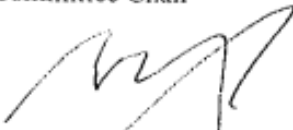


ACCEPTANCE

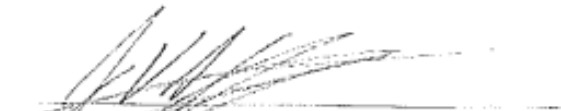
**EARLY INTERVENTION FOR AT-RISK MIDDLE SCHOOLERS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON THE IMPACTS OF A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL**, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership in the School of Education, Concordia University Irvine.



Belinda Dunnick Karge, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair



Gregory Merwin, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

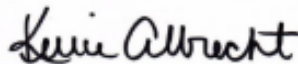


Jim D'Agostino, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

The Dissertation Committee, the Dean, and Executive Director of the Doctor of Education Program of the School of Education, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.



Heather Vezner, Ed.D, Dean  
School of Education



Kellie Albrecht, Ph.D, Executive Director  
Doctor of Education Program

## COPYRIGHT PERMISSION AGREEMENT

Concordia University  
Library 1530 Concordia  
West  
Irvine, CA 92612  
[www.cui.edu/library](http://www.cui.edu/library)  
[librarian@cui.edu](mailto:librarian@cui.edu)

I, Roshni Patel warrant that I have the authority to act on any copyright related matters for the work, **EARLY INTERVENTION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON THE IMPACTS OF A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL ON AT RISK MIDDLE SCHOOLERS**, August 10, 2023) to be included in the Concordia University Library repository, and as such have the right to grant permission to digitize, republish and use the said work in all media now known or hereafter devised.

I grant to the Concordia University Library the nonexclusive worldwide rights to digitize, publish, exhibit, preserve, and use the work in any way that furthers the educational, research and public service purposes of the Concordia University.

This Agreement shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of California. This Agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter and supersedes all prior representations and understandings.

### ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

My electronic thesis or dissertation can be made accessible via the Concordia University Library repository with the following status (select one):

☒ Option 1: Provide open access to my electronic thesis or dissertation on the internet

☐ Option 2: Place an embargo on access to my electronic thesis or dissertation for a given period from date of submission (select one):

☐ 6 months   ☐ 1 year   ☐ 3 years

Permission Granted By:

Roshni Patel



Candidate's Name (*as appears in academic records*)

Signature of Candidate

## VITA

Roshni Patel

### ADDRESS

1530 Concordia West  
Irvine, CA 92612  
[Roshni.patel@eagles.cui.edu](mailto:Roshni.patel@eagles.cui.edu)

### EDUCATION

EdD	2023	Concordia University Irvine Leadership
MA	2010	Azusa Pacific University, Azusa Educational Counseling and Clinical Counseling
BA	2008	California State University, Fullerton Sociology

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2020- Present	Counselor on Special Assignment Santiago Charter Middle School
2012-2020	Counselor Santiago Charter Middle School
2011-2012	Community Liaison Santiago Charter Middle School

**EARLY INTERVENTION FOR AT-RISK MIDDLE SCHOOLERS: A MIXED  
METHODS STUDY ON THE IMPACTS OF A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF  
SUPPORTS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRAL**

by

Roshni Patel

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor of Education  
in  
Leadership  
August 10, 2023

School of Education  
Concordia University Irvine

## ABSTRACT

This mixed method study evaluated the impacts of tiered levels of early intervention and referral for special education evaluation, on at-risk middle schools, using the Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework. Academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions were examined, with a special emphasis on the impacts of these strategies on at-risk middle schoolers and the need for initial evaluation for special education educational services when implementing the MTSS framework. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, research from a large suburban middle school in Orange County, California was collected and analyzed. Social Ecological Theory states that a person is molded by their surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2019; cited by Gu et al., 2021).

The researcher used convenience sampling to collect secondary research and nesting sampling to collect primary research. Secondary data included grade reports, discipline incident data, small group counseling data, and data from a site-based relationship building activity called the *Dots activity*. Primary data included an educator focus group, counseling department interviews, intervention observations, and an educator survey. Quantitative data was analyzed using univariate analysis. Qualitative data was collected, recorded, and transcribed through Zoom. The computerized program Delve was used to code interviews and the educator focus group, using open coding and thematic analysis. The key findings were seen surrounding student academic, behavioral, and social-emotional desired outcomes and special education referral. When early interventions were implemented with fidelity, the need for further intervention decreased. A decrease in the referral for special education assessment was also seen from the 2021-2022 school year to the 2022-2023 school year.

*Keywords:* early intervention, middle schoolers, MTSS, special education, disproportionality

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Research Questions	3
Theoretical Framework	4
Significance of the Study	5
Definition of Terms	8
Summary	10
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
History of Special Education	11
Response to Intervention	12
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports	13
Response to Intervention and Instruction	17
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	18
California MTSS Framework	19
Whole Child	20
Essential Domains and Features	26
Tier 1 Universal Interventions and Supports	27
What is a Tier 1 Interventions?	27
Academic Tier 1 Interventions	28
Behavioral Tier 1 Interventions	30
Social-Emotional and Mental Health Tier 1 Interventions	31
Tier 2 Supplemental Interventions and Supports	38
What is a Tier 2 Interventions	38
Academic Tier 2 Interventions	39
Behavioral Tier 2 Interventions	40
Social-Emotional Tier 2 Interventions	42
Tier 3 Intensified Supports and Interventions	43

MTSS and Special Education	44
The Disproportionality of Special Education Services	45
Disproportionality and Discipline	45
Disproportionality and Special Education	46
Summary	49
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	51
Research Design and Rationale	51
Setting and Participants	51
Sampling Procedures	52
Instrumentation and Measures	53
Reliability	65
Validity	66
Plan for Data Collection	66
Plan for Data Analysis	68
Ethical Issues	69
Summary	70
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS (or FINDINGS)	72
Research Question 1	74
Research Question 2	87
Research Question 3	109
Summary	124
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	126
Summary of the Study	126
Summary of Findings	127
Research Question 1	128
Research Question 2	130
Research Question 3	133
Implications for Practice	135
Implications for Theory	136
Limitations	136
Delimitations	136
Recommendations for Further Research	137
Conclusions	138
REFERENCES	140

APPENDICES	155
Appendix A: Educator Likert Scale Survey	155
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions	167
Appendix C: Informed Constant	168



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Dots activity Total Number of Students by Number of Dots	54
Table 3.2	Dots activity, Total Number of Dots and Grades Fall 2022	55
Table 3.3	Types of Discipline Referrals	56
Table 3.4	Types of Discipline Infractions	56
Table 3.5	Purpose of Counseling Center Visit	59
Table 3.6	Types of Student Concern	59
Table 3.7	Friendship Group Survey	60
Table 3.8	Child Find Data for the 2021-2022 School Year	61
Table 3.9	Counselor Interview Questions	63
Table 3.10	Research Questions	64
Table 4.1	Number of Discipline Referrals	76
Table 4.2	Types of Discipline Infractions and Number of Incidents	76
Table 4.3	Participant Role at School	80
Table 4.4	Perceptions on Knowledge of Academic Interventions	80
Table 4.5	Perceptions of the Implementation of Academic Supports	81
Table 4.6	Perceptions of Academic and Behavior Interventions	81
Table 4.7	Staff Perceptions of Academic and Behavioral Interventions	82
Table 4.8	Perceptions of Behavior Interventions and Supports	82
Table 4.9	Perceptions of Tier 1 Behavior Interventions and Supports	83
Table 4.10	Perceptions of Academic and Behavior Interventions	84
Table 4.11	Intervention Observations	86
Table 4.12	Perceptions of SEL Interventions and Supports	99

Table 4.13	Perceptions on the Importance of SEL Interventions and Supports	99
Table 4.14	Perceptions on the Importance SEL on Academics	100
Table 4.15	Question 1: Roles and How Many Years in Education	103
Table 4.16	Question 2: How are Students Selected for Tier 2 Academic, Behavioral, And Social-Emotional Interventions	104
Table 4.17	Question 3: How Do You Believe Friday School has Impacted Student Grades and Academic Progress	105
Table 4.18	Question 4: Describe the Impacts and Outcomes of a Counseling Group	106
Table 4.19	Question 5: How Do You Believe the Gear N Up Class has Impacted Students?	107
Table 4.20	Evolving Themes from Counseling Team Interviews	109
Table 4.21	Child Find Data	110
Table 4.22	Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education	111
Table 4.23	Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral	111
Table 4.24	Perceptions on Special Education Referral	112
Table 4.25	Intervention Implementation Observations	114
Table 4.26	Question 1: What is Your Role at the School?	115
Table 4.27	Question 2: Describe the Referral Process for Special Education	116
Table 4.28	Question 3: What Changes Have You Seen in Behavior and Work Habits?	117
Table 4.29	Question 4: How are Staff Members Trained?	118
Table 4.30	Question 5: Describe Your Views on SSTs	120
Table 4.31	Question 6: How are Tier 1, 2, and 3 Interventions Monitored?	122
Table 4.32	Evolving Themes from Staff Focus Group on Special Education Referral	124

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1.	Brofendrenner's Ecology Theory	6
Figure 2.1	Elements of PBIS	14
Figure 2.2	PBIS Tiers of Intervention	16
Figure 2.3	Response to Intervention and Instruction versus CA MTSS	20
Figure 2.4	California MTSS Framework	21
Figure 2.5	Sample Behavior Matrix	32
Figure 2.6	CASEL's Framework Wheel	35
Figure 3.1	Intervention Observation Form	62
Figure 4.1	Student Grades from Weeks 7-12 to Weeks 13-18	75
Figure 4.2	Participant Years of Experience	79
Figure 4.3	Effectiveness of Tier 2 Academic Supports Offered	84
Figure 4.4	Perceptions on Tier 2 Behavior Supports	85
Figure 4.5	Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Tier 2 Behavior Supports	86
Figure 4.6	Participant Years of Experience	88
Figure 4.7	Dots activity: Total Number of Students by Number of Dots and Grade	89
Figure 4.8	Purpose of Counseling Center Visit	90
Figure 4.9	Type of Student Concern	91
Figure 4.10	Friendship Group Survey Pretest versus Posttest	92
Figure 4.11	Friendship Group Survey: I know what a health friendship looks like	93
Figure 4.12	Friendship Group Survey: I do not feel anxious about coming to school	94
Figure 4.13	Friendship Group Survey: I feel comfortable starting conversation with new people	95

Figure 4.14	Friendship Group Survey: I know how to start talking to a new person	96
Figure 4.15	Friendship Group Survey: I feel anxious or nervous when meeting new people	97
Figure 4.16	Friendship Group Survey: I have people to spend time with at school	98
Figure 4.17	Perceptions on the responsibility of teaching SEL	101
Figure 4.18	Perceptions on providing SEL Support	102
Figure 4.19	Evolving Themes from Counseling Team Interviews	108
Figure 4.20	Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral	112
Figure 4.21	Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral	113
Figure 4.22	Perceptions on Special Education Referral	114
Figure 4.23	Thematic Analysis Diagram	123

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I conclude my dissertation journey, I would like to take a moment to thank my incredible support team. First, I would like to thank my amazing chair, Dr. Belinda Karge, whose encouragement, leadership, and support throughout this journey will be something that I will forever cherish. Thank you for always being available to ease my stress and help me process my thoughts and feelings through every step. Second, I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Merwin for his guidance, insight, and expertise on my topic. Since my first doctoral class, you have been patient, supportive, and an incredible teacher. Third, Dr. Jim D'Agostino, whose mentorship, encouragement, and guidance have supported me for over a decade. He is the best boss that anyone could ask for. I am forever grateful for all the time and effort you have invested into allowing me to fulfill my dream.

