them in a classroom and you're saying okay, study, don't tear the classroom up. They need a different environment.

Participants felt alternative education was a positive substitute to regular classroom education.

Rita described the alternative school setting in her county favorably by identifying it as a “resource when we get to the point where a child has to be taken out of school.” Will also recounted alternative education as a valuable discipline tool, stating:

And to me, again, the objective is to give them the individualized attention that they need to make a change in their lives; it's not just punitive. It's not just to separate them. We have some caring people at our alternative school and they also have counseling there...that consequence is designed to have purpose in helping that child. It's not just to punish or to separate.

Connie took this point further by describing a lack of alternative education setting in a county as a “disservice to our students because they go home for 10 days.”

Discussion

The categories that emerged during analysis indicate an intricate process of decision-making related to exclusionary discipline practices and law enforcement. It appears that participants oscillate between a need to create consistency for students while honoring their individualization. Both ideas often linked back to the notion that students, parents, and school stakeholders are observing the actions and decisions of administrators. Witnessing consistency might help students to better understand what is expected of them, whereas while being treated on a case-by-case basis allows for a more holistic and nuanced perspective of their particular situations. Consistency and individual treatment could help students through different means, yet executing both created a confusing conflict for some participants.

Although participants did consider consistency to be critical in discipline, the student's individual discipline history and home life factored into the decision-making process. Most participants described collecting information on the particular student as their first action in decision-making. Participants judged students on how often they committed the infraction in the past and previous responses to discipline decisions. In terms of home life, participants often sought this information, although they felt unable to do much with it beyond express sympathy and seek supportive resources. The majority of the time, students were asked to answer for current incidents based on their referral history. Home life weighed less when tipping the scales; this referred back to participants' belief in the need for consistency. Administrators also considered the specific circumstances of the incident, such as the severity and impact on others. After obtaining information on the individual student, participants sought to know what happened, with whom, how were all involved were affected, and what options existed for addressing it. The answers to these questions served to guide participants in determining the consequences administered to the student.

Decision-making tools also helped to guide participants in their decision-making process. Tools, such as a discipline matrix common to a number of Virginia schools, created a starting point from which administrators could determine courses of action. It seemed the discipline matrix was particularly useful for more minor offenses (e.g., tardies, dress code violations) while major offenses carried a more rigid set of guidelines. Administrators often reported that legal and policy expectations govern most strongly in determining how particular referrals are handled, such as violence and substance possession. Students were often pushed into the criminal justice system through legal obligation; if school administrators neglected to report violations of the law, they could face legal consequences. They felt their hands were tied in these situations, so much so that they informed students of their inability to assist them in the matter.

In an effort to help students in a more tangible way, some participants pushed students into the court system to access resources. They reported the courts could pay for mental health services as well as require parents to cooperate with the process. Participants expressed a desire to ensure students and families were placed in the appropriate services, even if it meant involving the court system or sending a student to an alternative educational setting. This means of rectifying a lack of school and community resources reflects a desperation to meet high needs. Participants discussed the two options of court system mental health support and alternative education favorably; they were often unable to fully conceptualize the risk of engagement in such systems because of their limited options in addressing these issues.

What policies, programs, and procedures direct students away from the STPP in Virginia schools?

Students may enter the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) through multiple avenues. Entrance can start in the classroom when teachers refer students for disciplinary action, or it can

occur as a result of zero-tolerance policies developed at the school-board level. Virginia schools incorporate a range of policies, programs, and procedures designed to divert students from the STPP. Interviews with administrators, resources officers, and counselors from Virginia schools produced multiple categories describing these efforts. Although most participants did not name a specific program, they voiced a mindset of keeping students out of the legal system. Most did acknowledge that students belonged in the classroom more than the courtroom.

In the interest of helping students to avoid the courtroom, participants might utilize alternative discipline methods. The majority of them indicated specific methods they incorporate as a substitute for removal from school or a referral to law enforcement. Participants mentioned restorative justice (an intervention that brings offender and victim together in an effort to ameliorate harm, and support the school community) as a useful tool. Tim acknowledged the lack of restorative justice “back in the day,” and stated it has helped the school to “[see] the value in the relationship, and getting to know the kid, and talking about what was the reasons behind the discipline infraction that occurred.” When students are unable to resolve fights on their own, Tori described incorporating “third party” restorative justice practices “...to help them work through it...”. Lionel described a similar process when he said, “...we just talk it through, have an intervention, talk with the kids or we’ll have a mediation-type thing, where we’ll actually sit down, the guidance counselors, the administration, whoever’s required.” In addition to restorative justice, participants also noted the importance of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), a program through the Department of Education designed to improve social, behavioral, emotional, and academic outcomes for students. Rita described implementing this change on a school-wide level when stating, “The focus is going to be, and objective is going to be, to create a school-wide system...in which the discipline focuses on alternatives to

suspension, using Positive Behavior Interventions and Support.” Prior to incorporating PBIS, both Cole and Connie observed significant behavioral issues as a result of previous discipline practices. They noted that PBIS has since improved student discipline. Connie stated, “...we were having so much behavior concerns. Because we were not systematic, our interventions were a moot point. But once we've gotten this going...it makes the interventions a little bit easier because you know what you're targeting.” Cole discussed the relational component of PBIS as beneficial in helping decrease conflicts between students and teachers:

...had some rules in place here and some policies that I think not only the way they were enforced but the way they were presented to the kids, they were kind of outdated and as a result of those you had increased cases of discipline – of insubordination – in conflict with students and teachers that would result sometimes in suspensions. And so, we kind of took a different angle of approach to these things. Instead of sort of hitting the issues with what kind of rules can we develop to make these things better, we tried to get back to the root of the problem and the root of the issue. And what we came up with was it's all based on relationships...And this is sort of based on the principles of PBIS.

Many participants described a policy in which they temporarily remove students from escalating situations that could result in disciplinary action. Marilyn acknowledged that this helps to ensure students remain engaged in school when stating, “Maybe the student needs a break from the teacher...I try to do those types of things to make sure that they stay in school.” Ophelia described a similar process of enabling students to work through the conflict on their own by giving students a “a time out for a couple of hours...[to] remove the student from the situation but also give the student some space.” Some participants reported that in their school exists a specific classroom where students are allowed to calm themselves. Mathias reported, “...they

send them to the restricted classroom and then we'll catch up with them later when they have the ability to talk through their discipline issues.” Hope described a program in her school that was developed around students receiving a break from emotionally-charged situations:

One that we use frequently, is the STOP Program, student timeout program. And that has helped lower our discipline...even though it originally was intended for special education students, any student in the building can use the STOP program...Sometimes teachers will send them out when they're not focused as opposed to writing the referral. Or a student may escalate a little bit. The teacher could send them – would send them to the STOP room. So all of our teachers are oriented about the STOP room and they know how that program works. So that's been helpful.

Although not commonly referenced as a deterrent to the STPP, some participants stated their beliefs that alternative education helps to keep children in school. Dominic reported, “...to do that, to keep kids in classrooms, there's a certain population that needs alternative education.” Ronald described alternative education as an “opportunity” which has garnered his school “very positive support.”

Participants described efforts at incorporating discipline practices that required creativity and ingenuity. Vince, a school resource officer, stated that he has witnessed school administrators assign community service instead of requesting he refer the student to court:

I've seen them give kids community service here after school instead of me referring them to court, and it being court ordered. We work out a deal amongst themselves of tell you what, instead of me charging you...[administrators] call the parent and say hey, this is strictly voluntary. We can't make you do it. You, sometimes you have to be

creative...they're usually happy that you didn't refer them to court. Because of all the other stuff that could happen in court.

Hope also described giving students a choice to engage in an alternative discipline method instead of receiving school discipline. She stated that her school provides “seminars and awareness for parents and students...about social media and police relations...about college and career readiness...mental health services, social services groups, all coming together...banking, financing. Just kind of looking at the entire student.” Rather than give students a referral, “[administrators] offered the students a choice...either you serve....[or] you come to this community outreach seminar...And they did that as an alternative to having school discipline...to be part and connected to that community outreach program.” Ronald reported he has developed a behavioral contract with students, a procedure he labeled as “effective.” Shelly stated a book inspired her school to implement reverse suspensions as an attempt to engage the family in the discipline process:

There is a book that we did a book study with our group, Better than Carrots – Sticks and Carrots. But it talked about reverse suspension, where instead of sending the kid out, the parent comes to school. So we've invited, we've probably done it about eight times, where, “Hey, unfortunately your student continues to have this behavior. We would like you to shadow your student for the day?”

Participants also described alternative methods of addressing students possessing tobacco products. Rather than engage the school resource officer to charge the student, participants sought to reframe the incident as a teaching opportunity that allows the students to remain in school. Rita supported this idea when she reported the following:

I think we would like to move away from being punitive in this and in the first offense having conversations, have the child possibly do some type of research in reference to tobacco, the addicting parts of tobacco, how that affects the body, what that looks like. Trying to be, like I said, just more positive in dealing with the problem that they have because any time they're out of school, they're missing instruction.

Hope reported that her school recruits an outside entity to conduct a smoking cessation program. Once again, students are given a choice to engage in this program. She stated, “they have an option of a three day out of school suspension or they can attend a smoking cessation program...but that's a great alternative to suspension.”

Participants described procedures in which they elected to not take action with a behavioral issue. They interpreted their inaction as a type of action that decreased the likelihood of a student receiving a suspension or court referral. The incidents for which this occurred ranged from minor to severe. Reanne discussed her decision to understand a student’s family situation when choosing to excuse his excessive tardiness and allow natural consequences to occur. She said the following:

I have a child who has 10 million tardies to school—and I'm exaggerating, but it's over 30 this year. His daddy has cancer. He has to work at Target in the afternoon. I have a formal note that his father is ill, so I haven't taken his parking pass, because he has to work. He's helping pay the bills. His consequence is, he has to take his exams. So, he does have a consequence, it's just not coming from me, because he's gotten more than three tardies second semester to that class.

A number of participants discussed this inaction in the face of potential legal charges. Although the behavior was often addressed in some way, participants chose to address it through

nontraditional methods. When making the choice whether to charge a student with possession of marijuana, Tori places value in the amount of the marijuana. If it is below a particular amount, she chooses to engage in “oral counseling where we still write out the paperwork, but it doesn't go to a court. It doesn't go to an intake officer. It just stays inside the school.” In lieu of arrest, Tori might ask a student to complete an alternative discipline method: “The last kid we did it with, I made him write out five paragraphs on the side effects of marijuana on kids. So that was part of the punishment instead of him going to intake.” Tori also described relying on standardized methods, such as an interview:

...a lot of people think if we decide to press charges on the kid then they go immediately in front of a judge...now they get interviewed, and depending on where they score, then decides what path they're on. So if they score low, then what they call them is least likely to offend. And then that's it. They're done.

Mark reported the school resource officer holds the power to engage in an unofficial diversion process. Despite the school's mandate to report certain incidents to the resource officer, he or she can pursue a different route for students. Mark stated, “Now there are some things that we're mandated to tell the resource officer...but even then he has the ability...to discuss this with the court services unit...to determine how they want to handle it.” Hank, a school resource officer, corroborated this process when recounting two incidents in which he exercised judgment to determine if a student's actions warranted a referral to the legal system. The first incident involved what he perceived to be an empty threat:

...down here we have kids all the time make threats like that, empty threats, and sometimes they make 'em without thinking and they don't really mean – intend to follow through with them. They just get mad and say 'em. So in this instance, that person who

made that threat, I felt like...they didn't mean it but it got portrayed as that way. So instead of pushing it to, you know, being the worst possible scenario, then we kind of worked it out and got behind it honestly, 'cause that'd have been awful if we'd pushed it all the way to official and for a felony charge on a middle school where they didn't need it over something that was a mistake.

Hank also discussed the outdoor culture of his school often resulting in knife possession on campus. He stated it is not abnormal for him to choose not to pursue a weapons charge with students that participate in outdoor activities or organizations. Hank reported, "If it is a student, a boy scout who forgot it in his pocket over the weekend, then it's just given to the parents and nothing's done...there's still a report done but it's not referred on past that point."