In addition, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my friends and colleagues who supported me both professionally and personally throughout my educational career, particularly these last few years. Your friendship and support have been invaluable to my success. To my outstanding Cohort 14, thank you for the fellowship, memories, and friendships that will last a lifetime. A special thank you to Nery and David.

Finally, to my number one cheerleaders and supporters, my parents. Without them, this doctoral dream would not have been possible. Thank you for your love and support throughout not only my dissertation journey but throughout my entire life and educational career. Without my amazing team, I would not have completed this journey.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Much research has demonstrated the effectiveness of school-wide tiered levels of support, to help mitigate the unnecessary need for intense intervention and to personalize interventions for those that require more support (Eagle et al., 2015; CA Department of Education, 2021; Hunley & McNamara, 2010). In this chapter, the reader is introduced to the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework and its impacts on students academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally. This work will be presented in detail in chapter two. There is a lack of research on the impacts of both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions in the areas of academic achievement, behavior, and social-emotional needs for middle school students. In general, there is substantial research supporting interventions for elementary school-aged students, but minimal research has been conducted on middle school students. Research has shown that disciplinary exclusion, while expected to curb behavioral infractions, actually leads to decreased school engagement and academic achievement (Gradsely-Boy, Gage & Lombardo, 2019). This study aims to address the gaps in the research, to better understand the needs of middle school-aged students and early intervention, in all areas of the whole child.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research from Cruz et al. (2021) suggested that common school practices set up a system in which certain groups of students are disproportionately impacted, typically brown and black boys. Often when schools try to mitigate behaviors by implementing punishment practices, the problems are exacerbated. Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin (2015) add that frequently used exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsions do not have positive impacts on students and only result in loss of instruction, which can lead to academic deficits and a higher rate of student dropout. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (2014)

intended to support struggling learners through RTI, which helped to identify students in need of more support. However, a significant number of students were identified as needing special education services, instead of merely identifying those in need of more support (Bleak et al., 2019). MTSS aims to combat this by providing a continuum of support for students. This should occur before students are identified as needing special education services. Ideally, this begins with first best instructional practices within the classroom and progresses to targeted and individualized interventions in the general education setting (Bleak et al, 2019). Without these steps, schools will continue to have large populations of students receiving services that are not in the least restrictive environment and often cause exclusion from educational opportunities. It is important to seek ways to mitigate these barriers for students and provide necessary interventions (Bleak, et al., 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Minkos and Gelbar (2021) showed that student behavioral and social-emotional needs have increased significantly, especially during the global pandemic. The researchers state that pre-existing hardships and struggles have only been exaggerated by the distribution in both school and home life norms, during this challenging time. Families already struggling with financial difficulties, food insecurity, limited access to affordable health care, and a lack of social networks have only experienced further hardship through the global pandemic. As a result, Minkos and Gelbar (2021) noticed that schools may see a rise in mental health issues and behavioral problems due to the increased stress on students and families during this time, possibly leading to long-term implications as a response to this trauma. With this increase in student needs, schools are presented with a unique opportunity to examine current practices and interventions, ensuring that schools are meeting the current needs of the whole child, meaning

the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. In education schools often go from things we do for all students (Tier 1 supports) straight to individualized supports (Tier 3) if a student is not responding to school-wide, best instruction (Minkos and Gelbar, 2021). These supports can often include a Student Study Team meeting or assessment for Special Education. By proactively engaging in assessing student needs and monitoring progress, schools may implement early interventions so that students will not require the individualized support of a Tier 3 intervention (Minkos and Gelbar, 2021). When schools look at the needs of students for whom they hold a Student Study Team, students often have similar concerns. Interventions are designed to support individual needs but are often supports that can be beneficial to a small group of students. Schools should consider working more efficiently and developing a middle tier (Tier 2) of interventions for small groups of students (Minkos and Gelbar, 2021). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the impact of an MTSS on at-risk students and the impact on the need for initial special education referral at a suburban middle school in California. At this stage in the research, the MTSS will be generally defined as a framework for providing targeted prevention and early intervention support to struggling students in the areas of academics, behavior, and social-emotional needs, in a systematic, data-driven manner, with tiered levels of support to address the needs of *all* students.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions support at-risk middle schoolers?
  - a. What is the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on academically and behaviorally at-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?



- b. How do Tier 1 and 2 interventions impact emotionally at-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?
- c. How does a Multi-Tiered System of Support impact the need for an initial evaluation for special education services for at-risk middle schoolers?

## **Theoretical Framework**

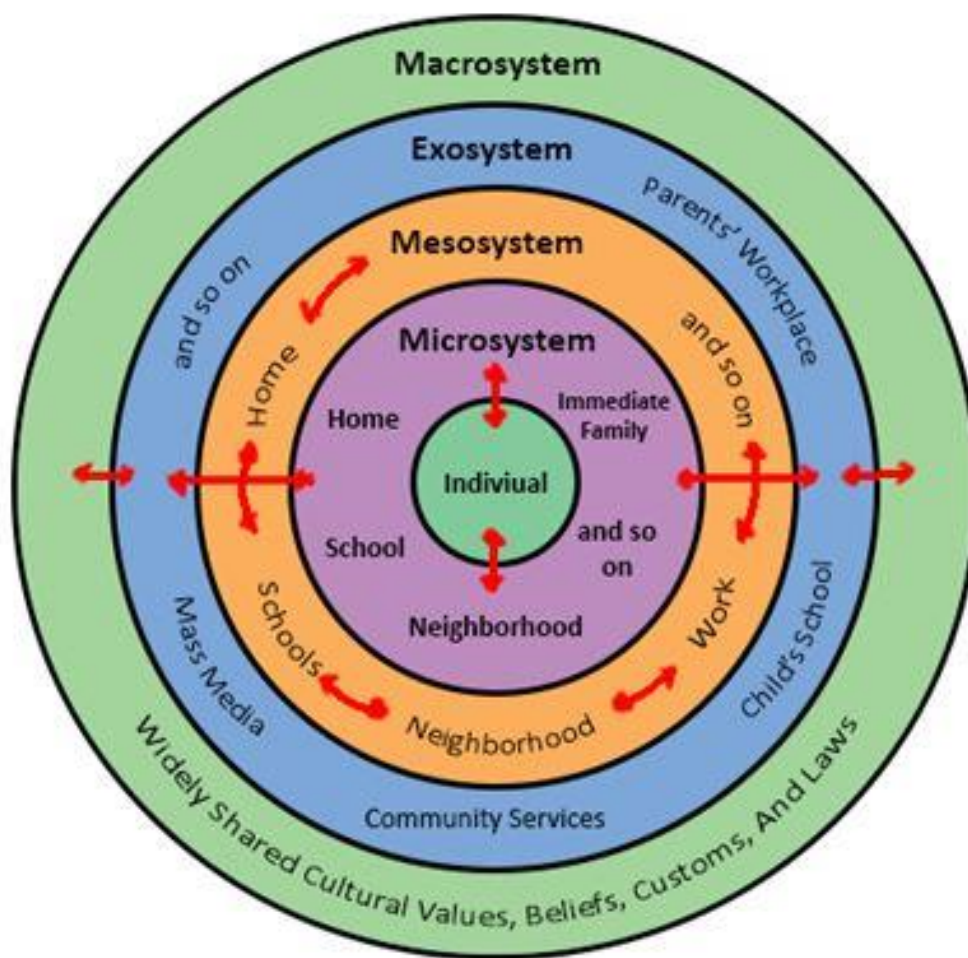
### **Social Ecological Model**

The social-ecological model, modeled by Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that behaviors in youth are molded by characteristics that are shaped by a person's family, peers, school setting, community, and the surrounding society (cited by Gu et al., 2021). Perceptions, attitudes, and coping skills for these behaviors are developed through these settings. Golden and Earp (2012) state that changes in the environment determine which intervention should be used for each person, which aims to change the environment or social relationships for a person. The Center for Disease Control (2022) studied violence prevention, noting that a model aimed at interconnection between an individual, relationships, community, and societal factors helps to identify factors that contribute to violent behaviors. As an example, research by Gu et al. (2021) on cyberbullying with students discovered that students with a lack of parental involvement and poor academic performance were more likely to be involved in cyberbullying, in comparison to those having greater peer support, which led to fewer incidences of cyberbullying, showing that positive adult relationship impacts a person's behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that people develop according to their surroundings and experiences, including their relationships with family, peers, and their community. He believed in five systems within the social-ecological model: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem (Emerson et al., 2022) represents school and family,

those in the person's immediate circle, along with their immediate environment (Duerden & Witt, 2010). This includes those with whom a person comes in direct contact, such as parents, siblings, teachers, or peers, with influence going in both directions (Guy-Evans, 2020). The mesosystem represents the relationships and interactions two people where one person supports the other person, such as a teacher and parent or student and teacher relationship (Duerden & Witt, 2010; Guy-Evans, 2020). The exosystem encompasses the factors by which a person is influenced, but is not connected directly (Duerden & Witt, 2010). One's overall culture and environment can be identified as the macrosystem (Emerson et al., 2022). Finally, chronosystem focuses on major life changes, historical events, and environmental changes over time (Guy-Evans, 2020). It is important to note that a single-level intervention has not proved to be as effective in behavior change as multi-level interventions, ideally incorporating social, institutional, and policy approaches (Golden & Earp, 2012). A visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's five systems of ecology theory is presented (Figure 1.1)

### **Significance of the Study**

Eagle et al. (2015) say that intervention and identification of student needs have been a part of educational policy for years. Research by Ciotta & Gagno (2018) shows the importance of strong behavioral and social-emotional learning supports and the importance those have on academic achievement. The MTSS framework merges the academic interventions of RTI (RTI) and the behavioral interventions of Positive Behavioral Intervention (PBIS) into one system of support (Weingarten, 2020). This includes "data-based decision-making and collaborative problem-solving" (Weingarten, 2020, p. 124) and research-based interventions and data-driven interventions (Eagle et al., 2015).

**Figure 1.1***Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory*

PBIS is “a framework of systematically organizing and implementing evidence-based behavioral supports to all students to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes” (James et al., 2019 p.1513). The PBIS framework supports and aligns the work on the MTSS framework by focusing on the behavioral aspect of student learning and achievement. James et al. (2019) go on to state that the PBIS framework is based on providing tiered levels of support, according to student needs, just as MTSS does. PBIS begins with Tier 1 school-wide supports,

teaching all students three to five behavioral expectations. Bradshaw (2013) writes that expectations are coupled with a rewards system to support the reinforcement of those expected behaviors. “Increasing evidence suggests that successful implementation of school-wide or the universal (Tier 1) PBIS system is associated with sustainable changes in disciplinary practices” (Bradshaw, 2013, p. 289). Frequent progress monitoring is essential to all tiers of support, within the PBIS framework (James et al., 2019). Along with behavioral factors, Dix et al. (2021) show that taking the time to teach and develop social-emotional learning competencies provides positive impacts on academic success. Students are continually exposed to situations where they can positively interact with peers through play, can lead to new opportunities to learn, and practice social-emotional learning competencies in real-life situations (Ciotta & Gagno, 2018). When students can feel emotionally safe, they are more likely to practice and embrace these skills, leading to greater success in school, both socially and academically (Ciotta & Gagno, 2018).

Over time, the merging of PBIS and RTI has resulted in MTSS, as both models focus on similar frameworks to create systems to best support the unique needs of all students. MTSS helps to eliminate the compartmentalization of educational approaches and aims to develop an integrated model to support all needs of students, including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional (Eagle et al., 2015). By focusing on tiered levels of support through an MTSS framework, schools can mitigate disproportionality and over-identification of the need for more restrictive interventions (Eagle et al., 2015). Much of the previous research has focused on elementary-aged students, so this dissertation will focus on middle school students and their unique needs.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions clarify the meaning of the terms used in this study:

*At Risk:* Per the Iowa Department of Education (2022), At Risk students are any student who is an “identified student who needs additional support and who is not meeting or not expected to meet the established goals of the educational program (academic, personal/social, career/vocational). At-risk students include but are not limited to students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts” (p.),

*Child Find:* As part of IDEA (2022), schools must identify and evaluate students who are suspected of having a disability.

*Disproportionality:* Dever et al. (2019) describe disproportionality as “an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a particular student group within a setting or outcome of interest, given that group’s proportion in the total population” (p.59).

*Fidelity:* Adhering to all components of an intervention authentically and truly (Schoppee et al., 2020).

*Intervention:* “An intended, planned, and targeted operation in a system or process which aims at removing or preventing an undesirable phenomenon” (Loss, 2008, p. 808).

*Least Restrictive Environment:* The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act website (2022) states that students who have an identified disability should:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removals of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or

severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (About IDEA).

*Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*: “Three Tier system of instruction and Intervention” (Karge, 2023, p. 35). Per the California Department of Education Website (2021), MTSS is a framework that aligns academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning in a comprehensive, integrated system, to support the needs of *all* students. It aims to provide quick and intentional support to students, using data to drive decisions.

*Response to Intervention (RTI)*: The early identification and intervention of learning and behavioral needs, through high-quality instruction and ongoing assessment, providing tiered levels of support (Welenofsky, 2022).

*Student Study Team (SST)*: A problem-solving team that aims to determine general education support to students who are demonstrating difficulties in academic, speech/language, social-emotional, or behavior. The team should consist of a variety of members of the student’s educational team, such as classroom teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, education specialists, administrators, and parents (Welenofsky, 2022).

*Tier 1*: Universal, Evidence-Based practices that are available to all students at the school in the areas of academic, behavior, and/or social-emotional development (CA Department of Education, 2022).

*Tier 2*: Targeted support for those that do not respond to Tier 1 (Karge, 2023). Supplemental, Evidence-Based practices for students who need additional support in the areas of academic, behavior, and/or social-emotional development (CA Department of Education, 2022).

*Tier 3:* Intensified interventions for a few students who have a greater need for individualized support in the areas of academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional development (CA Department of Education, 2022).

*UDL:* “Framework for designing learning based on individual learners at the planning stage” (Karge, 2023, p. 160).

*Whole Child:* Pertains to looking at all aspects of a student, in particular academics, behavioral needs, and social-emotional needs (CA Department of Education, 2022)

### **Summary**

In summary, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the problem of over-identification of special education services needed, due to the lack of implementing tiered levels of support in academics, behavior, and social-emotional areas, with fidelity. Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model, used as a theoretical framework in the dissertation, indicates that students are shaped by their environment (1979, cited by Gu et al., 2021). Research shows that focusing on multiple levels of support, using the MTSS model can mitigate disproportionality and overidentification of the need for more restrictive interventions (Eagle et al., 2015), including focus on RTI, PBIS, and SEL. Most recent research focuses on elementary students, causing the need for middle school students to be examined, and aims to analyze how various interventions impact student outcomes.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter provides the reader with the research background and synthesis for the dissertation. Discussed in this chapter is the history of special education, the evolution of student support programs and practices, along with a detailed description of the current educational system of student supports. Additionally, the background of special and disproportionality is discussed.

### **History of Special Education**

Prior to 1975, many students with disabilities were not educated in public, general education schools. Students with severe disabilities typically had to attend a special institution and often resided within the institution (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2022). In the early 1900s, students with special needs were integrated into public schools but remained in isolated classrooms (Francisco et al., 2020). By the 1930s and 1940's the stigma of special education was heightened, and students became marginalized within society. The curriculum also became watered down, not allowing the opportunity for academic or social growth. The rise of parent advocacy groups in the 1950s and 1960s prompted more federal funding for special education services and many states destigmatized special education, allowing students with special needs to be educated with their peers (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2022). Brown v the Board of Education in 1954 propelled the desegregation of not only students of color but also students with disabilities. With the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, all students were allowed to have a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), requiring schools to provide individualized education programs (IEP) for students identified as having a disability (Weber & Muro, 2022). Students with disabilities were expected to be taught in a manner that was designed to meet their unique needs, regardless of the



environment, and at no cost to the family (Francisco et al., 2020). In 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was updated to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), establishing an array of specific disabilities qualifying students for an IEP, along with other stipulations around identification, assessment, and placement of students in the least restrictive environment (Weber & Muro, 2022).

### **Response to Intervention**

Bursuck and Blanks (2010) refer to Response to Intervention (RTI) as a “multitiered systemic approach to support children who are at risk for reading problems due to factors such as disabilities, socioeconomic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency before they fall behind” (p. 42) and was created to also support overidentifying students for special education services. Bursuck and Blanks go on to state that RTI aimed to reduce the discrepancy between certain groups of students achieving more than other groups of students. Many components of RTI have dated back to the 1960s (Karge, 2023). Researchers Bursuck and Blanks (2010) stated that students have struggled with key pieces of education, such as reading, for numerous years, and were forced to continue to learn while lacking these essential skills. Oftentimes, these students failed before they were referred to special education services, provided in an alternative setting (Karge, 2023). RTI was introduced as a new instructional strategy that was focused on early detection and prevention strategies to help students struggling with reading (Bursuck and Blanks, 2010), along with tiered levels of support, focusing on interventions backed by research (Karge, 2023). Students from special populations such as English Language Learners, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with disabilities tend to struggle with academic concepts, such as reading. Implementing an RTI model was aimed to reduce the overidentification of students needing special education services by providing general education

intervention (Bursuck and Blanks, 2010). Additionally, by reducing the overidentification of students requiring special education services, educators could focus more on those students who undoubtedly need special education services (Bursuck and Blanks, 2010). The system helps to support students before they fall below grade level, by placing students into groups, depending on their level of academic comprehension. With the re-authorization of IDEA in the early 2000s, RTI's practices strengthened the identification of students with possible learning disabilities (Farkas, 2020; Karge, 2023). The RTI model focuses on a three-tiered pyramid, similar to the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports pyramid shown in Figure 2.2.

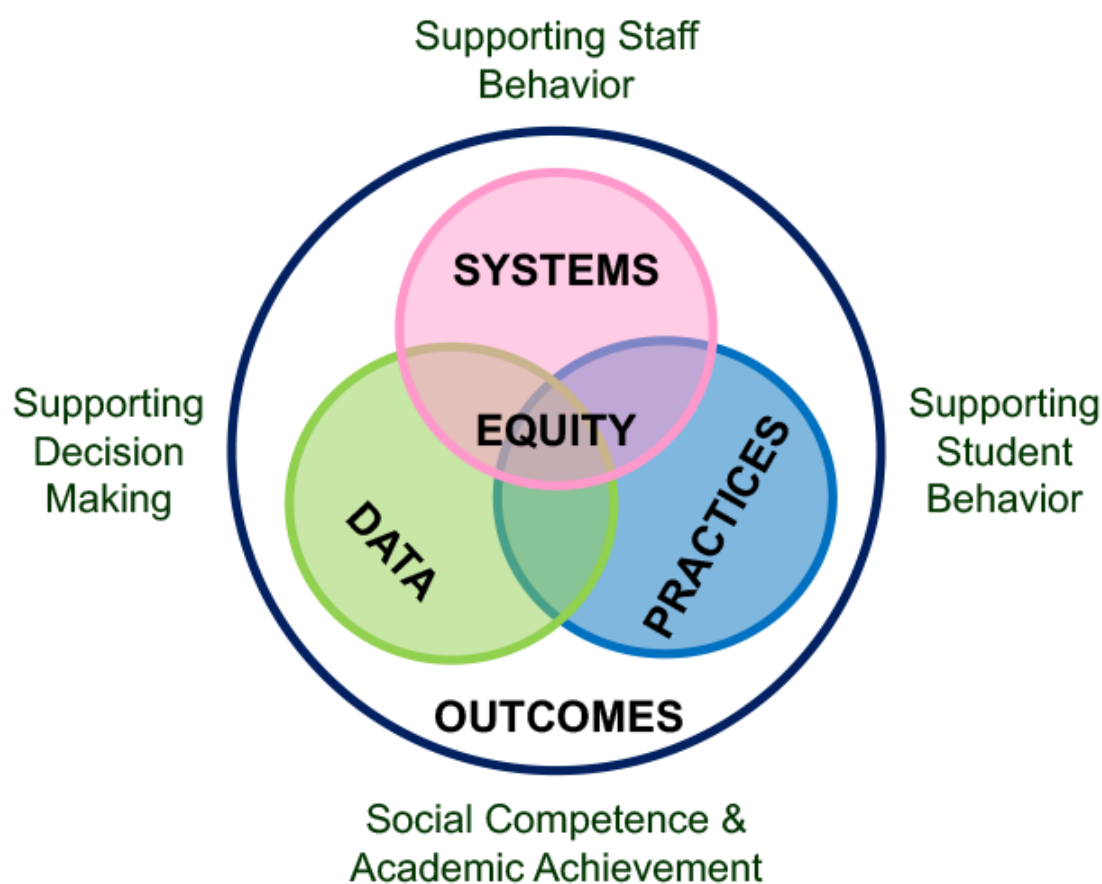
### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