Participants chose to approach discipline through preventative methods as well. Rather than reactively addressing issues, many participants described developing policies and programs that allowed for working with students in advance of problems. Larry reported he altered his school's cell-phone policy to reduce violations by requiring students to place their phones in a holder at the beginning of class. He described this policy as "kid-friendly, parent-friendly, teacher-friendly and administrator friendly" because it still allowed to for students to use their phones "during lunch, before school and after school, and during transition from block to block." While this policy targeted a specific behavior, other participants described programs designed to cultivate a relationship between teachers and students. Tori reported she and a teacher organized a gardening project with a known "high-risk population" so that they could be an ally as issues developed throughout the school year. She stated, "...one of the kids from the gardening project will come in here and I will try and help her. Or I will get emails from her teacher...And she will come stay here and do work." Mark identified other teachers as engaging in mentorship and

coaching with students in lieu of conflict when saying, "...the teachers have really taken to the idea of coaching that they realize that they can help bring them back to the classroom as opposed to continuing to ratchet up the verbiage back and forth until it blows into something..."

Similarly, Rita reported her school utilizes a support services leadership team with the goal of bonding with particular students to keep them engaged in school:

...the other thing we implemented...was our support services leadership team. They are also bonding with those students. All the students that we were having truancy problems with, or attendance problems with, even before it got to the truancy point, they have a teacher specifically at the school that checks in with them daily...Again, a change in the culture and a change in the climate in relation to what the expectations are for those kids...That is basically the referral policy that we have and are working on right now...We're gonna try to be more creative in the interventions that we have here...What's something else that we can do so we're keeping them here?

Sue, a school social worker, echoed that her school utilizes programs that work to identify high-risk students and coordinate systems of care to reduce students' risk of entering the STPP:

Then there's keeping kids – the [NAME] for Youth and Children; it's about maintaining kids in our community, high risk kids in our community so that when you talk about a school to prison pipeline, these are the kids who we're trying to keep out of detention, keep out of postee, keep out of congregate care, keep out of residential facilities by making certain we do everything we can for that systems of care and to support the systems care in the community...We keep plugging along and making certain that we are meeting the needs of our kids and families through our systems of care.

When the considering mental health needs of students and families, participants referenced allowing systems that meet these needs to work with the student in instances of potential behavioral referrals. Paul stated that students engaged in therapeutic day treatment (TDT) were often referred back to the program in cases of a first offense so that they could “handle it...and use that learning experience for the students’ treatment plan.” Ophelia and Hope also stated therapeutic day treatment is involved with students to help avoid discipline referrals. Ophelia stated, “So [therapeutic day treatment] is sort of an intervention program to put something in place. Instead of coming to us for discipline it goes to them...they have a counselor who is helping them with some coping skills.” Hope attributed teachers utilizing students’ therapeutic day treatment as helping to reduce discipline referrals in her school:

...we have a therapeutic day treatment program here. We have counselors...the teachers are aware of what students can use TDT services. And they're good about reaching out when the kid is in crisis, the student is in crisis, and/or disruptive, to get the TDT counselor. I think that's been a huge help with lowering our discipline referrals for kids who need that TDT support.

Vince also spoke to treating students differently based on their specific situations when stating, “We do have a children’s home in our attendance area...when we’re dealing with those children, we deal with them differently than we do a child that is not at children’s home. Because we know there’s some reason they’re there.”

Teachers were regularly identified as the first line of defense in pushing students away from the STPP. Larry described his efforts to empower teachers to be involved in a way that helps students remain in the classroom when stating, “So we will say if you want in put on our punishment here’s your opportunity...if you want the child back in the classroom, then we can

look at other forms of punishment so he doesn't miss instructional time." Sue also stated that addressing behavior begins in the classroom:

First of all, the onus is on the teacher within the classroom to address the behavior in a positive, but firm manner. Then the responsibility is outreach to parents. Trying some different in-classroom management strategies to address the behavior; movement of the child, proximity, and re-engaging them in the lessons really looking at it there could be an academic challenge in there that's making that difficult for the child to behave in class.

Jill identified the value of teachers practicing appropriate classroom management because "It may never even come to a referral...that teacher is able to handle things within the classroom or they have great communication with the student or the parent...they recognize the power of the relationship, and keeping it in-house." Hope and Jane reported teachers are encouraged to address behavioral concerns with students directly through a private, non-confrontational conversation in the hallway. They described a similar process in which a "sidebar" conversation is followed by "parent communication." Jane added that teachers may also follow-up with a lunch detention for the purpose of "[having] a conversation and that the teacher will use that as an opportunity to create a relationship and an understanding with the student." Participants also spoke of a policy in which teachers can allow students an opportunity to disengage from class for a short period of time as opposed to sending them to the office for a referral. Shelly stated, "If you need a kid to have a time out...instead of sending them to the office, send them to another classroom that they might have a more positive relationship with, get refocused, and then have them back in class." Mathias acknowledged that allowing students a break required a policy change:

This year, we have given the teachers the flexibility to say if you think the kid can cool down in 20 minutes, send him down for 20 minutes. In the past, we've always said if you send a kid out of class, they need to stay out. But that's not always productive.

Sometimes, the student just needs to chill.

Mathias also stated that teachers have adopted this policy due to their "recognition that it doesn't do us any good if those kids are out of the class for the remainder of the block."

As teachers are empowered in discipline, so too are students. Participants discussed their efforts to facilitate student ownership over their discipline. This often came in the form of choices. Reanna described a procedure she utilizes in which lays out a first option for a student to cease misbehavior and a second option for involving outside assistance. She stated she then advises students, "I'm gonna continue teaching, and you make the decision in the next couple minutes, and I'll take a cue from you." Cole reported these choices are most useful when presented as a discussion:

And part of the initial warning may be, "Look, I don't want to call your mom and dad about this. You're 18 years old, you're 17 years old, you know right from wrong, you really want me to bother your mom about this?" And of course, the kids are like, "No." But the second time, you say, look, I'm gonna have to call home, I should be writing a referral right now but I'm gonna hold back on doing that. But the next strike, the third strike, you are gonna get that referral. You have that understanding.

Shelly described a similar process in which students are presented with an option of involving parents and empowered to consider what they could have done differently:

I may remove the kid for just the class period...instead of missing the entire day because of something that happened in the locker room, and they're pulled out of math, science, et

cetera, “Just come spend the day with me. As a matter of fact, if you so choose this behavior again, I’m inviting mom and dad in. Who would you like me to?” “None of them.” “Well then let’s make better choices. What could you have done differently?”

Peter stated this ownership can be an opportunity to “stop [students from] going down that road, because we gave them the benefit of the doubt and we gave them the opportunity to figure out what they could’ve done differently.” He shared an example in which a student worked with an assistant principal to develop “what their plan of action was going to be to sort of rectify what had happened...now the kid has to take ownership of what we’re going to do.”

Participants articulated their role in the discipline process as well as the roles of stakeholders. Jill described her goals when students are referred to her for discipline by saying, “I just want to know what's going on. So, my goal is to try to diffuse the situation...so you have to be able to listen, but again, my goal is to de-escalate the situation.” Marilyn noted that her role helps to keep students in the classroom when she stated, “....my role is to keep them in school, and not be at home suspended. Because I need them to keep doing their work, and so that I can ensure that they pass classes.” Marilyn also further defined her role in school discipline:

I don't really facilitate with in-school suspension or out of school suspension. I do more of – the word I want to call it is I run interference. That's how I call it, because I don't want it to get to the level where they are going to get in trouble, and I'll go get them, and we'll talk it through...

The distinct roles held by participants and other stakeholders can lead to a team-based discipline approach as a method of diverting students from the STPP. Reanna avoids sole decision-making when involving others in the process:

And then I bring in other people so I'm not the only one making the decision. Other people who have experience. I'm not a certified license in psychology, but my person is, and she has experience with kids. I'm not law enforcement, but he is, so, he comes in. So, I think it's important that all of that experience comes together to ascertain what is best for this child.

Participants also reported recruiting parents to assist in discipline. Dante advocated for including the parent when encouraging teachers to contact parents “because some of these situations can be taken care of just by talking to the parent, and just asking them for their help.” Dennis echoed this experience by stating, “And for the most part when that happens, when communication is made, normally, our parents are pretty supportive and will – they’ll put a squash to it...And I think that's really important, that we’re all on the same page.” Paul stated that parents may also be involved in selecting consequences for discipline. He stated, We'll discuss with the parents. Usually, it's, "Here's the consequence I'm issuing." Sometimes parents will ask, "You know, can we do this instead of that, because..." and they'll give me a reason, and we may adjust based on parent request.”

Although participants valued a team approach, they made efforts to not involve the resource officer in school discipline issues to minimize student involvement in the justice system. Mathias clearly outlined the role of the resource officer in his school:

Well, we don't get law enforcement involved in school discipline issues...But I know that I've heard this phrase used, principals ceding power to school resource officers over school issues. I fundamentally don't agree with that...He and I both very much agree that his role is not to be a disciplinarian, it's not to enforce school rules, it's not to enforce,

that it is to maintain the safety of the learning environment and to help us in legal situations where we do need to have law enforcement involved.

Participants also spoke to keeping school discipline and law enforcement as separate, yet supportive, entities. Ophelia stated, “It’s important to us that we keep school and law enforcement separate. And then bring it together if it need be. We don’t do things simultaneously just to keep it clean.” Hope described it as the school resources officers “staying in their lane” because their role “is not to be a disciplinarian.” Amber stated she engages in careful deliberation when working with the school resource officer. Amber reported, “It can go bad quickly, and you, as an administrator, have to know what you have to involve a resource officer in, what you don't have to involve them in, and who to ask when you're not sure.” Hank, a school resource officer, supported administrators’ statements of distinguishing him from disciplinarians by stating the following:

Now, I do – if I see a situation where a kid may need, I guess, not correcting but some better advice not to do something that could potentially be a safety concern, then I, you know, yeah, I will address it. I don't just let it be ignored. But other than that, any discipline practices, the teachers do that. So I'm not involved in that process.

An overwhelming amount of participants described the goal of strengthening relationships in the school as a deterrent to behavior issues. In terms of the school resource officer, Tim reported the officer in his school “works hard at developing a relationship with those kids, so that they know that he's not here in a punitive way, but he's here to help.” John also identified the need for “a positive relationship between law enforcement and students.” He observed a link between positive relationships with students and referrals when stating, “You can have good, positive relationships with your students, the referrals are gonna go down and you're gonna understand

your students more. And they're gonna respect you and kinda know where you're coming from.”

Other participants also noted the commonality of this dynamic. Lionel said, “We’ve seen less numbers of fighting and verbal altercations and stuff...because a lot more of the kids are realizing that if you come and talk to somebody, we can resolve these issues before it gets to that level.”

Jane described her school actively working to strengthen relationships so that students felt more engaged in the academic environment:

The most common thread in all of that is the idea of strengthening relationships. We know that if we have stronger relationships between adults – students and adults in the school, then we are more likely to improve the behavior and reduce the discipline. We've done a number of things. We currently are using an expanded homeroom....there are several other things that we're doing here at our school other than the [NAME], that have been put in place in order to better support students academically and/or in terms of building positive relationships in order to help reduce the number of students who are absent from school or present and not participating or present and disruptive or distracting.

Other participants also described active efforts to change discipline policies in the benefit of the students. They identified prior policies were not effective, so they sought to engage the appropriate stakeholders to assist in making these changes. Rita stated, “ ...we would like to pilot a new handbook and code of conduct...We kind of started it this year...What we were doing varied from what they were doing without really getting the proper channels involved to do something different.” Ronald described the growth of his school’s discipline policy as the following:

A few years ago, we made a decision to try to reduce out of school suspension. So we brought ISS back, so in school suspension...So a suspension is kind of a last resort, I mean for your major offenses...15 years ago we used to suspend kids for truancy. So they would cut class. We would give them a day of suspension. We don't do that anymore...We did try evening detention and Saturday school, but we found with our population either working or transportation needs that those types of things we had low participation rates. So we dropped those. So basically, we do right after school. We provide buses for students....We do try to limit ISS to three times a year, so you're not constantly putting a student into ISS. They do get class work in ISS.

Hope specifically identified the influence of advocacy groups on addressing the STPP in her school as a result of garnering the attention of state systems:

I know that there is a group that's been very vocal about the pipeline to prison sort of issue...in terms of us trying to come up with different policies and procedures and alternatives to suspension, that very much comes from our central office, but that's very much coming from, I think, the state, getting this pressure. So perhaps indirectly, the groups are having their voices heard.

Participants also described altering their current discipline practices to reflect the need to minimize removing students from the classroom. Amber reported the following:

So, we modified our referral...[to] where the person writing the referral can communicate what they've already tried...I think it's to be more responsive, and to also gather more information to inform our decision. Because it is important when you're thinking about taking a child, even if it's just out of the classroom for a day, that's impacting them instructionally, and I need to make sure I've done everything that I can to avoid that.

Participants discussed the usefulness of this policy of moving through multiple steps in the disciplinary process. Craig stated that “there's several steps that the teachers typically try to go through before they actually write the referral...It's usually if they've already exhausted, you know, maybe a guidance referral, call home to the parents, you know, talk to the student.” Hank also described avoiding automatic legal involvement. He reported, “I don't automatically go in and deal with students as – like it was out on the street. Like, I don't automatically write our kids the summons for hitting another kid.” Other participants supported this idea that it is important to help students avoid engagement with the court system. Many described their belief in the futility of removing a student from school and/or charging them with a crime. They used these beliefs in their efforts to direct students away from the STPP. Brad described the risk of pushing students into the court system:

I've always had this thought that it's not a good idea to involve kids too quick in the law enforcement process. And there are so many people – many people in school, who think, “Oh yeah, put him in jail for one night. They'll learn. They'll learn that they don't want that.” And I can't say it's my experience, but maybe it's my fear that it just hardens them to it. It doesn't have the scare value that people think it would have.

Participants questioned the impact of suspension and court referrals. Cole asked, “...does it do any good to send a kid into the court system when you know that your jurisdiction is not gonna do anything that's gonna be impactful other than put this on the kid's record?” Peter described himself as using a “common sense” approach to discipline when he reported the following:

Okay, so let's think about this for a second. You left school ground without permission and now I'm suspending you at home? Does that really make sense as a consequence?

You missed time in school. Do you not think that maybe what would be more impactful is to pay back the time you missed? The only way to pay back time is to be here.

Finally, participants humanized students when considering how to help them avoid removal from class. Dominic spoke to the naturally occurring process of students making mistakes and that they were in high school to “learn about healthy choices.” Mathias empathized with students acting out due to academic struggles:

...trying to find ways to intervene without taking students out of the learning environment. So many of our discipline issues are a result of if I’m a kid in class and I just don’t understand something, and I’m behind academically, and I’m sitting in a class for an hour and a half, sometimes, the reason why I act out, I don’t have any other pathway to go. And so if I stick them out of school or put them in-school suspension, then they’re just gonna be three days further behind or two days further behind. And so, yeah, we make every effort to keep kids in class...

Discussion

Participants described a range of policies, programs, and procedures utilized to divert students away from the STPP. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) was spoken of not only as a program but also as a mindset. It appears PBIS helped participants more strongly consider the value of understanding the student and developing relationships when making discipline-related decisions. Although established programs were identified, the majority of participants referred to ideas, concepts, and beliefs that helped to keep students in classrooms. Participants appreciated creative approaches to discipline and sought to utilize alternative methods when possible. Some believed alternative education was a worthwhile option while others chose to give students an opportunity to learn from their behaviors through research,

community engagement, and parental involvement. The majority of these creative options seemed to involve enhancing human connection for the student. In fact, strengthening relationships was identified as helping to reduce behavioral referrals. Participants alluded to the benefit of students feeling invested in their familial, academic, and social relationships. Schools often sought to proactively instigate this investment by seeking high-risk students and engaging them in community-building processes within the school.

Intentionality in not taking action on a behavior was also discussed. Participants often knew a child had violated a rule or law, but they chose to address it through natural consequences or group collaboration. A school resource officer even discussed his own efforts at using judgment when deciding whether or not to charge a student with a crime. Therefore, despite the legal expectations that loom over schools, it seems gray areas exist. Mental health needs fell into this gray area; specifically, students connected to therapeutic day treatment were often referred back to treatment rather than given a discipline referral. If a student was not connected to therapeutic day treatment, they were still given the option to take breaks or time-outs in lieu of a referral. This indicated participants' understanding of students needing to work toward emotional regulation in a safe environment rather than continue to engage in conflict. Teachers were also encouraged to create safety within their classrooms by addressing misbehavior relationally and with immediacy. It appeared that participants felt teachers stripped themselves of the power to handle discipline in class, thereby increasing the likelihood of students entering the STPP.

Although teachers were guided to address discipline themselves, participants did rely on team-based approaches to discipline. These teams could be considered broadly and consisted of school stakeholders, students, and parents. Participants sought to empower students and parents

to play an active role in discipline decision-making. Rather than approaching discipline punitively, it seems there was a need to cultivate learning through these teachable moments. Avoiding punitive discipline often meant administrators carefully considered the appropriateness of school resource officer involvement. Many acknowledged that involving the school resource officer increased the chances that a student was charged and referred to the legal system. Therefore, administrators sought to draw a clear line between what did and did not constitute collaboration outside of school discipline.

The data indicated an evolution in thought toward discipline practices. Administrators described active efforts to change archaic policies that they felt ignore nuance and too readily punish students. They strived for systematic decision-making and humanizing of students and wanted policies that reflected as such. Participants valued policies, programs, and procedures that encouraged building supportive relationships in school, home, and community settings. They shared the sentiment that missed class time was inappropriate for helping students to address behavior violations. As a result, they often discouraged harsh consequences developed from standardized discipline methods.

What is the role of professional development and training in addressing the STPP in Virginia schools?

School administration and staff engage in regular training on a range of topics related to discipline and education. Some trainings are mandatory and formalized while others are informal and optional. Aspects of these trainings, both formal and informal, work to address the STPP in Virginia. Interviews with administrators, school counselors and social workers, and school resource officers uncovered a range of ways in which training impacts students entering the

pipeline. For example, participants considered it critical to train staff to think relationally when interacting with students. Although there was agreement across interviews, it appeared there was not much of a standard of professional development and training throughout the state. One standard of professional development and training referenced by participants was Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Participants expressed an understanding of the importance of PBIS in their schools. Some were either currently implementing PBIS or preparing to implement PBIS. Jane commented, ...we are in the midst of starting a new program. This coming school year, we will be implementing PBIS throughout the division...Each of the schools in the division are getting together to do the training and then they will come back and share that with their building...I just know PBIS is coming and we're going to all be prepared.

Sue described herself as “excited [about] rolling out PBIS next year.” She reported she was going to be trained the following week and that she was glad that “administration and teachers have the same framework.” According to participants, this framework focuses on finding effective ways to work with students experiencing issues related to discipline. Shelly, a principal, specifically informs the administration team at her school that “it’s about relationships and forming those relationship with kids.” Shelly identified that the program has created “huge shifts” in academics and discipline at her school. Craig summarized PBIS with the following statement:

...what we're trying to establish is a culture and climate of positive behaviors among our students...instead of providing consequences for negative behaviors, we're looking for positive things to encourage positive behaviors...our trainings throughout the year have

been in the form of what other things can we do to recognize students, what other things can we do to positively promote our school culture and climate.

Amber described PBIS as an active and ongoing process of “...training our teachers to help recognize [students need alternatives to save face], to offer them an out before it comes to a referral...” She reported her school is currently working on their next step of PBIS in which they “work on professional development to talk about contingent and non-contingent behavior, and what the kids will do when we're looking at those types of behaviors, and how you can thwart some of that in the classroom with your relationship-building.” Brad also provided specific discipline steps that his school follows as a result of PBIS:

We have a positive behavior intervention team here...we do have discipline steps that we ask staff to follow...when a child does something wrong in the classroom...the first time it happens they're supposed to talk with the child one on one...a real heart-to-heart talk. If it happens again, they're supposed to call home. If it happens again, they're supposed to go to the guidance counselor. And then the fourth time, if that doesn't help, then it gets sent to an administrator.

When participants spoke of PBIS, they expressed agreement on its efficacy and value. Amber said her school discovered PBIS when searching for a program dictated by another entity; however, she described learning that PBIS is “organic...ground-up.” Amber further described specifics of how they implement PBIS as well as how it took time for her school to understand its importance:

Last year, we implemented our expectations in behavior matrix for the first time, and we did lessons with the students modeling what does good behavior look like, and what are the expectations at arrival and dismissal, vs. in the hallway, vs. in the classroom, vs. in

the cafeteria. And in that matrix, we also require the adults to have a role, so there's a modeling piece for us, so that the students understand the same expectations apply to us as well as them, and that helps them to be more vested. You can't just be top-down; no one likes that top-down, and the kids are no different than we are. So, that's what we do here, and we're evolving every year with that. It has, and we're a little far behind in that regard. I think it's been hanging around since the late '90s, but we are just now beginning to realize the impact it can have here at the middle school...it was more of a top-down under previous administrations here....But this seems to be more effective...

When describing the components of PBIS that they found most effective in addressing student discipline concerns in a positive manner, participants also provided information on the frequency with which PBIS training occurs. Tim identified regular implementation when saying, "Working with the staff and talking with them about positive behavior interventions...it's not yearly. It's weekly, it's monthly, talking about how best to work with kids that are having different types of issues." Other participants also reported a consistent frequency of discussing PBIS with staff. Brad stated, "We have a PBI Program...We meet with the staff once a month. We have staff development at the beginning of the year...every year we do a staff development on discipline and classroom behavior." Connie also reported that monthly training occurs at faculty meetings in addition to verbal reinforcements to utilize the program: " Usually each month during the faculty meeting, we are talking about some behavior interventions or, 'Don't forget if you have a student that's having academic or behavior, fill out the RTI form.' ...So it's just training and reminders." Rita also referred to, at minimum, providing resources to teachers monthly that are specific to PBIS: " We try to monthly, if not more so, put little articles here and there in their boxes specific to positive behavior intervention, how you can have better rapport with students,

how you can handle situations differently in the classroom...” Rhonda spoke of a similar process in which she provides weekly PBIS resources in teachers’ boxes as well as “sending e-mails weekly with links or strategies or, “Try this if this isn’t working.” Constantly checking in with the teachers in their meetings to see what support they need...”

As participants reflected on PBIS, they focused regularly on the role of relationship-building in discipline. Administrators and staff recalled intensive training in how to build connections with students as a deterrent to discipline problems. Tim spoke multiple times on the need to communicate and understand students. He stated, “We’re more seeing the value in the relationship, and getting to know the kid, and talking about what was the reasons behind the discipline infraction that occurred.” He identified this as a step to take prior to writing a discipline referral and engaging in exclusionary practices:

...that’s the thing that we more address now....talking to the kid, and understanding what was going on in their life, or what happened in the situation, before you just jump to writing a piece of paper and sending him out of your classroom.

Additionally, Tim declared that cultivating relationships between staff, students, and families should be a priority in the interest of reducing discipline infractions. He said:

...schools need to make it a priority among their staff, and that’s all their staff, to develop relationships with their students and the families in the community. We say a lot in education that students aren’t gonna learn from teachers they don’t like, so it’s really important that teachers establish a relationship. And it’s really important that all staff in the building develop relationships with kids, so that kids know that you trust them, that you care about them, that you have their back. Kids are going to be less likely to commit egregious offenses if they have a bond with the adults in the school buildings. It’s just

gonna occur less likely, because I think in life in general, you're just not going to hurt people that you care about, and know that care about you. So, that personal relationship is really, really important.

Ophelia echoed this concept as present in her trainings with staff when saying, “We do preface that relationships [between teachers and student] have the biggest impact.” Participants described specific steps taken in their professional development and training to increase the likelihood of positive relationships developing. Shelly reported teachers are not allowed to teach the first two days of the school: “They are not allowed to touch content unless it has something to do with getting to know their kids...For two days, they have to design activities to get to know kids, because it starts with the relationship with children.” Valerie recalled a professional development activity in which staff were challenged to identify students and consider how they can build greater connections by giving them a task in the classroom:

We also have meetings where we will put kids' faces up so that the teachers can identify a face with a kid...When they feel important in your classroom, they're gonna do anything for you...if I [as a teacher] start to struggle with connection with this kid...giving them purpose and a job is gonna help me build connection.

Participants felt that many discipline issues were rooted in negative relationships between students and teachers. Therefore, they described it as a critical aspect of training. Peter stated his belief that training teachers to develop positive connections will minimize issues:

You want kids to behave in your classroom.? Then connect what you're doing to them as a person.... how do I train them? I train them in that stuff. You train them in that stuff and you train them how to use that stuff, and you train them how to connect like that? You don't have to worry about a lot of the other stuff.