In conjunction with RTI's academic focus, PBIS focuses on the behavioral needs of students. PBIS, according to James et al. (2019), "refers to a framework of systematically organizing and implementing evidence-based behavioral supports to all students to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes" (p.1513). Historically, research by Sugai & Horner, (2020) states that PBIS was first acknowledged through its relation to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Special Education, focusing on avoiding exclusionary practices and creating classrooms that are respectful, orderly, and safe. Although no specific recipe was developed (Sugai & Horner, 2020), James et al. (2019) state that the PBIS framework is based on providing tiered levels of support, according to student needs. Some refer to PBIS as behavioral RTI, with practices grounded in applied behavior analysis, and originally geared towards students with disabilities (Kinney et al., 2010). The Center on PBIS (2022) emphasizes five key elements of PBIS, which include equity, systems, practices, data, and outcomes. Equity focuses on providing high expectations and support to all, including staff members. Creating systems, including teams and process, are essential to sustainability. A wide variety of data should be

collected to drive practices to support expected student outcomes. Figure 2.1 shows how these elements work together to create effective PBIS implementation (Center on PBIS, 2022).

**Figure 2.1**

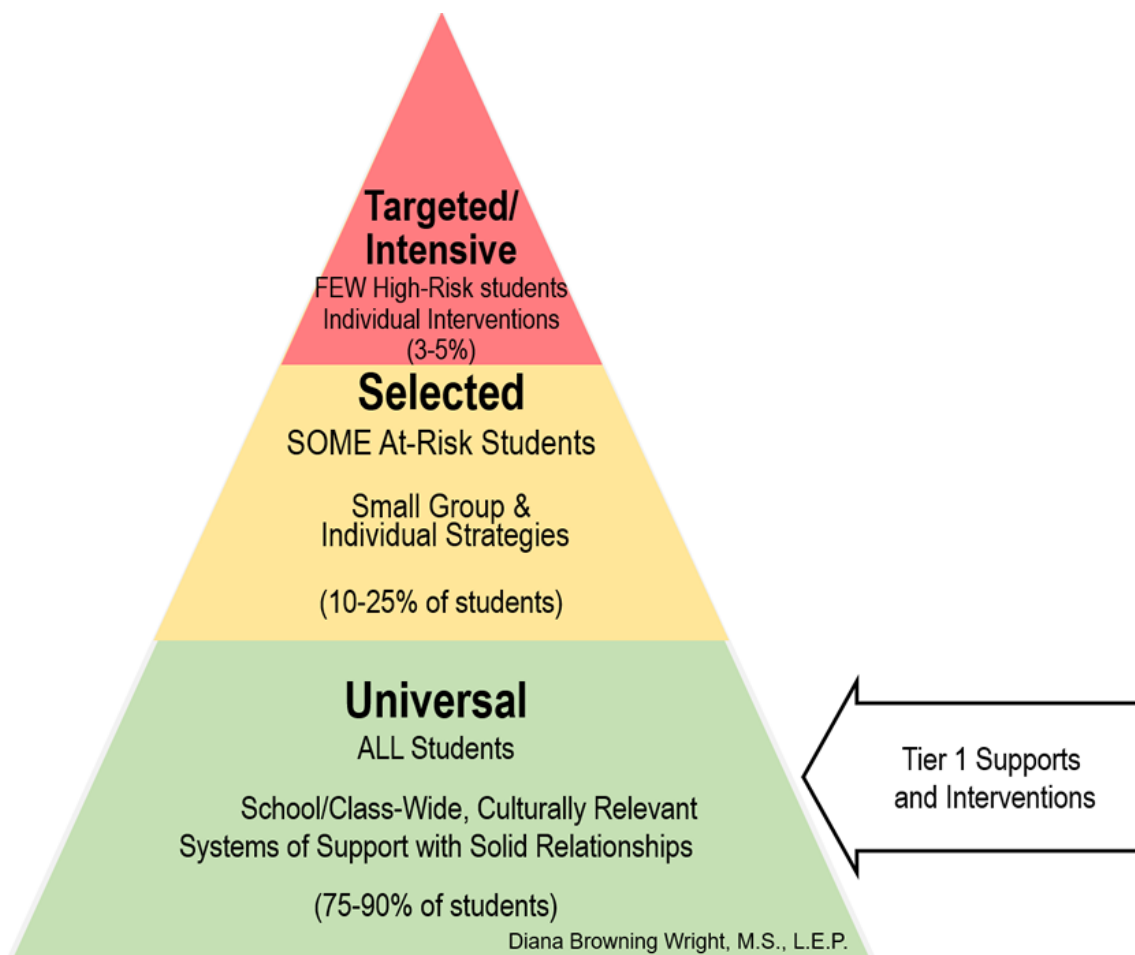
*Elements of PBIS*



PBIS begins with Tier 1 supports that create school-wide systems and practices that focus on data (Center on PBIS, 2022). Universal, Tier 1 supports, features teaching three to five behavioral expectations to all students (Bradshaw, 2013) and should aim to align with classroom expectations (Center on PBIS, 2022). These behavior expectations are coupled with a token system or acknowledgments of expectations, including pre-corrections (Gage et al., 2019). When

Tier 1, school-wide interventions and supports are implemented with fidelity, research suggests there is a correlation to “sustainable changes in disciplinary practices” (Bradshaw, 2013, p. 289). PBIS should also reduce discipline infractions and improve learning environments for all students (Kinney et al., 2010). Those students who do not respond to Tier 1 interventions and continue to have significant behavioral problems, even with school-wide supports implemented with fidelity, should be provided with Tier 2, targeted interventions (James et al., 2019). Tier 2 interventions will apply to roughly 10 - 15% of the student population, focusing on small-group support and instruction, increasing adult support, providing positive reinforcement, increasing prompts and reminders, and increasing home communication, according to the Center on PBIS (2022). Of those that receive these Tier 2 supports, 1-5% of students will require intense behavioral support attained from Tier 3 interventions and supports (James et al., 2019). These supports are derived from an individualized look at each student’s unique needs and focused on supporting those needs with on and off-campus recourses, such as a behavior contract or outside counseling (James et al., 2019) and often involve student-centered planning and function-based support (Center of PBIS, 2022). Frequent progress monitoring of the student’s progress is essential to all tiers of support, within the PBIS framework (James et al., 2019). Figure 2.2 shows a visual description of the PBIS tiers (Positive Environments, Network of Trainers, 2022).

Chitiyo et al. (2019) shows that most schools around the country have implemented a School-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) program to target problem behaviors, resulting in positive outcomes. The key to long term sustainability of SWPBIS is the self-confidence of the school personnel that support these programs. Chitiyo et al. (2019) go on to point out that most programs fail after 3 years, especially those in urban areas of the country.

**Figure 2.2***PBIS Tiers of Interventions*

The leading cause is the self-confidence and self-efficacy of school personnel. Ongoing coaching for teachers and staff is imperative for the positive results of such interventions (Bohanon et al., 2018). Those that feel comfortable with implementing the practices and saw success, were more likely to continue the practices long-term (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Staff coaching can lead to better staff morale, which leads to more fidelity to the implementation of SWPBIS practices and helps to build self-efficacy among the teaching staff. The results of coaching also contribute to maintaining a common goal amongst the staff. It is critical to

continually train and support all teachers, especially through tough cases (Bohanon et al, 2018), as research (Chitiyo et al., 2019) shows that special education teachers had the most self-confidence and sustainability of practice, among all other categories of school personnel. Sugai and Horner (2020) add that the most important implementation drivers of PBIS include stakeholder support, continued funding, system/policy alignment, personnel capacity, training, coaching, behavioral expertise, program evaluation, and data collection. These aspects, in addition to implementation teams, are crucial to long-term success.

### **Response to Instruction and Intervention**

With the evolution of RTI, education saw the emergence of Response to Instruction and Intervention or RTI<sup>2</sup> (Cardenas-Hagan, 2019). With RTI, educators waited for students to fail to provide intervention (Karge, 2023). RTI<sup>2</sup> focuses on changing universal instruction to meet the needs of all learners, providing high-quality instruction, with fidelity before they fail (CA Department of Education, 2020). Teachers know which students are struggling based on universal screeners that are given to all students to show areas of deficit before students failing (Cardenas-Hagan, 2019). For students who need more support, classroom-based small group instruction is provided, as well as progress monitoring. Additionally, individualized, special instruction and frequent progress monitoring is provided for students who continue to struggle. Response to Instruction and Intervention provides continuous formative feedback to allow teachers to measure student progress and growth (Cardenas-Hagan, 2019). Although this model can be applied in multiple settings, it remains largely a part of the academic curriculum, particularly with reading support.

## Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) merges RTI, academic interventions, and PBIS's behavioral interventions into one system of support, aligning all school practices and supports, for ALL students, both general education and special education, in one comprehensive system. This includes "data-based decision-making and collaborative problem-solving" (Weingarten, 2020, p. 124). Intervention and identification of student needs have been a part of educational policy for several years. Over time, the simplification merging of PBIS and RTI has resulted in MTSS, as both models focus on similar frameworks to create systems to best support the unique needs of *all* students (Eagle et al., 2015). Dulaney and Hallam (2013) show that both state and federal governments have increasingly pushed for more accountability and a uniform measure of accountability and action from educational institutions. MTSS helps to eliminate the practice of working in silos and aims to develop an integrated model to support all needs of students, including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional. Primary components include research-based interventions and data-driven interventions (Eagle et al., 2015). Dulaney and Hallam (2013) state that a capstone element of MTSS is "Empowering all students to learn through systematic school-wide support" (p. 33). Freeman et al. (2015, p. 59) found the following:

The evolution of multi-tier systems of support (MTSS) for both academics and behavior has reflected the diverse interests of those leading implementation efforts, the influence of various state and local regulatory requirements, and differing funding methods and priorities. These variations have naturally led to many different pathways for implementing MTSS (p.59).