John expressed a similar notion when stating that, “The biggest thing that I stress to my teachers is that it's all about the relationships. You can have good, positive relationships with your students, the referrals are gonna go down.” He went on to discuss the importance of mutual respect and reminding teachers to develop these positive relationships. He also reported this training and mindset has resulted in “ decrease in the amount of referrals that have been given.” In addition to acknowledging the importance of positive relationships between teachers and students, Cole described the importance of relationships within the entire education system, a perspective he and other administrators at his school adopted from PBIS in order to improve their discipline practices:

I think it's not just relationships with students. From an administration point of view, it's how you treat your teachers first...And then it's developing norms for how we treat our parents and how we treat our community members. And then it also includes, you know, how do we treat our student? How do we react when something happens in a classroom that is disruptive? What is our first response to it, you know? And part of it is PBIS...And this is sort of based on the principles of PBIS. We didn't take it verbatim from the BDOE. We kind of modified it... It's about people. It's about relationships. It flows in both directions – in all directions I guess I could say.

Other participants also discussed how the communication that occurs between administrators and staff reflects on discipline practices. In fact, many described such communication as a form of informal training in discipline and classroom management. Marilyn reported that administrators at her school “work with the teachers constantly throughout the year, so if there are issues, it's not necessarily a professional development or something that they attend.” She stated that “something as simple as a meeting” can result in a plan to “help them with their classroom

management.” Dante reiterated the idea that teachers may need redirection in how they discipline students when stating, “I may just share certain things in a faculty meeting or something like that. There are certain referrals that I may make suggestions...kinda getting the teachers on the right track.”

Administrators also felt it was important to utilize an open-door policy with staff in order to proactively assist them with issues in classroom management. Paul reported, “...we'll tell them...we have an open door. ‘Come in. If you see something wrong, talk to us. Let's talk through things’...And then we'll give them tips on classroom management there...” This open-door policy allowed for administrators to model, communicate, and suggest ways for teachers to improve behaviors in the classroom. Jill described her open-door policy when she said, “I do a lot of modeling, a lot of communicating. Definitely I let people know it's an open-door policy, open to questions...I share with teachers to talk to the student's other teachers...” She further reported directly working with teachers to assist them when struggling with students:

I work with teachers on making sure if there's a particular student who just might need a little bit of cool down time prior to being spoken to...For some teachers, they don't always recognize that...So, I'm very big on communicating, I'm very big on if you have a question, it's an open door. I am fine with you coming to ask...a lot of communication modeling if need be, especially with some of the more difficult students...

Jill stated this policy allows for teachers to “come in to talk about the situation prior to turning in the referral.” Moreover, Amber believed that teachers “ appreciate the approachability, them being vested, knowing they can come to administration.” In addition to helping deter discipline referrals and increase investment in the school, participants also utilized an open door to educate

teachers on best practices within the school. Rita confirmed using an open-door policy at her school to provide resources to teachers:

We have a very open-door policy, and I continuously tell them, if they have any issues or any questions about discipline, to come see me, and I constantly provide any resources that I can...I try to attend as many conferences and things as I can, and then bring that information back and always share it with the administrative staff. And then we'll share it with our teachers. So just consistently giving them – providing them resources and support.

Shelly described a hands-on training process in which she actively works with teachers on how to improve teaching and classroom behavior: "...When I do staff training, I use my own grade books from when I taught sixth grade...I teach a 30-hour course on behavior management, classroom management here at the school. I offer that free to my teachers."

These opportunities for administrators to directly train their staff, formally or informally, on appropriate discipline practices might occur in both group and individualized formats. Participants identified value in a more personal learning process. Ophelia stated, "I think the education part comes in the experiences of working with me...It is informal...working with me, to understand how I approach students." Rita agreed that teachers learn from working directly with the administrators when she stated, "I'm trying to model for them also what we need to do and not do." Additionally, meeting with teachers individually provided greater opportunity for participants to provide feedback to teachers. Brad said, "And then there's always the one-on-one coaching. So if I have a teacher that's having trouble, I'll talk with that teacher." Mitchell described this as a formative process when stating:

It's also on the personal level when you meet with a teacher and talk about a classroom observation, and kind of share some insight as to "Let's think about how this happened and understand why these things are taking place."...a lot of times it's the one-on-one... This one-on-one training often resulted in advocacy for students. Larry described witnessing "times when teachers will back kids into a corner and push their buttons." As a result, he would "bring the teacher in after the fact and say this is how you need to handle this in the future." Similarly, Jill recalled a specific instance in which a new teacher was writing a referral for each misbehavior. Jill addressed these concerns with the teacher by offering classroom management suggestions which led to "second semester, that particular teacher was better with regards to referrals."

Participants described the importance of reiteration for teachers. Cole spoke at length about choosing to remind teachers at his school of the rationale for particular discipline practices. He stated, "You preach hard to your teachers...Just reiteration at the beginning of each semester...here's our philosophy on how we handle any issues in our classroom or our hallways." Cole incorporated scheduled reminders at his school, such as sending a memo to remind teachers how to be proactive in classroom management after students return from a break. After staff was initially exposed to PBIS, Cole found it important to reinforce the practices:

We, the staff, agree that this is the way that we're gonna handle this situation to make an improvement...there ought to be the same general expectations for how we function and what our expectations are for kids in class...You really have to spend some time during that pre-service week really deep diving into why we decided to do this, and why we're deciding to work in this way. It's been easier this year, because they've been through it

for a year. That first year though, a lot of reiteration and a lot of one on one conversation with teachers.

Jane also felt that reminders are important when saying, “Sometimes the teacher needs clarification so there could be some follow-up that might be considered training or refreshment.” Dennis described conducting observations of teachers’ routines in the classroom to provide regular feedback; he called it “a routine of the routines.”

Participants emphatically discussed the importance of administrator/staff communication, especially consistent reiteration of discipline beliefs and practices. Mathias linked this to the process in which teachers also remind students of expectations when he said, “I talk to teachers about one of the best things you can do in class is to set your expectations and then continually reteach your expectations. And so we take opportunities throughout the year also to reteach our staff.” Overall, consistency was a component of professional development that participants felt was important in teachers working with students. Dennis felt helping teachers understand the importance of a consistent routine also helped minimize behavioral disruptions in the classroom:

Really, really what it is is just routine. And I think that that's really what the teachers need to understand. If you've got a good routine and you're consistent and you build a rapport...they [kids] will thrive. You can be a mediocre teacher, have great rapport, and you're gonna be the best teacher in the world. You could be the best teacher, you can know all your knowledge content, but not have rapport, not have any type of routine, it's chaos.

Larry attributed his schools’ low discipline referrals to “staff members holding kids accountable and us being very structured and strong and disciplined.” He credits this to the following:

We do a lot of staff development in regards to classroom management skills...I stress on numerous occasions that it's important to get daily routines and procedures established early in the semester, whether it be the first semester for the beginning school year or the second semester. I tell our teachers you should practice those daily routines and procedures for at least a week to two weeks so the kids can get in that mode of knowing what you expect.

However, Rita addressed with her teachers the importance of flexibility within consistency:

“Sometimes it's hard for the teachers to see those differences because they feel as if they're not being consistent. I stress this. Consistency is important, but you really have to look at the entire picture...” Participants discussed training on how to consider the entire picture, specifically in the areas of culture and mental health. In terms of culture, participants felt it was important for teachers to be trained in looking for the differences between students. Rita described her school as actively working toward better considering these differences when she stated, “We're continuing to work on it...Failing to think of the differences that other children may have in the family unit at home in relation to their own children. It's having those conversations.” Peter passionately discussed the training needs of his staff to understand poverty and other aspects of students' specific situations:

Well, so let's put this into perspective. What socioeconomic class houses the most teachers? Middle class. Some of these teachers have never experienced what these kids experience. Part of it is just educating them on what our kids are experiencing. Because they've never experienced it. They don't understand abject poverty...instead of training people in broad spectrum, begin to train them to investigate the individual. So we could bring in any number of people and we could talk about what it's like to live in poverty

and how to help kids in poverty and you could be broad spectrum in that...Or, we could start training teachers on how to be more investigative and how to begin to learn the story of your students...And that's what we try to get the teachers to understand – is that, we're going to show you these things and we're going to talk about how to train you to have an eye for these things. But how the eye works is when it's one kid at a time. And that's where the training comes in...You asked me what we teach and what we're trying to get the teachers to understand? It's that. It's not a canned approach. It's not some seminar or webinar I put everybody in front of. That's not it. It's not that I don't think those things are valuable and that I don't think you learn from those. It gives you a good base and a good frame to start from, but you've got to think about each kid individually and you've got to think about, what is it that you're doing in your room? And you've got to get it so it's a kid at a time.

Participants reported staff engaged in training specifically to identify and understand behavioral issues related to mental health. Rita and Tim spoke of processes related to teachers locating the source of students' behaviors. Rita reported her school has “done a lot of training with the teachers in reference to looking at the behaviors, again, specific to what is causing that behavior and trying to get to the bottom of that.” Although a mental health class is offered at Tim's school, he reported it is not a required training. Teachers that do take it are trained to “identify those types of behaviors and those indicators that might say this student needs help.”

Participants spoke of trainings that educate teachers on trauma-informed practices. Sue stated her school is going to make trauma-informed instruction a “full focus for the year.” Additionally, Mathias described training teachers in the crisis cycle and “about student reactions to behaviors and how to best handle a student in the crisis cycle within the classroom.” He

described role-playing escalating situations during faculty meetings as a form of training and professional development. Amber expressed frustration at the “tough love” perspective in discipline when she stated the following:

I think that when we do cut certain kids a break, or we do go out of our way to build in support to help them avoid really screwing up, sometimes people think that that's mollycoddling someone, or you need tough love. Well, that doesn't work with everybody. Tough love doesn't work with someone who's got mental health issues because their mom held them underwater as punishment when they were age three, until DSS took them out of their home. And now this child has developed an emotional disorder, and that is – that tough love? That kid's already been tough-loved past any point. And so yeah, I'm cutting him a break, because I know what's in his file, and you don't...how do I help my teachers understand that; how do we educate ourselves as a society? Because some of these things are the mental health issues that feed into that pipeline to prison...So, how do I help them still learn, and become a functioning person in this society, when they don't have the same bar that you and I have, because they weren't given that opportunity, in utero or after? The nurturing wasn't there...truly, it's the mental health piece...the stuff comes our way every day, and so, how do we better equip ourselves, and how do we help build understanding within our school community that kicking a kid out for ten days isn't gonna fix this?

Mental health trainings have been incorporated into schools to elicit greater understanding of these dynamics in a students' life, thereby improving discipline practices. Hope reported her staff is trained by their schools' therapeutic day treatment program and school counselors; as a result, teachers are “good about reaching out when the kid is in crisis, the student is in crisis, and/or

disruptive...that's been a huge help with lowering our discipline referrals for kids who need that support.” Valerie, a school counselor, corroborated the idea that teachers benefit from trauma-informed training. When staff were trained in adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed education, Valerie reported teachers approached her to discuss how they could apply the information to classroom management:

I don't think a lot of teachers receive training like that in their college degrees. So, it's been really nice because not every teacher's responsive to it or really quite understands how to take that training and put it in practical application. I think the more that we get trained like that, the more it's gonna become more ingrained in our school system. I did have several teachers come to me after one of those trainings and say, "Wow, that was the best training I've ever had. I've never thought about viewing a kid as what's happened to them." Instead of what's wrong with this kid, what's happened to them that's causing this behavior. How can I approach it better, instead of being reacted to them? But instead, being responsive to them and letting them feel like they're cared about and heard...They're like, well, it's just a kid that they probably have a bad home life, but they saw it in a different way of their brain literally is changed. Their brain's affected. They're not in a place of learning right now until I build that connection with them and seek to understand what makes this kid responsive....

Participants also referred to mental health in the context of threat assessment team training. All participants identified a school counselor, social worker, and/or psychologist as members of their threat assessment team. In fact, Rita stated her school’s two counselors constitute the entire threat assessment team. Similarly, Rhonda ensured her school counselors were trained in threat

assessment to offer their opinions on the best avenue of referring students for professional counseling.

In addition to the training on threat assessment, participants identified a number of training and professional development experiences that play a role in the STPP. Again, these ranged in formality. Participants often referred to administrators receiving outside training and then bringing the information back to the teachers. Rhonda spoke to this with the following: “As far as any outside training with the teachers, we haven’t done much of that. Most of it – all of it – has it been things that we’ve done and then brought back and provided to the teachers.” Mark discussed attempts at his school to better train teachers on classroom management and discipline, which has resulted in improved discipline and students spending more time in the classroom:

We've had some folks, and myself included, that have gone to a couple of workshops that are designed to help coach kids back into the proper behavior in the classroom. We presented that to our staff...the ability to coach them back...into the classroom setting to continue with the learning...I think it's a weakness of the training that teachers get in school is classroom management and discipline things...So, it's probably something I'd like to see more of here is a more structured ability to train on strategies to coach the kids back into doing what they're supposed to be doing.