Per the California Department of Education's website (2022) on MTSS, there are several similarities and differences between the previous RTI<sup>2</sup> and the new MTSS framework. Both frameworks support high-quality and research-based instructional practices that support the notion that all students can learn, including special populations of students. Data collection is emphasized and is meant to be used to drive practices and services for students. In the MTSS model, the framework differs from RTI in that it aligns all school practices and initiatives, rather than a focus on academic support only (CA Department of Education, 2021). There is also an emphasis on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as a primary instructional practice. This practice focuses on designing instruction to fit the needs of all types of learning, through the delivery of content, engagement, and the way learning is expressed (CA Department of Education, 2021).

There are many similarities, but the MTSS Framework adds additional domains and layers to intervention, and there are differences and similarities between Response to Instruction and Intervention and the California MTSS Framework (Figure 2.3)

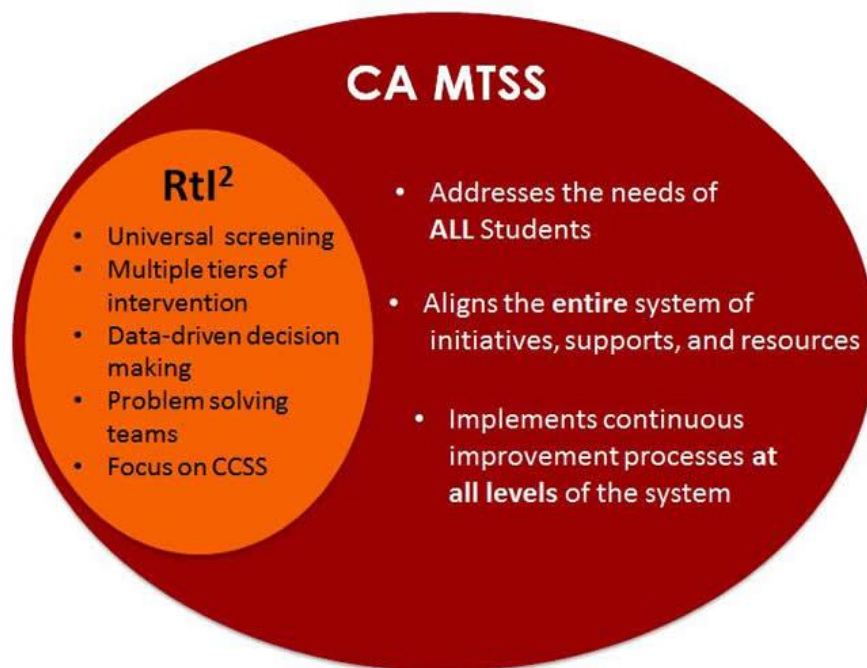
### **California's MTSS Framework**

The California's MTSS Framework supporting was designed to all students (Figure 2.4). This is broken down into seven different domains: Inclusive Academic Instruction, Inclusive Behavioral Instructional, Inclusive Social-Emotional Instruction, Mental Health, Administrative Leadership, Integrated Supports, Family and Community Engagement, and Inclusive Policy Structures and Practices (CA Department of Education, 2021).



**Figure 2.3**

*Response to Intervention and Instructions versus CA MTSS*

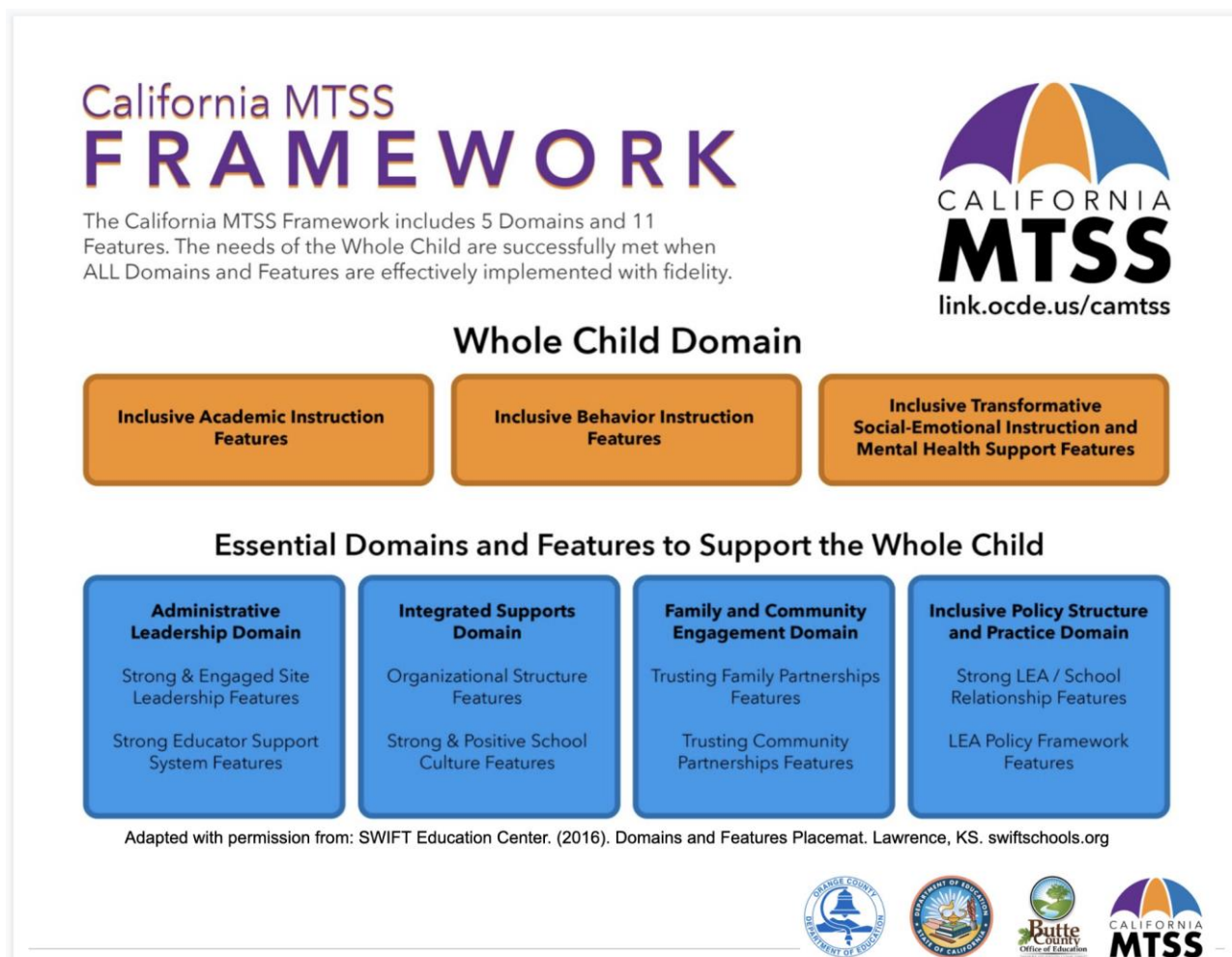


### **Whole Child Domain**

The Whole Child Domain focuses on the interconnectivity between the academics, behavior, and social emotional needs of all students (Darling & Cook, 2018). The whole child domain focuses on evidence-based practices and curriculum to meet the comprehensive needs of students (Adamson et al., 2019), both general education and special education students. This also includes the factor of access to basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, and health care (Darling & Cook, 2018). To fully understand and support the needs of *all* students, all factors of a student's life must be examined. When adequate support is put in place to overcome deficits, student academic outcomes should increase (Darling & Cook, 2018). Focus on the Whole Child includes embracing and celebrating the cultures of the student population and providing equitable services, aiming to eliminate the cultural barrier to learning (Bal, 2018; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Sugai et al., 2019, as cited by Goodman-Scott et al., 2022).

**Figure 2.4**

*California MTSS Framework (Multi-Tiered System of Support, 2021)*



### ***Inclusive Academic Instruction***

The California Department of Education (2021) describes Inclusive Academic Instruction as including a comprehensive system to assess student learning and growth, provide various levels of support for those students who are not making progress, and implement Universally Designed Instruction (UDL). Instead of making modifications for certain students, UDL aims to design instruction to meet the range of needs of the various learners within a classroom (Cook & Rao, 2018). A detailed account of UDL can be found below, in the Tier 1 Academic Interventions section.

### ***Inclusive Behavior Instruction***

Inclusive Behavioral Instruction is similar to the structure of inclusive academic instruction but instead focuses on creating a comprehensive system to identify and support student behavioral needs, per the CA Department of Education (2021). Behavior support includes teaching expected behaviors in and out of the classroom, along with a system to acknowledge expected behavior and correct unwanted behaviors (Adamson et al., 2019). The PBIS framework is used to support this domain (OCDE, 2022; Goodman et al, 2022). Adamson et al. (2019) suggest that schools provide a continuum of behavior supports that are adapted to the changing needs of the student.

### ***Inclusive Transformative Social-Emotional Instruction and Mental Health Support***

Schools have the opportunity to create a sense of community and belonging that is essential to social and emotional functioning, satisfying a student's need for social interaction and relationships (Emerson et al., 2021). Santre (2022) states that mental health is “a condition of well-being in which a person appreciates his or her abilities, can cope with the usual life stresses, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to her or his community (p.123). Mental Health disorders such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and substance abuse impact about 20 to 25 percent of students in America (Osagiede et al, 2018). These types of conditions strongly impact academic performance and overall wellbeing (Osagiede et al, 2018 cited by Borntrager & Lyon, 2015). Social-emotional learning can support overall mental health and well-being. Dobria, et al. (2019) state that Social Emotional Learning is:

The process by which each student develops their capacity to integrate thought, emotion, and behavior to achieve and accomplish important social tasks. In this sense, students develop

skills that allow them to recognize, express and manage emotions, build healthy relationships, establish positive goals and respond to personal and social needs. (p. 22)

Social Emotional Learning includes competencies that should be integrated into daily curriculum and lessons, in a comprehensive approach, to meet the needs of all students (Ferreira et al., 2020). These skills are often overlooked and deemed skills that should be preprogrammed in students (CASEL, 2021). Over time, students will continually develop social and emotional skills that will move from external motivators to internal motivators. Students should also show a shift in academic performance and demonstrate fewer social behavioral problems and incidents (Durlak, et al., 2011). These skills fall into five different areas of competency: Self-awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making (CASEL, 2021). Teacher self-efficacy plays a large role in SEL lessons, along with teacher burnout. Some crucial factors to consider when looking at sustainability are ensuring that social-emotional learning is practiced outside the classroom, having enough support staff to implement strategies and lessons, along with the proper training and support for educators (Ferreira et al., 2020). As the pressures of teaching standards increase, teachers must be supported so that they can support our students in learning these essential skills for both academic and behavioral success in the present and future (Ferreira et al., 2020).

### **SEL and Academic Performance**

There is growing research linking academic success to non-academic skills, such as social-emotional skills and executive functioning skills, which are best learned in early childhood education, as this is when neurodevelopment occurs (Wolf & McCoy, 2019). Durlak et al. (2011) show that students who have strong SEL competencies are more likely to stay organized, set goals, and work towards those goals. Having these skills early in life and attribute

to successful academic outcomes for years. Dix et al. (2012) showed an 11% growth in academic achievement when school-wide, universal social-emotional learning was in place. Jackson et al. (2021) examined the connection between high schools that promote social-emotional learning and academic achievements. The study found several important links in work habits, test scores, and other long-term academic impacts. The research found that in high schools that promote student well-being, students were more motivated to do their best, put in the work needed to be successful, and are persisting.

Siqueira de Souza et al. (2022) found that fifth-grade students who received continuous SEL instruction showed improvement in academic performance over a three- and six-month period of time. Cabarello et al. (2019) found that there is a correlation between mindfulness practices and higher-grade point averages and test scores. Students having a growth mindset and grit, as social-emotional competencies, showed more progress in academic achievement in high school students around the country. It was also noted that academic problems often correlate to behavior problems, which can be ameliorated by SEL (Siqueira de Souza et al., 2022). Wolfe and McCoy (2019) also found that students who can recognize and regulate their emotions showed higher success in reading and math and, perhaps, can also be related to having the ability to problem solve and persevere, which is a skill needed when learning and practicing new concepts. Student test scores were also positively impacted through an emphasis on the promotion of student mental health (Jackson et al., 2021). The study determined that when students feel good about themselves and feel that they can do something, the more likely they are to invest in learning, which directly caused increases in academic achievement (Jackson et al., 2021). The investment of time into teaching social-emotional skills does have academic benefits. This was measured by teacher input, test scores, and student grades, and emphasized the idea of

social-emotional learning is essential to school success, including academic outcomes (Dix et al., 2012).

### **Mental Health Needs in Schools**

Schools are often sanctuaries for students, especially during times of crisis, so it is critical to provide emotional support (Mariani et al., 2022). COVID-19 has provided a magnified look at the mental health needs of our youth (Townsend, 2020). School administrators have recently become concerned with addressing mental health needs as their academic impacts are noticeable (Osagiede et al, 2018). Over 50% of mental health disorders are first noticed during adolescence (Santre, 2022). During times of economic hardships, there is a tendency for increased youth mental health problems, especially suicidal ideation (Townsend, 2020). Social isolation has been linked to mental illness (Santre, 2022). Influences on adolescent mental health include bullying, family relationships, supportive friendships, and abuse (Santre, 2022), Social-emotional learning principles of social skills and self-awareness can support these influences and thus support overall mental well-being (CASEL, 2021). In addition, School Counselors are trained to support the mental health needs of students, but with the increase in the variety of mental health problems with which students currently deal, many issues are out of the comfort zone or scope of training for school counselors, leading to the need for increased mental health training and staff (Carlson & Kess, 2013). Although dramatic changes take years to occur, with the support of mental health professionals in schools and teacher intervention, student behavioral growth can be achieved (Eppler-Wolff et al., 2020).

## **Essential Domains and Features to Support the Whole Child**

### **Administrative Leadership**

The Administrative Leadership domain of the California MTSS Framework (CA Department of Education, 2021) focuses on strong and engaged site leadership that helps to create leadership teams, provide other opportunities for contribution, and includes the use of data to guide decision-making. Billingsley et al. (2014) state that it is important for administrators to set the tone for inclusive schools so that ownership of the concept is supported by the widespread school community. Administrators should also seek to create a strong educator support system that provides professional development opportunities, the use of data, and conducts strengths-based evaluations (CA Department of Education, 2021; Karge, 2023).

### **Integrated Supports**

The Integrated Supports domain focuses on the overall organizational structure and practices within the school, such as the use of non-categorical language, collaboration time for educators, and the use of instructional aides to support learning (OCDE, 2021). This also contributes to a strong and positive school culture, ensuring that the school community has a shared vision, and demonstrating culturally responsive practices (CA Department of Education, 2021). This also included identifying students who may not have access to resources and seeking ways to provide access to these students through existing programs or better utilization of support staff (OCDE, 2021). Creating a shared vision amongst stakeholders sets the tone for this work (OCDE, 2021).

### **Family and Community Engagement**

The Family and Community Engagement domain of California's MTSS Framework (OCDE, 2021) strives to engage students and families by obtaining feedback from all

stakeholders and by facilitating regular communication between the school and home. OCDE (2021) also encourages schools to provide opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities, Additionally, creating community partnerships and providing mutual benefits to both the school and the community organization (CA Department of Education, 2021). Schools can also seek to invite community partners to school events to further develop relationships (OCDE, 2021).

### **Inclusive Policy and Practice**

This domain focuses on the relationship between the school site and the Local Education Area (LEA). The goal of this domain is to create and maintain positive relationships and communication between the school and the district, with policies of the LEA reflecting data and best practices (CA Department of Education, 2021). There should be mutual communication and strong relationships between the LEA and the school that encourages continued learning and development (Choi et al., 2022). For this study, the focus was on California's MTSS Framework, specifically the Whole Child Domain, and including the Academic, Behavioral, and Social-Emotional domains.

### **Tier 1 Universal Interventions and Supports**

#### **What is a Tier 1 intervention?**

Rodriguez et al. (2016) state that Tier 1 interventions are “for all students in a school and designed to promote the prosocial behavior and academic competence of all students” (p. 94). Universal, or Tier 1 supports, should be aimed to address the needs of most students, providing high-quality education to all students (Sailor et al., 2021) and aims to provide a more positive school culture (Rodriguez et al., 2016). These supports focus on preventing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional problems with students (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Data should be



collected to determine whether Tier 1 interventions are successfully supporting the student. On average, around 80% of students will respond to these interventions (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Houri and Miller (2020) emphasize the importance of providing universal screeners, an important tool to help collect data and monitor student progress, to help identify the early behavioral and social-emotional needs of students, especially early in the student's educational career, which can be attributed to academic and overall school success. For the 20% of students who still require more support, based on universal screeners or Tier 1 intervention data, schools should implement Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, based on continuous progress monitoring (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

### **Academic Tier 1 Interventions**

#### ***Universal Design for Learning***

The MTSS Framework places a heavy emphasis on best practices for all students, using Universal Design for Learning as a way to intentionally design learning to help students combat learning barriers (Lowrey, 2017). Dickinson and Gronseth (2020) explain that in the 1990s the emergence of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), based upon neuroscience, and its principles aimed to make learning accessible for all students, especially for those with disabilities and limitations. Based on brain science, UDL focuses on the notion that there is no typical learner and there is variability in learners within a classroom (Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020). This means that instruction must be adapted to meet the needs of all learners, through engagement, multiple modes of representation, and multiple means of expression. These components fulfill the Why, What, and How of learning. Teacher design instruction to focus on specific components intentionally, to proactively support student academic needs (Cook & Rao, 2018). Engagement focuses on student motivation and how they are supported through learning new concepts or the

*why* of learning (Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020). Representation is based on the “recognition network” (Lowrey et al., 2017, p. 225) and how content is delivered to students or the *what* of learning, encompassing perception, language, comprehension, and comprehension (Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020). The *how* of learning is through Action and Expression of showing the learning that has taken place (Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020), based on the strategic part of the brain (Lowrey et al., 2017). Teachers differ on their perceptions of UDL implementation practices, ranging from believing UDL is good teaching practices to a new practice (Lowrey et al., 2017) and should find a balance between the UDL framework and the adaptation to the needs of their students (Cook & Rao, 2018).

### ***Data Collection and Universal Screeners***

The collection of data to drive instruction, both formative and summative, is essential in knowing how students are learning and which students need further intervention (Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020). Data collection, including implementation data, capacity data, diagnostic data, universal screeners, and progress monitoring data is an essential component to understanding the needs of students and the success of each intervention (Sailor et al., 2021). According to research from The National Center for Intensive Interventions (2022), universal screeners are assessments that assess a student’s abilities and areas of weakness. By identifying the problem areas, whether they be academic, behavioral, or social-emotional, the educators are then able to provide specific interventions to support the skills that the student is lacking. Without universal screeners, schools typically rely on existing outcome data such as grades, attendance, and behavior reports that often lack dimension in pinpointing areas of weakness, and the lack of validity and reliability, which universal screeners provide (Hori & Miller, 2020). These screeners must be administered and used throughout the year to measure growth and areas of weakness, which is often referred

to as progress monitoring. This information allows for insight into whether or not the student needs further intervention (Hori & Miller, 2020).

### **Behavioral Tier 1 Interventions**

Behavioral Tier 1 interventions will be modeled upon the PBIS and Supports (PBIS) framework. The Center for PBIS (2022) defines PBIS as a tiered framework aimed to improve and integrate data, school systems, and practices that impact daily student outcomes, helping create learning environments that help students succeed. Hong et al. (2018) state that PBIS utilizes a three-tiered system that encourages the use of research-based interventions to support the behavioral needs of all students. Other major components of Tier 1 practices consist of Foundational Systems, Core Practices, and Assessment.

#### ***Foundational Systems and Teams***

Foundational Systems require a strong and diverse PBIS Leadership team that meets monthly, with regular attendance by team members (Center for PBIS, 2022). The Leadership Team should be committed to creating a more positive and safe school culture and climate while using data to drive decision-making (Center for PBIS, 2022). Teams should focus not only on implementing practices but also analyzing data for future practices (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010). Training new staff is also an essential practice of the Tier 1 Leadership Team (Scheuermann & Nelson, 2019; Center for PBIS, 2022).

#### ***Core Practices***

Core practices consist of teaching three to five school-wide behavior expectations (James et al., 2019), establishing school-wide routines and expectations, and including procedures for responding to undesired behaviors (Center for PBIS, 2022). Bradshaw (2013) writes that expectations are coupled with an incentive system to support the reinforcement of those expected

behaviors. These supports aim to create a preventative approach to common behavioral problems and create an increase in positive adult interactions for students. A common system for intervening in problem behaviors and how behaviors are monitored typically is accomplished through office discipline referrals. It is also imperative that a school-based leadership team is developed to monitor, analyze, and address school-wide behavioral problems regularly (Hong, et al., 2018). An example of a PBIS Behavior Matrix (2022) shows five school-wide behavior expectations, from the Center for PBIS (Figure 2.5).