However, Mark identified time constraints in the ability to train staff in this crucial area that increase the chances a student can remain in class:

...that probably needs to be implemented more as a full training, and it would probably take a day or two to do it. We just have not been able to devote that much time to do so, but we presented in two short things to where I believe our discipline this year has been a lot better than last year as far as referrals to the office, and the teachers who look at

discipline problems, and interruption problems, and disruptions as an opportunity to teach...

Many participants described in-depth and more intensive training opportunities for staff that play a role in the STPP. Participants' schools commonly utilized the first week of teachers reporting to school as an opportunity to educate on discipline expectations. Hope reported her school implements a week of orientation for teachers at the beginning of the school year; during this week, the special education department presents on PBIS and a student timeout program. As a result, Hope says, "That has helped us lower our discipline." Jane also described a "preservice week before school begins" in which the responsibilities of various staff members are addressed:

We have something happen each preservice to bring everybody up to date and hopefully on the same page; going over what the school rules are and what will be enforced and how it will be enforced and what are the consequences, and try to clarify what is the responsibility of the classroom teacher versus the responsibility of the school administrator because some behavior should be handled by the teacher at that time in their classroom.

Ronald agreed that the beginning of the school year is a time in which "the administrators who handle discipline talk to the staff...setting that expectation." While some participants reported their school chooses to have administrators relay information to staff, Will described the opposite process occurring at his school. Due to his self-reported advocacy for fewer suspensions in schools, Will explained his process of encouraging teachers to engage in workshops through the Department of Education:

I try to encourage – and I do encourage teachers to go to these workshops, allow them to bring that information back and they share it with our faculty. Each month we have

faculty meetings with the people who have gone to the workshops and we'll take five or ten minutes and just share something that was meaningful to them. And for the faculty members to hear that from their peers I think is a lot more valuable than just me up on the soapbox and preaching that sort of thing.

Hope described a similar idea of teachers receiving information directly when she reported teachers at her school rotate in groups to attend professional development and training opportunities:

We do a week of different components and programs and procedures that are in the building. So we usually do, let's say four groups of teachers and they run through certain cycles. And so there will be a cycle about some behavioral supports that they all travel to and get that information.

Although some schools utilized formal, direct training programs for teachers, other participants denied utilizing intensive professional development days, specific programs, or some mandatory trainings. Marilyn discussed the ongoing professional development opportunities that are “offered for teachers who need assistance with behavior management...I don’t think everyone is required to do [it].” Ophelia stated, “ I don’t know that we really have any specific program that we use...they have a copy of the student handbook themselves. They have a copy of our code of conduct.” Reanna also alluded to a more casual approach to training when reporting she learned from directly working with students and passing this information along to teachers rather than through “a formal classroom management program.” Similarly, Larry reported the following for training his assistant principals: “ But this is my 12th year as a principal and I’ve had seven assistant principals. So I’ve had to do a lot of on-the-job training.” Participants also described

piecing together various training methods, but denied a formal process in which this occurs.

Mitchell described the following as his school's training procedure:

Not really [any specific programs]. We would love to, there's, some of our staff are really familiar with PBIS, and bring in some of those aspects. But it's not systematic. It's not uniform. I think we've done some things with Check-In Check-Out, that kind of stuff...I'd say it's more sort of patched together. Kind of a "this is what works" kind of thing, and this is what works in this situation.

Paul expressed similar sentiments when he described new teachers being assigned a mentor and a book to read, but that "I don't know that we have a formal training." He went on to say, "As far as official program, as a school we don't have an official program here on the high school level...But for myself I make sure that – I let teachers know where your help is." Expanding upon this idea of informal and spontaneous training, Tori described this: "A lot of things that's not specific training, but we get called in to meetings, then it starts to become training...Like education on juvenile intake. Like what the court process looks like." However, Shelly reported that formal training programs matter less than having a structure to the training process:

I don't think it's the programs, as much as it is the structure of the staff development piece of it. In the week before school starts we have a teacher work week, and we make sure PBIS and the relationship piece is taught. From that monthly meeting, those teachers then share that information. We purposely set up our meeting schedule where PBIS meets right before a grade level meets. So anything that is shared needs, anything with PBIS, then that following Monday we share out at grade level meetings. So that's been a nice transfer of information, which is really important.

Discussions of training brought about participant reflection on threat assessment training and its benefits. Based on what she learned through threat assessment training, Reanna described using a crisis handbook, guidelines for bullying, and the IEP process when seeking to determine “whether or not the child is being childish, or whether it is a serious threat to all the other students in the building. Because safety is key in order to educate.” Valerie reported she recently engaged in a staff development day in which they were able to process their threat assessment training, discuss practical applications, and answer logistical questions. She identified the process as formative when stating, “[it] helps a lot because even in our school, we've had situations in the past where things probably could have been handled better...” Additionally, Valerie voiced the impact of the threat assessment training on her work as a school counselor by advocating for the need to incorporate it into earlier trainings: I left feeling like wow, that was something I needed from Day One. I should have had that my first year as a school counselor 'cause it was just so helpful and eye opening, just to process through things.” As a school resource officer, Hank also declared the value of threat assessment when reporting that the training can be considered an “intervention tool.”

School resource officers’ (SRO) training, as well as the training they provide to the school, was discussed at length by participants. Many participants classified the school resource officer as training staff and students in various issues related to the legal system and public safety. This also included local laws and the court process. In their eyes, this knowledge might deter discipline problems through an increased understanding of the legal system. Mark described the following of his school’s resource officer:

We've worked really hard to make sure we utilize the school resource officer as a law enforcement officer as a liaison to the court system for information for kids...more

information to the kids about the things they do that can be considered against the law, and a lot of them just don't have that knowledge and don't have that understanding.

Shelly described her school resource officer as “instrumental.” This SRO offered her time to train families on how to safely use technology, which Shelly described as “[volunteering] to do things for parents like little mini workshops in the fall for how to keep your kid safe on social media.” Specific to staff, Hope’s SRO has “been helpful with helping to train our staff with our drills and so on...let us know how we did, what we need to improve on...” in addition to providing information on “specialized” topics, such as how to identify signs of gang involvement. For students, she reported SROs have provided “training and education” in a criminal justice class offered at the school. Lionel provided an extensive list of training experiences that he offers to both teacher and students as a school resource officer. This list included alcohol awareness and rape aggression defense training. He also described the annual training he receives at a “school safety conference,” such as gang identification, school safety threats, and autism crisis intervention. Lionel discussed the benefit of receiving training on working with students who have a learning disability, specifically by being authentic:

Every last piece of training that we do always helps...And again, we have a large amount of kids with autism or learning disabilities and each kid that we deal with or emotional disabilities, we have classes on that too. So, understanding the process and the way that those kids think, and how we can effectively give them the proper information, and how we can present it in a way that they will understand. I think that has been a key thing to really help me be successful...it’s giving them my true emotion because I feel like through my training that’s what I’ve taken from that, and it’s really helped.

Participants spoke to the range of training that their school resource officers receive. Many of these trainings are intended to benefit students and ensure appropriate handling of discipline situations that cross into legal thresholds. Tim described these trainings as “special trainings through the Sheriff’s Office, as far as being able to be a school resource officer,” indicating that the role of an SRO is specialized from a traditional police officer. Mathias confirmed this when recalling a time in which the town police department provided an SRO without any of the training; as a result, “there would be times in the past where students and incidents were dealt with in the same manner that a patrol officer would. And there’s a whole different way, as you probably know, of handling things in the school.” Mathias stated he was unaware of the specifics of the SRO training, but that it is “unbelievably helpful.”

Other participants were better able to speak to the specifics of the SRO trainings, such as Connie. She stated they received state training on active shooters, cell phone laws, and biases in discipline. Brad reiterated that SROs receive “school-based training” in crisis intervention, lockdown drills, and “strategies for being a good SRO on campus.” Although Brad did not provide a definition of the term ‘good SRO’, Cole positively spoke of his perception that “the resource officers are great people...[do] not get involved unless absolutely asked to get involved.” Despite Cole having such an experience, Ronald expressed concern that “every law enforcement officer that I’ve had is very different in how they treat issues...I would like for there to be a standard for how it’s done within our school system.” Participants addressed the role of school resource officers on campus and how their training has contributed to the academic environment. Many considered the SROs adequately trained in discerning which situations did not require legal involvement. Will described engaging in a direct discussion with his SRO on his expectations for law enforcements’ treatment of students:

A lot of that has been very informal training...our focus point was talking about what is the appropriate way of handling certain situations in regard to discipline and what the philosophy was behind that. And I think having those discussions there's not a lot of argument against that philosophy that we're looking at the whole person, we're looking at the whole student. Of course there's certain legal manifestations that mandates that we have to abide by under certain circumstances as far as the consequences go but as far as creating that environment of trust and belief and care, you can't beat that. And that to me is the most crucial aspect of what we do in knowing that I could have a kid in my office or the SRO can have a student that he's working with and that student actually trusts and believes and knows that there are consequences but there's a genuine care for that person.

Cole agreed that having an SRO and the entire police department “in the fabric” of the school’s culture and supportive of the philosophy is important for student discipline. As administrators identified the necessity of coming to a mutual understanding with school resource officers, SROs also spoke to the need for administrators to understand their roles. Vince, a school resource officer, identified prior “strain” in relationships with administrators who felt his “sole purpose” was to arrest students; however, he reported improvement in a “new generation of administrators who are used to having law enforcement in schools.” Similarly, Hank, also an SRO, stated he will provide training to staff on “what I can do and what I can’t do as far as...my job is not to...discipline students.” Ophelia acknowledged this coming together of different perspectives and trainings when saying the following:

I don’t see it so much as a training. I see it as collaboration...they [SROs] are thinking about if it’s a school shooter, they’re thinking about getting that person. We’re thinking about keeping everybody safe. So, they’re coming at it from a different angle. They want

us to be safe...so, it's just, it's a collaboration of understanding their perspective...our training is different. We're training for different reasons.

Participants regularly referred to the differences in classroom management between new teachers and veteran teachers. At one side of their experiences, newer teachers struggled with behavior in the classroom. Therefore, administrators would work directly with these teachers to assist in improving classroom management skills. Larry reported that he chooses to “work very closely with beginning teachers because that typically is their most difficult area of expertise is classroom management.” He felt that “seasoned teachers have gotten that down.” Cole also felt it important to work directly with teachers, especially new ones: “Well, you preach hard to your teachers. And it's part of your induction of new teachers.” Additionally, Mitchell acknowledged that newer teachers struggle with classroom management, so his school worked to address that through education and training:

I've got a lot of people that are provisionally endorsed. So they really don't have as much experience in the classroom. So there's a lot of teaching and training that should happen that doesn't always happen. We certainly, we do have staff development on classroom management. We do that once a year.

Rita recalled directly working with a new teachers the prior school years to address behavioral issues in the classroom:

Especially for our newer teachers. We have one teacher that – this is her second year – last year she was really struggling with behavior in the classroom. As it turns out, it seemed to be more about the way she was responding to the students, and that was adding fuel to that fire. In discussing different ways to approach the students, in changing their behaviors, actually started with changing her behavior and her attitude towards that.

Reanna felt that having more experienced teachers resulted in better discipline practices: “But, for the most part, because our teachers are veterans and are experienced, it is rare we have classroom referrals.” However, participants also identified concerns with more experienced teachers. They described veteran teachers as misunderstanding of this generation of adolescents as well as holding to more outdated beliefs of discipline. Rita reported she works with teachers to try to “change that demeanor because it is difficult and frustrating for some of them.” Specifically, she attributed this to the following: “It seems to be more frustrating for our veteran teachers...because the students have changed dramatically, even with the last five years, because of technology, because of social media.” Mathias reported that he incorporates modeling techniques to teachers rooted in prior discipline practices when he stated, “I said, ‘If you’d like to come down and watch how this ends, you can watch how this ends.’ ...I think the lesson of that whole thing was with this veteran teacher who was all about poundin’ flesh...” Tim believed in the need to continuously educate staff on the changes in appropriate classroom behavior and discipline:

You know, it's ongoing; it never ends. When you work in a public educational setting, you have people that have been working for different amounts of years, and so...behaviors that may have not been tolerated 30 years ago, or more differently handled than they are today – consequences for behaviors 30 years ago are a lot different than they are today. So I think it's a constant talking to your staff and educating them about what good discipline looks like in a classroom. And then what are the consequences that are appropriate for this day and age. Back in the day, we didn't have what we call restorative justice practice, like we do now. Back in the day, it was, "You do this, and this is the consequence, regardless.”