### ***Assessment***

Assessment for the fidelity of implementation, or how accurately the intervention is implemented should be measured at least twice a year (Center for PBIS, 2022). One common tool for assessment is the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), which measures the extent of interventions and supports being implemented at each tier and is taken by the PBIS leadership team (Sheuermann & Nelson, 2019). Rodriguez et al. (2016) question the evaluation process for these interventions, and how those providing the intervention feel about the intervention have impacts of the success of the intervention. A survey was conducted by school-based support staff, such as counselors and psychologists, to help identify feedback on commonly used Tier 2 interventions. There was significant variability in student outcomes, depending on the curriculum used and how success was measured (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

## **Social-Emotional and Mental Health Tier 1 Interventions**

### ***Relationships and Mental Health Support***


Teacher-Student relationships may be the most important and influential factor in academic success (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004, cited by Eppler-Wolff et al., 2020) since students feel safer taking academic risks when they feel supported. O'Brien and Roberts (2019) found

that the stronger the relationship a student has with an educator, the less likely it is that the student will have disciplinary problems. Eppler-Wolfe et al. (2020) share that even small changes, such as taking the time to pay attention to behavior and trying to understand, can result in significant behavioral changes.

**Figure 2.5**

*Sample Behavior Matrix*

***Remember! The Golden Hawk says, "Be Respectful! Be Responsible! Be Safe!"***

<b>CLEMENTE PBIS EXPECTATIONS MATRIX</b>							
 <b>Respect</b>	<b>Classroom</b>	<b>Cafeteria</b>	<b>Bathrooms</b>	<b>Hallways</b>	<b>Buses</b>	<b>Computer Lab/Library</b>	<b>School Grounds</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow directions</li> <li>Raise your hand</li> <li>Use appropriate language</li> <li>Use an appropriate tone</li> <li>Keep your hands &amp; feet to yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow directions</li> <li>Listen to adults</li> <li>Exhibit good table manners</li> <li>Keep food on your plate or in your mouth</li> <li>Keep food in cafeteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect the privacy of others</li> <li>Keep the facilities clean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep hands &amp; feet to yourself</li> <li>Observe personal space</li> <li>Listen to adults in hallway</li> <li>Use your quiet inside voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow directions</li> <li>Wait in line</li> <li>Listen to the bus driver</li> <li>Share seats</li> <li>Use appropriate language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow directions</li> <li>Use your quiet inside voice</li> <li>Raise your hand to be recognized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow adult directions</li> <li>Use appropriate language</li> <li>Obey fire drill procedures</li> </ul>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ active listening</li> <li>Participate actively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay in designated area</li> <li>Clean up your eating area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do your business &amp; leave</li> <li>Flush the toilet</li> <li>Throw trash in appropriate receptacles</li> <li>Wash hands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry a valid hall pass</li> <li>Go straight to your destination</li> <li>Use your own locker</li> <li>Pick up litter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay seated while the bus is moving</li> <li>Keep your body and belongings inside the bus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow media center and computer lab rules</li> <li>Use equipment correctly</li> <li>Access only appropriate websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dispose of trash in appropriate receptacles</li> <li>Use equipment correctly</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep your hands &amp; feet to yourself</li> <li>Remain in assigned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wait in line for your turn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report problems, vandalism, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walk on the right</li> <li>Wear appropriate shoes at all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enter and exit in an orderly fashion</li> <li>Stay in your seat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enter and exit in orderly fashion</li> <li>Stay in your seat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use equipment correctly</li> <li>Keep your hands &amp; feet</li> </ul>

. Supporting school overall mental health needs and social-emotional learning should focus on a supported and informed staff, the role of the teacher, an environment that allows students to feel safe, coherence of school culture, relationship building, a thorough communication system, and transition planning (O'Brien & Roberts, 2019; CASEL, 2021). One study (Anyon et al., 2018) found that when staff makes efforts to build strong relationships with students and understand the student's strengths, coping styles, and areas of weakness, it provides

better insight into how to handle behavioral problems. Providing frequent social-emotional learning opportunities and supporting the building and maintaining of these relationships through targeted skills building and practice (CASEL, 2021).

### ***Trauma-Informed Practices***

Trauma-informed practices are inclusive practices that support behaviors related to childhood trauma (Berger & Martin, 2021). This is associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), which are events in a child's life that can disrupt their social-emotional development such as interpersonal trauma and abuse (Robertson et al., 2021). Parker et al. (2020) share that this ranges from household disruption, physical abuse, sexual abuse or community/school violence. Using trauma-informed practices can support increased academic success and engagement (Berger, 2019 cited by Berger & Martin, 2021) by building better student relationships (Robertson et al., 2021). This helps educators better understand students, but also better understand their own trauma and prejudices that can influence practices (Robertson et al., 2021).

The trauma-informed practice involves:

- (a) recognizing the impact of traumatic events on the functioning of clients and that their symptoms serve as attempts at coping; (b) viewing recovery from trauma as a primary treatment goal; (c) utilizing an empowerment model; (d) maximizing client control over their recovery; (e) relying on relational collaboration; (f) creating an atmosphere of safety, respect, and acceptance; (g) focusing on adaptation over symptoms and resilience over pathology; (h) seeking to minimize the potential for re-traumatization; (i) conceptualizing clients' life experiences in a cultural context; and (j) soliciting client

input and involving clients in the design and evaluation of services (Elliot et al., 2005, cited by Alessi & Kahn, 2019).

### **CASEL SEL Framework**

The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a framework to teach SEL competencies to students to apply appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to maintain a supportive relationship, show care for others, achieve goals, regulate emotions, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2021, cited by Mariani, 2022). Teachers and school staff are expected to create a “safe emotional environment” (Ciotta and Gagno, 2018, p, 27). When students can feel safe, they are more likely to practice and embrace these skills, leading to greater success in school, both socially and academically. Ciotta and Gagno (2018) note that these skills are easily practiced through physical education classes, where students are inherently tasked with working in groups and pushing themselves physically. Students are continually exposed to situations where they can positively interact with peers through play, which can lead to new opportunities to learn and practice social-emotional learning competencies in real-life situations. The CASEL Framework for Social Emotional Learning includes the various settings in which students learn social-emotional skills, as well as the five Core Competencies for Social Emotional Learning (Figure 2.6)..

**Self-Management Skills.** The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021) defines Self-Management as being able to effectively manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in various situations to reach one’s goals. Specific skills within this category include managing emotions, identifying, and using stress-management strategies, exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation, setting goals, planning and

organizational skills, initiating skills, and demonstrating personal and collective agency (CASEL, 2021).

**Figure 2.6**

*CASEL's Framework Wheel*



Self-Management can also include having the ability to control your own thoughts and emotions (Ciotta & Gagno, 2018). This is an important skill needed for success in life, both inside and outside of the classroom. Self-Management helps students regulate their emotions and discover ways to self-soothe in a positive and effective manner (CASEL, 2021). Ciotta & Gagno (2018) go on to suggest that self-management also includes managing stress levels and managing goals, which is emphasized in Physical Education classes. Team sports activities conducted in most Physical Education classes are the ideal setting to explore feelings of success and disappointment in a safe and supportive environment since mental and emotional wellness is essential to success



in school. Working in teams is something that will be continued through post-secondary education and in the workplace (Ciotta & Cagno, 2018). Mastering the skill of setting goals, planning, and staying organized has great impacts on academic success and performance (CASEL, 2021). When students can keep track of assignments, make time for studying, and work towards goals, this makes learning easier and more fun, making it something students will desire to work towards and in turn, accomplish more than peers that do not have these skills (CASEL, 2021).

**Self-Awareness Skills.** The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2021) defines Self-Awareness skills as “the ability to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts” (p. ) which is divided into multiple traits, including Self-efficacy, having a growth mindset, demonstrating honesty and integrity, and identifying personal assets. These skills must be explicitly taught and practiced within schools. In their research by Ciotta and Gagno (2018) explain that self-awareness skills are taught through Physical Education classes, as they allow students to problem-solve and explore through sensory movement and unique expression. Working in teams during Physical Education classes allows students to express their unique attributes to make the team well-rounded.

**Social Awareness Skills.** Social Awareness is a collection of behaviors that emphasizes the ability to empathize and understand others' views, especially those of people who are from different backgrounds and cultures and within various settings (CASEL, 2021). This includes “empathizing with others, understanding social and ethical behavioral norms, and recognizing available resources and supports” (Green et al., 2021, p. 1057), along with understanding different perspectives, showing compassion for others, expressing and having gratitude for

others, identifying social norms, and understanding the impacts of an organization on others (CASEL, 2021).

**Relationship Skills.** Researchers Ciotta and Gagno (2018) discuss relationship skills, which “include the ability to communicate clearly, cooperate, actively listen, avoid inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict, and seek and/or offer help when necessary” (p. 30). There are many opportunities to practice these skills within the classroom, especially through physical education classes (Ciotta & Gagno, 2018), but an emphasis should also be placed on maintaining healthy relationships (Payton et al., 2000).

**Responsible Decision-Making Skills.** Many students struggle with making decisions that are beneficial to themselves and the world around them. CASEL (2021) defines Responsible Decision Making as the ability to caring and constructive choices about social and personal interaction within various settings, especially in the school setting. Within the learning of these skills, an emphasis is placed on making ethical and moral decisions, along with making safe and healthy choices (CASEL, 2021). This includes the ability to evaluate the choices that are made and a reflection on the implications of these decisions on personal and community well-being, including problem solving skills (Payton et al., 2000).

**Second Step Curriculum.** Most current SEL programs provide classroom-based lessons and allow students to practice skills within the classroom setting. Some schools also implement school-wide practices to incorporate classroom lessons into daily life outside the classroom, which helps to promote the idea of active learning. To be effective, these practices must be integrated into all learning environments (Durlak, et al., 2011). To support social-emotional learning among students, direct instruction and integrated instruction is ideal (Hong et al., 2018). Second Step is a widely used curriculum for explicit teaching social-emotional learning, that

includes highly interactive lessons that focus on the core competencies of Social-Emotional Learning, including instruction on relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, social awareness, and self-management skills to teach students important skills to build better social interactions (Hong et al., 2018). Second Step is grade level specific SEL curriculum that consists of interactive lessons that force students to problem-solving skills, helping to increase social skills and teach emotional awareness and regulation (Belfield et al., 2015). Second Step provides opportunities for class discussion and reflection upon these skills and an emphasis on bully prevention and school safety. Social-Emotional skills are arguably more important than academic and behavioral instruction, as these skills support the daily struggles of the majority of students (Hong et al., 2018).