Despite concerns of teachers adhering to prior discipline philosophies, participants also found significant value in more experience amongst school staff. Dominic reported he does not believe the staff at his school is trained in classroom management, but that what he learned on the topic comes from “both experience and education.” Larry also stated that his “years of experience and track record in my school state that I know what best decisions are for kids.” Amber felt that experience could lead to greater empathy when stating the following:

And I think that one of the keys to this is just understanding...professional development, but coupled with actual experience. There are oftentimes that I wish some of our teachers – especially those who tend to be a little more hard-nosed...I wish they could shadow or they could have more meaningful experiences.

A theme of the interviews was communication amongst staff members and working as a team. When teachers struggle with classroom management at Larry’s school, the administrators “go with them hand-in-hand to help them through that process [watching training videos].” In areas of threat assessment training, participants felt that communication was critical to ensure a student receives appropriate intervention. For Rhonda, communicating with the counselors was important in accomplishing this goal. She stated, “The biggest thing is just communication. If something happens, we all come together. We know where to go. We get together; we make our decisions. So we all communicate with each other...we share it with our counselors.” Also related to safety, Valerie reported that receiving her own training highlighted how critical communication is for identifying issues:

I was sent onto a threat assessment training that was really eye opening. They brought up things from way back, from Columbine, and then to more recent events, like things that have happened at Virginia Tech were looked at. It was just really eye opening to process

what groups of people are involved in a threat assessment and how, in the past, the communication has been so compartmentalized and not cohesive that mistakes have been made, things were missed. Talking about how it's so important to have more communication and pieces linked together to be able to recognize when something's abnormal. That was really eye opening.

Administrators also work with teachers to help them become more comfortable in working with parents over discipline issues. Cole described it as an “art” and stated training on how to speak to parents occurs at the beginning of the school year. Jill stated she chooses to sit with teachers and help them with the phone call so that the parent and teacher can maintain their relationship:

So, it's just communicating not just with me, but communicating with your peers, and communicating with the parent. I'm open to teachers having phone calls. You need to be the one to call the parent, but we can sit here and write notes back and forth, and I can help you with that phone conversation. Because I still want for the teacher to have the power sort of say in the relationship.

Connie described a similar training process as intervening with a teacher when she said, “This is what we offer. This is our intervention for the adult. We will sit down with you and make the call with you.” Ronald also reported efforts in his school to change previous notions of separation between parents and teachers:

But I think a lot of the training comes from – the big thing that we expect from a teacher is...before you write a referral, please call the parent. There are some teachers that are somewhat reluctant to do that, just because they don't want to get into a confrontation with the parent. But generally speaking, I think we've changed that culture, where the administrators expect it...for 95 percent of the teachers it's not a problem. There's gonna

be a few that are gonna be reluctant, and those are the conversations the administrator would have with those teachers.

Training for the task of teacher/parent communication also came in the form of participants encouraging parents to be proactive when speaking to parents. Many felt that developing relationships prior to the development of issues could mitigate behavioral occurrences.

Specifically, Dante believed that teachers could intervene before problems were brought to administrators: “At a faculty meeting, I think I shared one time...’Communicating with the parent is so crucial.’...because some of these situations can be taken care of just by talking to the parent, and just asking them for their help.” Moreover, Shelly suggested teachers recruit parents as allies at the beginning of the school year:

We talk through involving the parents in some of this, too. Talk to a parent, make a positive phone call at the beginning of the year. And then when you have to call that parent again, “Hey, I was the one that called you at the beginning of the year. Can you help me with this? This is some of the behavior that I’m starting to see from your son or daughter. Have you heard this before? What are some things that work?” Get the parent as an ally before you have to report something that’s not so nice.

Continuing the theme of cultivating relationships between school staff, students, and parents, participants also discussed working with teachers to demonstrate respect toward students. Shelly said, “It starts with the respect piece. And how do you develop that with kids, the relationship piece?...Here are some ideas. So we brainstorm as a faculty, reiterating the fact that talk to the kid.” Jill also spoke of infusing respect into communication: “...showing teachers how to still get your point across without jeopardizing that respect level. Because we’re all people, and we all just want to be treated with respect.” She went on to speak more about teachers delaying referrals

in the interest of developing respect and a relationship with a student. She also encouraged teachers to remain aware of how respect looks to different people and cultures:

...if they automatically write the referral, automatically give it to me, the teacher's lost the power, and the student's never going to respect the teacher. They'll always respect me, because I'm taking the time, I'm building that relationship. But they're never going to respect the teacher, because the teacher's quick to throw them away. I want to make sure that the teachers continue to have that power, but also make sure they understand it's about respect, and it doesn't – I don't have to – you don't have to give me respect first for it to be a respectful relationship. For some students, they will give you respect if they see you giving them respect...Just understanding that respect looks different to different people, different cultures, different backgrounds, and different days.

Reanna spoke at length about the role of respect in deterring behavior problems in the classroom. She stated she speaks to her faculty about the “modern and contemporary teenager” when she said the following:

I always tell them—there are two things you need to know about the modern or the contemporary teenager. One, these children, if they feel like you disrespect them, they're not going to respect you back. You're not in 1950s anymore where you're automatically respected because you're the adult in the room. You have to show respect to those children—whether you agree or disagree with that, that's the reality with these kids. So, it is a good idea that you call every child, every student's name when you are teaching, at least once. Have that eye contact, have that rapport. That child knows, “I see you today. I've asked you a question.” Secondly, if you're having a problem, the child's having a problem in the classroom, you don't argue with kids, you do not raise your voice. I never

have yelled at my kids. You look at the child and you say, “I’m gonna give you two choices.” Because if you start arguing with them, they have an audience of 20 peers and they’re gonna posture and they’re not going to lose. So, you say, “I need for you to please quit talking” or, “I need for you to please put your cell phone away and let’s work on diagramming parts of speech” or whatever.

Finally, participants discussed the ways in which training and professional development in Virginia schools are in need of improvement, particularly for the reduction of discipline referrals and exclusionary practices. Mark identified that more teachers need to “realize that those situations can be teaching moments, and they can coach the kids back into the classroom to continue class...that’s training that I think we probably need to spend more time on.” Rhonda also reported ongoing development in areas of classroom management:

We still need to work with our teachers on handling – ways to handle things in the classroom. De-escalating, and positive strategies and positive things they can do within the classroom. Because I think a lot of our referrals probably wouldn’t have to make it to that point. So we’re all still learning. We’re all still working on and training on that.

Sue described plans to increase training on classroom management strategies when she said, “Trying some different in classroom management strategies to address the behavior...There’s a lot of things that teachers are expected to do, trained to do. We are looking at much more training along that this year.” In terms of improving discipline methods, some participants spoke of specific growth opportunities in the school setting. Connie stated she and other administrators review the discipline matrices over the summer to determine if anything needs amending. Valerie suggested that administrators do a better job of informing school counselors of discipline issues with students when she stated:

I think that we are doing a great job here, but I do feel that, as a school counselor, I want to be more involved than even than I have been. I would love to be able to meet with more kids who are getting disciplined, and sent to ISS and so forth. One thing that I would like to improve upon is just asking that administrators make me more aware and let me know...they have been doing a good job, but I want even more communication with, "Hey, this student got another referral. Go see them. Go talk to them."

Discussion

As participants discussed the role of professional development and training in the STPP, categories emerged that reflected a belief in educating school staff on the importance of relationship-building as well as working as a team for teachers to learn from administrators and SROs. It appeared that PBIS was an influential program for participants. As an alternative to behaviors that push students into the STPP, PBIS provided participants with steps that avoided acting punitively. They spoke of it as a framework through which to view students and intervene with behaviors by modeling. Participants also voiced that PBIS was individualized to the particular school and intended to evolve over the course of implementation. Additionally, participants discussed the timing of training and professional development opportunities. It seemed intensive training occurred mostly at the beginning of the school year. Because of this, administrators spent time throughout the year reinforcing the trainings and providing reminders of the school's philosophies. Specifically, administrators wanted teachers to remember the primary goal of creating and maintaining positive and healthy relationships with students and parents.

Once again, relationships emerged as critical in the disciplinary process. Teachers were trained to understand that they would be less likely to have trouble with students if a relationship

was established. Administrators encouraged teachers to pause before writing a referral to avoid pushing students into the STPP. Most administrators described this as an informal training that occurred through their communications with the staff. Based on their reports, it seems the perspective of the administrator was instilled into the teachers. This indicates that the mindset of the administrator matters in teachers' professional development. Furthermore, participants described an open-door policy for teachers seeking opportunities at professional development. Although formal training did occur, this policy often resulted in one-on-one trainings from administrator to teacher. Again, reinforcements and reminders were utilized to bolster what teachers learned from earlier trainings. Through these practices, administrators would advocate for students' needs by imparting classroom management strategies to teachers.

Participants also reported that teachers were taught to be consistent in their routines as well as to strive to consider each student on an individual basis (i.e., culture and mental health). For example, training of teachers often included an understanding of poverty and trauma-informed education. This also occurred during threat assessment training when team members were taught the role of mental health in threat assessment. Although not all teachers were afforded the chance to receive direct training on various topics, administrators did bring this information back to campus and share with staff. This further demonstrates the significant impact an administrator has on a teacher's professional development and training. In addition to administrators educating teachers, the school resource officers also provided information to administrators, staff, and students on laws and the court process. SROs felt that they gave information on campus that would have otherwise remained unknown. SROs also worked with administrators and staff to help them understand their role in the school, particularly in how they

treat students involved in discipline issues. It appeared that participants felt it was important for everyone to know the duties of the SRO.

Administrators also worked directly with teachers at various levels of experience. When teachers held traditional beliefs of discipline practices, administrators became involved to guide them in better understanding the students of today and available alternative discipline methods. Administrators also coached newer teachers that struggled with classroom management skills. There were differences in the training needs of veteran teachers and newer teachers, but both groups received direct assistance from administrators. Through this lens, participants felt it was better for administrators and staff to work as a team. In addition, participants felt it was important to engage parents as members of the team. Although some teachers struggled in communicating with parents, administrators were open to helping them develop in this area. They believed that working together would reduce the number of referrals and exclusionary discipline practices. It seemed participants felt that professional development and training on relationships and communication were critical in deterring students from entering the STPP.

What role does data play in addressing the STPP in Virginia schools?

Data-driven decision-making has been a topic of discussion in school systems around the country. Specifically in Virginia, administrators are moving toward a greater understanding of how to utilize data in their schools. Participants addressed the impact of data on student discipline through avenues such as improvement of policies and reviewing discipline collaboratively. Categories emerged across interviews that spoke to the role of data in the STPP in Virginia schools. Although some categories uncovered similarities in data usage, differences revealed additional considerations for school discipline.

Evaluating and improving programs and policies in the school setting was a common theme across interviews. Participants often reviewed data to determine which problems they needed to address. Larry stated, “If we see a month that we have a large amount of behavior problems, we try to figure out what created it.” Similarly, Connie spoke of the “problem areas” at her school and acknowledged the need for “some schoolwide, general systems.” She expanded upon this when she said, “We sat down looking at the data. We come up with hotspots. In other words, these are the areas that we probably see the majority of our discipline, based on the data.” Participants also discussed methods that might be most effective in addressing problems uncovered by data. Rhonda described utilizing data with other administrators and staff to develop improvement strategies:

They have their meetings and the last nine weeks I gave them a print out or a data sheet basically of the number of referrals, what the incidences were for, some of our repeat offenders – and just met with them briefly and reviewed that with them. And then from there we kind of talked about strategies of, “Okay, what do we do for these five or six kids that are on this repeat offender list?” What is happening? Why are they still having trouble? And I think they really liked that. They were able to see those numbers of, “This is what’s going on with our kids. This is when the referrals are happening.” So we tried to break that down and provide that to the teachers too.

Rhonda went on to describe specific instances in which her school utilized data to discover those “repeat offenders” and engage them in a mentorship program “based on basically the number of referrals and some teacher concerns that they had.” Rita also reported that her school uses data to develop strategies for improving discipline practices. She stated, “The focus is going to be to create a school-wide...in which the discipline focuses on alternatives to suspension, using

positive behavior interventions and support. We're gonna use the data from this year specifically to analyze and look at successful interventions.” Through these efforts, Rita’s school plans to “pilot a new handbook and code of conduct.” Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) was referenced by a number of participants as guiding them in how to use data for more effective discipline practices. Craig stated PBIS requires his school to “really look” at their data: “For instance, if we don't have a lot of occurrences of disruptive behavior in a classroom, that's not something that we focus on. We're not going to focus on something the data tells us is not a problem for us.” Shelly agreed that PBIS encourages improvement when she stated, “the PBIS committee looks at [a certain program] ... But and here’s the offense that we are seeing most this month. So we then go back and brainstorm problem-solve about what can we do differently here.”

As schools moved toward data-informed decision-making, they relied on the data to tell them which policies and practices to modify. Amber stated, “We’ve changed those referrals every year, and I think it's to be more responsive, and to also gather more information to inform our decision.” Brad provide a specific example of his principal using “student data to come up with plans to reduce them [behavior referral].” He further explained the following:

Like maybe if it’s cell phones – if we have 50 cell phone infractions one month, our goal would be to try to get those down maybe five or ten percent each month. Not just by wishing it away, but coming up with interventions to make that happen.

Cole described a similar perspective of reviewing data on cell phone use and developing a plan to rectify the referral rates:

We went from no cell phones ever...and you look at the number of referrals, it’s like, okay, this isn’t jiving with society, it’s certainly not jiving with our discipline and it’s not

helping our SOL scores, keeping these kids out of class because their cell phone went off or whatever, because they're looking at a text. So, we said, what can we do with this?

What's the best way to deal with this?

Multiple participants discussed how data inspired them to place more staff on duty in a particular location to reduce instances of behavior. Amber reported her school's data indicated where fights occurred most often which resulted in the following thought: "Can we put someone there who could be on duty...as we're going through the hallways at class changes, station one of our administrators there, to deter any type of negative interactions that occur in that particular place?" Dennis reinforced that data showed procedural changes were necessary in his school:

If something really just is blaring – glaring out there, we – we'll say, "Hey, we're starting to see this going on." And what we'll do is we'll make adjustments as far as logistics on our side. "Do we need to place more people in the hallway at that time? What's going – are the teachers at the doors?" We start to ask those logistical questions of, "Okay. Yep. That's – that makes sense because there's nobody there that block" – it's that type of thing – or, "It's happening in the cafeteria. We need to up the – we need to up the supervision in the cafeteria" type of things It's just one of them things. We do – we just – you have to make adjustments.

Dennis reflected that a recent behavioral incident at his school might not have happened if a staff member had been there as they "should have been." Similarly, Mitchell adjusted his attendance policy based on "issues with students tardy to school." He reported an increase in detentions as a result of these problems and reflected on his school's decision to change the policy:

Typically we don't do a great job looking at data, and that would be one area where we kind of did and we revised our practice based on seeing how many students were getting

detention and how it wasn't changing anything. So it was kind of we had all these people, and that was a big part of it too. It's sort of like "Okay, our goal is to reduce tardies, right? Our goal, so it's always, you want, disciplinary consequences should reduce behavior. So it should be a tie-in." But what we were seeing every year was basically the same number of tardies. So, my thought was, "Okay, why not change? What's the worse that's going to happen?" So I think it has helped somewhat.

Participants referred to data as a pivotal factor in asking questions related to improvement.

Shelly implemented "climate surveys from students" to "figure out ways to help" in areas related to students feeling that teachers cared about and respected them. Furthermore, she incorporated a teacher survey to ask questions such as, "What are the hot spots? Where do you feel most uncomfortable? What classroom atmosphere makes you feel uncomfortable?" These questions prompted "one-on-one chats" to "be proactive." Similarly, Mathias felt like that "data is best used to ask questions. I think its best used to say, okay, this is happening and this is why, but to look at something and say why is this happening?" Through these questions, Mathias was able to "pay a lot of attention to the culture in the building, to the number of outbursts we have from students when we're in less structured time like lunch."

Some participants made strong statements of their belief in the role that data has played in their schools. Cole stated that "data comes first." He further explained evaluating year-to-year trends in the school setting:

This is where we are at based on last year now is what we're basing it on. Prior to that it was basing it on other schools our size with similar demographics, but now it's a year to year comparison. Once you figure out here's what our issues are, then it's, "Okay, how do we fix this? What do we do?"

Rita also discussed her school's efforts to fix issues through the use of data, specifically attendance and tardiness. These efforts resulted in fewer referrals for these issues, a change that Rita described as "tremendous":

At one point, we were using referrals to track attendance, and tardies, and things because they were going home. We stopped doing that. We stopped writing up referrals specifically for that. We took those referrals out. We look at the referrals and basically analyze, aggregate, disaggregate about every nine weeks as to the number, as to who's writing them, as to sixth graders versus seventh graders versus eighth, as to the more common referrals, if we can start grouping them like that. It's almost a qualitative exercise because we're looking for themes as we go through. It's interesting doing that. They have decreased tremendously, and we basically use that data to figure out what else we're gonna do administratively. That's what changed the sending them home for being late to school. That's one of the discussions we had specific to that. That's when we gather things.

Many participants felt that the data indicated their evaluation and improvement of policies and programs also positively impacted students. Shelly stated, "And we have seen, through tracking data, we have seen improvement with many of the kids." Furthermore, Hope linked using data to improve academics with an improvement in suspensions:

As a school, teachers have to do the evaluation process and they had to have goals. And like last year we worked with our gap groups, I think one and two, as goals to make sure that they were increasing their academic achievement. And when it's all connected, the academic achievement is connected to suspension rates and all that.

Jane identified another strategy, noting that reducing discipline related to creating stronger relationships between students and staff:

I can only say about the last three years where I've been here, that we've tried a number of strategies to try to help reduce the discipline. The most common thread in all of that is the idea of strengthening relationships. We know that if we have stronger relationships between adults – students and adults in the school, then we are more likely to improve the behavior and reduce the discipline.

Because of this “analysis of the data,” Jane and the other administrators at her school sought to “reduce discipline” through “strengthening relationships.” Jane reported they developed a program in which teachers were assigned additional responsibilities to participate in an advisory committee.

Many participants discussed the process by which they review data as a team with other administrators and school staff. They often acknowledged the importance of this collaboration although actual collaboration varied among participants. Paul admitted, “I don’t think we talked about it [data on discipline] at all this year, which is probably bad.” Mitchell echoed the sentiment that his school does not review data as regularly as they should. He reported, “I would say that we typically don’t use it [data report] as much as we should. Just to be honest...in terms of taking a step back, and as an administrative team and looking at all that data together, we don’t.” Brad also stated his school rarely reviews discipline, despite how valuable it might be for teachers:

I don’t know that there’s a reason that we don’t. It’s just not been our habit. Maybe in the future it will be. We don’t keep it as a secret...I think our central office has access, but I

think our teachers probably need to know also, to give them ideas of what they could be working on, on their level.

Tim noted minimal involvement in discussions of data with his school and central office, which he attributed to adequately addressing these issues in the past:

I do believe that the data is analyzed at the central office as well, and they have access to all of that information, and they can compare that across schools...But I can say pretty positively that we have not been a part of those discussions for a long time, 'cause we worked hard to talk about the best way to serve kids and address problems.

However, Tim identified working within the school to utilize data through their data system as well as through the development of a “dashboard” that includes both academics and discipline for each student. He stated they “absolutely look at that information during the summer...as an administrative team.” The frequency of these administrative meetings to discuss data varied by participant. Jane reported that the administrative team at her school meets to “analyze the data...once a week.” Meanwhile, Cole stated, “That’s every marking period pretty much. And we’ll sit down as an administrative team...” Additionally, during faculty meetings, Cole will inform teachers of data to be “upfront before they become epidemic.” John spoke of “monthly principal meetings” in which the assistant superintendent provides “discipline reports” for them to bring back to their respective schools to identify trends and where to focus their attention. However, Ophelia spoke of collaboratively working with data more broadly by stating the following:

We always are looking at grades. We’re always discussing student academics and are students on track to graduate and not graduate and what are we gonna do, what

interventions do we need to put in place, what plan are we putting in place for the student.

In further discussions of who reviews data, some participants spoke of designated committees or groups assigned to do so. Peter reported, “We have a teacher group that actually looks at all that data and helps guide some learning during our time together as a staff.” Cole stated his school has a “discipline committee that meets during the return to school week for teachers.” This committee utilizes discipline and survey data to develop a plan “based upon teacher input and based upon whatever our data is the previous year.” For Mathias’s school, data collected “on students, whether academically, behaviorally, or otherwise, is disseminated pretty freely between the guidance department and the assistant principal.” Although some administrators described an open and collaborative process of reviewing discipline, they also indicated reasons they might be more careful with whom they share data. Mathias expressed hesitancy to share data with law enforcement but that “if its information they [law enforcement] have or data they have, they’re very good at sharing it with us, and then we disseminate that out...” Cole also stated he avoids providing data to particular people, especially information from parole officers to teachers in an effort to not “sully that relationship.”

Participants referenced the interpretation of data by various entities, including administrators and staff. How individuals or groups of people interpreted data impacted decision-making in student support. Hope stated she uses data to “identify students” for a mentoring program at her school to provide “a little boost in support.” Paul spoke to the opposite situation in which the administrators at his school use data and notes to determine what they “did to this child” to determine “what do we do” when a similar situation happens in the future. Furthermore, Reanna indicated that data can establish a reputation for students when she said, “If you had

anyone who had investigated, they would've known these two people had less than stellar records.” Participants also noted interpretation on systemic and institutional levels. Ophelia spoke of how data on expulsions at her school communicate to the school board the reality of its drug problems:

I would say that’s one area where we are tracking the data, would be the drugs and the expulsions. It’s not -- our goal is not to expel kids, but our goal was to get drugs out of [NAME] High school, because they’re illegal... That is something that we have had more drug related expulsions this year than last year. The school board is starting to – two years ago [NAME] High School didn’t have any expulsions based on drugs. Last year we had several. This year we have several more than we had last year. So, I think they’re starting to – that data is starting to come to them as this is a more serious problem than we anticipated at [NAME] High School, so it’s taking the data to even bigger entities as the superintendent’s office and the school board to make them understand, this is real.

Mathias made an additional point of systemic concern when he noted that, “I think everybody’s a little concerned about this youth, the juvenile system, and some data that’s come out that maybe suggests that people are overusing the system.”

As often as data sent a message to stakeholders, school administration and staff also used data points to communicate with each other or parents. Oftentimes, participants used data to communicate about the role of law enforcement in a particular referral. Brad reported that “there’s a box on the discipline card” that indicates whether the school resource officer has been notified of an incident. Similarly, Paul said the following:

On the referral, we'll either write at the very bottom – there's a comment section – we'll write ‘charges pending’ or ‘charges possible’. And sometimes we'll write

‘pending/possible’, and that's one just to let the parents know how you may hear from him, you may not.

However, Hope noted that, at her school, checking a box labeled as a referral to law enforcement might mean that “we told the deputies that we had a fight with these two students.” She said this doesn’t mean the SRO charged a student; therefore, she stated, “We've learned to not overly report things like that. And that came from central office in terms of redefining for us what that looks like.” Amber also spoke to the process of modifying the referral forms at her school to collect more accurate data. She reported, “We modified our referral...to where the person writing the referral can communicate what they've already tried.” Furthermore, Hope described future plans to “put a location” on the referral form to collect data on “hot spots” for behavior to increase student “mindfulness” and “vigilance.”

It was important to some participants to identify and humanize students through data communication. Shelly avoided the creation of a “permanent record” for students by moving away from administrator referrals to generic discipline forms. Additionally, she used this teacher discipline form to collect data directly from students for the purposes of collaborating with teachers:

What’s interesting about both the teacher form and the administrator form is there’s a reflective piece for the kids to write down their answers. “Why did you choose this? What could you have done differently?”...If I have a kid that I’m meeting with for an admin referral, and he writes something unique or she writes something unique...I, in turn, use that data to go back to the teacher and say, “Hey, this is something interesting that this kid wrote down. What could we do?”

Rita stated she chooses to share with students when data indicates a reduction in referrals when she said, “If we have really good weeks...we share that information with the kids. We want to try to do that more. We don't do it as often as we probably could.”

Oftentimes, data was utilized as a reflection of students. Their reputations could be established based on what the data revealed about them as interpreted by administrators and systems. Jill mentioned that students are sent to the school board to appeal expulsions with “a packet of information, and within that packet all of their discipline is listed.” She went on to say that these packets show the board “exactly who this child is.” Similarly, Amber stated a “paper trail” is created to allow administrators to be “better informed the next time [a student] doesn’t do his homework.” Reanna reported that “discipline files” that contain information on prior infractions and parent contact are useful to review with students. However, participants also considered data to be more than a reflection of the student—it reflected student need. They discussed using the data to determine which students required a higher level of support. Reanna stated that she notes personal concerns within students’ discipline files, such as “whether or not he or she is working 40 hours a week.” Valerie described her data collection process when determining the appropriate services to which she should refer a student:

I would start collecting data: looking at the student's grades, looking at the student's attendance, looking at history, like has DSS involvement been with this kid? Has this kid ever been in juvenile detention before? Collecting all of that, and then referring them to day treatment counseling so that they can have someone more specific to them and attention to them so that they don't get kicked out of our school and put into an alternative placement, or our alternative school, or something like that.

Connie asked similar questions of support based on data for “students with multiple infractions” while Larry identified discipline history as “our main data port to see if there’s a repeat behavior of this child and what is causing this repeat behavior.” He acknowledged that these causes of behavior may be related to “limited resources” or “[having] no support system at home.” Rita used data related to trends that are “specific to a child” for the purposes of developing schedules, forming mentor groups, enlisting student support groups, and integrating nonthreatening staff members into the student’s academic plan. She noted that students may be “triggered” through interactions with certain people.

As Rita alluded, data also informed participants as to the reasons a student may or may not engage in behavioral issues. Mathias noted a cycle at his school in which behavior “amps up” from the middle to the end of the week because students are “ready for the weekend.” Ronald reported that data tells him if a student struggles with behavior in a particular class and/or with a particular teacher. However, Paul expressed his belief that low discipline numbers at his school are due to making students aware of discipline expectations and not hesitating to charge them with a crime:

I feel like we charge kids a lot. But the kids know that we're gonna charge as well; I mean, they're told at the beginning of the year, "If you do these things, we will charge you. You will go see a judge." And they know we follow through. And so, it's not an arbitrary thing, we're gonna charge this kid and not that kid; we let the kids know up front, and we have our back-to-school meetings of the whole school. "Here's what our discipline expectations are. Here's our expectations of the year. Here's what we'll charge you for, and it is what it is, guys – expect this," and they know that it's gonna happen. And I really believe that in itself helps keep the numbers down.

Participants also described a reduction in discipline data as a result of moving toward consistency in reporting behavior incidents. Jill exercised judgment when determining if a referral would be placed into her school's computer system when she said the following:

The referrals where the teacher wrote you up because you sneezed during a test, I'm not putting that in the computer. Just sit here, that's not going in the computer, because that just does not make any sense. But the ones that conference with student, ISS, OSS, that gets put into the computer system.

Rita reported that her school often uses the code of "other" because many behaviors are "not severe enough to fit into certain categories." Mark stated that regular "check-ups" on his school's data software occurs to ensure they rectify "if we've messed some sort of coding up." However, a school resource officer identified data inconsistencies as creating more severe referrals. Hank described the following:

That was my problem with the data and stuff before, because school administrators are required by what they're told to do to put anything in if it's a fight...they have to put that in as assault because it – by definition of the law, it is assault. And if you barely touch somebody, it's, by definition, assault. So they have to put it in that way and they do because they're told to and if they don't, they get in trouble...they put it in as assault because they don't fully understand, I guess, the definition – some school administrators – and then it gives an assault that's reportable to law enforcement but it's not reported to me because they feel like it was just a poke and it wasn't something that I needed to hear but they had to stick it in that way.

Data provided participants with an understanding of the disparities in discipline at their school. Many collected and reviewed data on students' demographics to strive toward better addressing

how certain populations are disciplined. Rhonda specified, “We look at it in terms of male/female, black/white, every aspect that we can.” Jane also described an awareness of demographics in discipline, particularly racial, at her school:

We are very aware of students in terms of demographics. So how many in terms of... How many black, white, or Hispanic students are receiving discipline? What level of discipline are they receiving? So what are the disparities between the groups or what's common in the groups and so forth?...And grade level, gender, that's also part of the data collection...

Hope and Shelly confirmed an examination of data to determine which differences exist in discipline practices across races. Hope described use of data “to ensure that we are not overly disciplining them [African-American male]... That they are not getting the OSS as frequently as maybe they had in the past.” Shelly reported the PBIS team at her school meets monthly “to talk about exclusionary data.” She noted using this information to develop plans for addressing these issues, specifically those involving racial disparities: “At the beginning of the year we were starting to see exclusionary data for particularly our black students. So we were trying to figure out what could we do differently? What approaches could we do?” Ronald noted disparities in discipline based on grade-level when he stated, “Basically, attendance, class cuts, our lowest attendance pattern is upper classmen, 11th and 12th graders, seniors. A lot of them work.” However, he noted more severe behavioral incidents occur in the lower grades when saying he utilizes data from students’ middle schools “because it's mostly going to be freshmen and underclassmen that are having the most significant discipline issues.”

Participants also reported they monitored data for disparities in discipline practices with students in special education. Amber acknowledged she does this because she trains teachers “to

help recognize” when “students with disabilities and 504s disrupt the classroom to cover for the fact that they are struggling academically.” Hope stated, “Our teachers break down their data...for their evaluation process.” She reported the evaluation helps to ensure the school is not “overly disciplining special needs students.” Peter also acknowledged a need for evaluation for the sake of improvement:

We’re interested in some of our gap group data... And it could just be that we never looked at it in that construct, so we were making the mistake without really knowing. And that’s really what it is – to look at what you’re doing and why it’s happening, and then, if it’s something that needs to be fixed, then what do we need to do to fix it? And in some cases, it’s just looking at things a little differently, and you didn’t think to look at it that way before. So yeah, so we use the gap group data and we use the individual demographic data. We’ll even look at gender data sometimes, just to see.

Despite the potential for disparities in discipline practices as indicated by data, Paul reported his school does not review this information regularly. He stated, “...Who’s getting the referrals, race-wise, or male to female, or SPED, or– that, we don’t look at nearly as often as we should. I think we just get them, we do our thing, and we go on.” However, Cole described the importance of exploring data when he said the following about his school’s prior discipline issues based on data:

I can’t attest to the way things were before I got here, but I can tell you is the discipline was way out of whack. When I compare it to the school I was previously at in [NAME], which was the same size, same demographics generally, and I looked at their discipline and the amount of referrals that they were handling as an administrative team, and the amount of violent things that were going on that you report to BDOE for the report card

and compared it to [NAME], we were almost even with the violent stuff. But the minor stuff we were way, way overboard.

The majority of participants described data reporting as a method of targeting teacher-specific discipline practices. Upon reviewing the data and determining if certain teachers were excessively writing discipline referrals, participants would address this concern with the teacher. The goal of these discussions was to develop plans for reducing future referrals. Rita reported that she observed differences in student expectations among the grades levels at her school; as a result, students were “coming to you [teachers] not understanding the behaviors they need to know...because your expectations weren’t the expectations of last year.” Sharing this data with the teachers resulted in a collaboration to agree on interventions that occur across grade levels prior to a referral. On an individual level, participants engaged in active communication with teachers about their concerns. Jill stated, “There have been some years where we’ve noticed maybe an increase in this particular teacher. It just seemed like they wrote referrals for everybody, so we will pull that data, and maybe speak with the teacher.” She recounted a specific incident in which she did this with a new teacher:

We had a teacher that started about October or so. So, it was already rough coming in October, brand spanking new teacher, every little thing he wrote a referral. Every single, tiny, little thing he wrote a referral. So, you come to the end of the semester, and so for that teacher, “Let’s look at some of the stuff that you’re writing referrals for. We understand you’re learning, we understand you’re still new. You got the content, but let’s just work on some classroom management now.” So, sitting that teacher down, looking at, “These are the things that have your name on it for your referrals. What can we work on?” Then second semester, that particular teacher was better with regards to referrals.

Jill described this as “utilizing the communication...using the data of the discipline to be able to help.” Participants agreed data provided insight on the need to intervene in teacher discipline practices. Jane stated, “...one of the things we do look at is our data on the discipline. What is the most common referral? Which teacher might be making more referrals than others and therefore might need some follow-up or something?” Tim reported his school has increased in identifying which students need assistance to address their referral practices when he stated the following:

Our data is so – now that we can actually see what teacher writes the most referrals, and that's kinda, to us now, that's the bigger issue now, is what teacher is writing the most referrals and why...And so, what's the reason for getting those with this one specific individual, and then addressing those types of concerns that are teacher-specific. To me, that's the thing that we more address now.

Similarly, Mathias uses his school’s discipline report to “take a look at which teachers are referring the most students, again, to ask the question why, what supports do they need?” Dennis described this as searching for a “pattern” with a particular teacher that may have “no rapport and no routine...so there are things there that we can help them out with.”

Discussion

Administrators, school resource officers, school counselors, and school social workers provided information on the role of data in addressing discipline practices in Virginia. It appeared that improvement to discipline was an overall theme in how to reduce the entrance of students into the STPP. The majority of participants acknowledged the need for data-driven policies developed from data-informed decision-making. Decisions related to programs and policies were based on data collected within the school. For example, some participants used

data to determine which students might benefit from mentorship with a particular teacher. Additionally, participants also included locations of behavioral incidents in data analysis to decide key places for teachers to monitor during class changes and lunchtime in the interest of deterring incidents. Improving discipline practices based on data also involved removing referrals for minor issues, such as attendance and tardies, because these minor referrals were causing exclusionary discipline practices. Many participants felt this practice was unnecessary and harmful. Once again, participants identified that situations with better relationships resulted in less referrals; therefore, the data told them to create and sustain programs that help strengthen relationships.

Participants also worked collaboratively to address the STPP using data-informed decision-making. They reported this helped to determine where the attention should be focused in the schools. There was a range of frequencies in how often data was reviewed as a team, including from only in the summer during professional development meetings to every marking period to monthly to weekly. It seemed that participants understood the benefit of sharing data as a group to improve policies and practices. Despite participants acknowledging this, some also stated they did not review data with teachers even though they felt it would help the teachers to improve. These participants mentioned the time constraints of being able to share this information. For those that did share data with teachers, they described both collaborative and individual processes of using the data to modify teacher discipline practices. Specifically, teachers with the most referrals were targeted as well as teachers who were referring particular students more often than others. This information was used to inform the teachers and intervene with support and alternative options. It seems assisting teachers positively impacted the STPP as it led to a reduction in unnecessary referrals.

How administrators interpreted data resulted in the type of intervention provided to students. This was often described on a continuum with students already receiving mental health treatment provided with extra support at one end and students establishing a negative reputation at school on the other end. Ultimately, how school administrators and staff interpreted data impacted how they worked with students. Furthermore, this interpretation of data helped to communicate issues at systematic and institutional levels. Some participants noted that data communicated to their respective school board that there are significant substance abuse issues at their school while another participant noted that their data demonstrated excessive referrals to the juvenile justice system. This data provided information to the schools and school systems on areas to target and address that are related to the STPP. Similarly, data was used to communicate information across school settings. Referral forms were often altered to indicate if the school resource officer was involved in an incident, where an incident occurred to determine if a teacher's presence might have stopped a student's behavior, and if the student felt empathetic and remorseful for their behavior.

Some participants described students as a reflection of their data when indicating that students *are* what the data says about them. While this perspective may be less helpful in addressing the STPP, other participants utilized data as a reflection of students requiring greater support and understanding from school administrators and staff. It appeared most participants used the data as a starting point while working toward a more holistic picture of the student. Participants also indicated that consistency in discipline and data reporting resulted in better discipline practices. When students understood the expectations of the school, less instances of behavior were reported. Additionally, when schools reported discipline in a streamlined fashion, discipline was reduced. Participants noted that schools were often forced to categorize behaviors

in ways that are not entirely accurate which overinflated the frequency of discipline incidents. As a result of needing to verify discipline data, participants reviewed the data to ensure there were no disparities in discipline practices across demographics, particularly racially, in special education, and in grade levels. Data was used to assist with training teachers to identify when behavioral concerns were related to academic and cultural stressors. Although one person reported they did not seek to review disparities in discipline data, this seems less common as the majority of participants did engage in this practice.

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