## **Tier 2 Supplemental Interventions and Supports**

### **What is a Tier 2 Intervention?**

Research by Rodriguez et al. (2016) reveals that Tier 2 interventions are those directed to groups of students that do not respond to Tier 1 interventions previously delivered and are targeted interventions to support deficits (Karge, 2023). These interventions should be research-based and administered promptly and with fidelity. “Tier 2 interventions should include the following supports: teaching, prompts, practice opportunities, frequent opportunities for feedback, fading procedures, and regular parent communication” (Rodriguez et al., 2016, p. 95). For best results, Tier 2 interventions should include teaching the expected behavior, teacher prompts to carry out the expected behavior, including frequent feedback to the student to reinforce the behavior or to help guide the student to the expected behavior. Another essential feature of Tier 2 support is frequent parent communication about the student’s progress (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). The researchers Drevon et al. (2018) share that Tier 2 interventions are crucial in preventing

significant behavioral problems in the future. These interventions should align with school-wide expectations, consist of observing behavior performance, providing explicit instruction, and providing students with the continual opportunity to practice expected behaviors and new behavioral skills that have been taught. This should account for about 15% of the population, which is intended for students that are not responsive to Tier 1 Universal Supports (Drevon et al., 2018). Students should move through each tier as needed, based on progress monitoring and meeting benchmark standards (Rodriguez et al., 2019)

## **Academic Tier 2 Intervention**

### ***Small Group Instruction.***

Teachers face the task of supporting academic growth in students of all levels, which can be accomplished through small-group instruction (Ardasheva, et al., 2019). Small group instruction focuses on a specific skill, in which students demonstrate deficits and should be formed based on level of ability and mastery of concepts (Ardasheva, et al., 2019). This type of differentiation of instruction should be used for any struggling student, regardless of language proficiency, special education need, or content area (Ardasheva et al., 2019). Velez et al. (2021) state that small-group instruction can have more significant impacts on student behavior than one on one support. Small group instruction offers teachers an opportunity to work directly with a small group of students who are displaying academic struggles (Ardasheva, et al., 2019). The use of instructional support, such as para-educators, can be an effective way to support Small Group Instruction (Karge, 2023). This type of instruction can also support behavioral problems, allowing the teacher to provide positive reinforcement to expected student behavior and allowing the student to model appropriate behavior for their peers (Velez et al., 2021). Small Group

Instruction is meant to be a quick and effective way to re-teach concepts or build remedial skills to support student growth (Ardasheva, et al., 2019).

## **Behavioral Tier 2 Interventions**

### ***Check-In, Check Out.***

A common Tier 2 intervention is check-in check-out, in which school-wide or Tier 1 interventions can be reinforced through daily checks with designated school personnel (Rodriguez et al., 2019). This intervention can effectively reach a group of students in a short amount of time if the school has the means to provide the staffing needed to successfully implement. Drevon et al. (2018), state that CICO is widely used in school and was first used to support “behavior difficulties maintained by adult attention” (p. 394) and has become a widely used intervention to support all types of problem behaviors. CICO consists of students checking in with a mentor each morning when they arrive at school (Drevon et al., 2018). Daily point sheets solicit feedback from teachers regarding behavioral goals. At the end of the day, students are to return the point sheet to a certain room (Myer et al., 2010), and the student’s unique behavioral goals of the day are reviewed (Drevon et al., 2018). This also includes the student taking the DPR home for parents the review. The process is then repeated the next day and subsequent days (Drevon, et al., 2018). The student would gradually transition to self-monitoring and self-*check-out* at the end of each day. If the goal is met, students earns a ticket (Myer et al., 2010).

Mye et al. (2010) provide 10 suggestions for implementing targeted behavioral interventions. These suggestions are:

1. Maintain consistency with staff.
2. Ensure that the intervention remains a high priority in the school.

3. Assign responsibilities judiciously and follow through.
4. Have an organized, efficient system for collecting and synthesizing data.
5. Use resources wisely.
6. Have a plan for students who self-select.
7. Have a plan for students who do not respond to the intervention.
8. Intervene at the first sign of participant drift.
9. Beware the students who hoard tokens.
10. Be flexible.

Bradshaw (2013) writes that bullying is often described as a form of ill treatment of peers in school aged students. PBIS is a great way to combat bullying, as well as other behavioral problems. PBIS promotes continuous and ongoing data collection, which is conducive to addressing bullying in schools. The study showed that peer mediation or other approaches that are student-led proved not to be effective. However, research-based practices such as CICO proved to have the best impact on reducing bullying (Bradshaw, 2013).

### ***Mentoring Program***

Austin et al. (2020) define mentoring as a caring relationship between a young person and an older person, in which the younger person is encouraged and provided with guidance. Mentoring relationships focus on the interpersonal relationships formed, relying on mutual trust (Keller & DuBois, 2021). Formal mentoring, typically community-based mentoring, has been proven to improve behavioral problems in youth (Austin et al., 2020). Within a school setting, this may have the administration assign a staff member to a student who needs additional support, typically when the student has exhibited a pattern of behavioral or social-emotional issues that are heavily impacting academic performance (Austin et al., 2020). These relationships

aim to improve social and cognitive skills (Keller & DuBois, 2021). Austin et al. (2020) also note that participating in recreational activities can help build positive community relationships as well as contribute to the continuum of building a strong mentor and mentee relationship. Although dedicating sufficient time to fostering mentor relationships proves to be the biggest hurdle (Garcia et al., 2021), such structured opportunities for connecting will result in a greater probability of the mentee seeking assistance from the mentor when faced with challenges (Austin et al., 2020). According to Garcia et al., (2021), the most important aspect of a mentoring program, to yield progress towards the goal, appears to be the interpersonal relationship between the mentor and mentee. Many mentor-mentee relationships continue after the allotted period, thus creating a long-term intervention (Austin et al., 2020).

## **Social-Emotional Tier 2 Interventions**

### ***Social Skills Building Groups***

Social skills groups' effective Tier 2 interventions are often used to support specific skill-building needed for several students (Rodriguez et al., 2019). This can refer to a plethora of things that focus on modifying behavior and providing instruction in a small group setting (Jonsson et al., 2019). According to the American School Counseling Association (2019), group counseling involves gathering several students, with the same type of academic, career, or social-emotional need, to provide support effectively and efficiently. School counselors are trained to provide skills-building group support to help students overcome obstacles to academic success and achievement (ASCA, 2019). Students can attain important skills in learning to manage problems and develop alternative skills to promote growth, especially in the areas of social skills and mental health (ASCA, 2019), and when practiced frequently these skills will become natural (Jonsson et al., 2019). By providing targeted intervention on a particular social-emotional

learning skill, schools can build better coping skills for students and create more resilience (Rodriguez et al., 2019). School counselors do not provide ongoing therapy for deeper-rooted problems, but social skill-building groups can be extremely beneficial in addressing a lack of social skills that contribute to a student's day-to-day educational success (ASCA, 2019).

### **Tier 3 Intensified Supports and Interventions**

When both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions have been implemented with fidelity and the student is not making progress, Hunley & McNamara (2010) state the next step in the MTSS framework is to conduct an in-depth assessment of the student and all factors that may contribute to the student's lack of progress. Students should be further monitored by using the case study model, studying and examining all interventions and contributing factors. Tier 3 supports typically are provided for students who are missing the foundational skills needed to attain academic success (Karge, 2023). Once this information is collected, teams should implement evidence-based interventions that are tailored toward the student (Hunley & McNamara, 2010). For many students, this is done through a Study Student Team (SST) or Student Intervention Team (SIT). Several Tier 2 interventions can be argued as Tier 3 interventions if they are intensified or individualized for a particular student, rather than a group. An example would be individualizing a behavior contract to meet the needs of a particular student, for a particular area of intervention in which a Tier 2 intervention has not been effective in mitigating the problem behavior (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Tier 3 interventions follow three major parts. First is the gathering of data from previous interventions in Tier 1 and Tier 2 that show no progress or inadequate progress (Hunley & McNamara, 2010). This also includes examining the effectiveness and implementation of previous interventions. Next, a deep dive into assessment is done to narrow down the skill that is



lacking and to develop applicable and appropriate individualized goals for the student. Finally, a functional assessment is conducted to determine whether there are external factors that are contributing to the student's lack of progress (Hunley & McNamara, 2010). This can be conducted informally, without looking toward special education.

### **MTSS and Special Education**

Once a student's problem is noticed, the student is often referred to the study team, with the teacher hoping for special education evaluation. It is important to implement Tier 3 interventions before looking into special education assessment, as they emphasize collecting and tracking data to measure progress on interventions (Hunley & McNamara, 2010). It is not until Tier 3, when individualized supports do not work for six months or more that a student should be referred for a special education evaluation (Karge, 2023). Barrett & Newman (2018) found that when the MTSS model is implemented, there was a gradual decline in special education referrals over a course of a six-year case study. If this step is missed, it often leads to the continuation of overidentification, or disproportionally placing students into in Special Education programs (Hunley & McNamara, 2010).

The MTSS framework is truly meant to support ALL learners, general education students as well as those who have previously been identified as needing special education services (OCDE, 2022). As schools move towards the MTSS framework, traditional special education practices take a back seat to allow for inclusive practice to be at the forefront of instructional strategies (Morgan, 2016). Generally, best practices around inclusion consist of genuine, often informal, collaboration between special educators and general educators (Morgan, 2016). Co-teaching is a common practice amongst schools, which involves two teachers delivering content to a diverse group of learners , within one physical setting (Strogilos & King, 2019). Keeping in

mind that students with disabilities are general education students first (OCDE, 2022), students with disabilities should have access to all supports within the MTSS framework. Equity based inclusive provides students with engagement opportunities, while using data to monitor progress (Sailor et al., 2021). Inclusive practices have supported students with disabilities to be placed in the least restrictive environment, while still getting their unique needs met (Sailor et al., 2021)

### **The Disproportionality of Special Education Services**

#### **Disproportionality and Discipline.**

Historically, most students with disabilities experience disciplinary consequences that result in them being excluded from their peers, activity, or another educational setting/event. Research by Gradsely-Boy et al. (2019) has shown that disciplinary exclusion, while expected to curb behavioral infractions, leads to decreased school engagement and academic achievement. Exclusionary practices, such as suspension, do not prove to have lasting effects to curb future disciplinary infractions and can increase the probability of future imprisonment (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Christle, Jolivett, & Nelson, 2005, as cited by Brown & Tillio, 2013). Gradsely-Boy et al. (2019) recommend that what proves to be effective in reducing disciplinary problems (is tiered levels of intervention that focus on prevention and early intervention. PBIS involves evidence-based practices that promote support that is geared toward the prevention of behavioral problems.

One study (Zakeszeki et al., 2021) examined 27 schools with over 15,000 students and focused on Tier 1 supports over a 3-year period of time. This study focused on high-fidelity interventions, explicit behavioral instruction, and support for teachers, increasing pro-social behaviors and narrowing the disproportions. Results indicate that Black and Latino males had the highest number of reported disciplinary infractions, whether the student had an IEP or not.

African American students tend to be over-referred for major disciplinary consequences, for minor infractions, compared to white students (Brown & Tillo, 2013). Zakeszki et al. (2021) show that the biggest factors in behavioral consequences are gender and race, indicating that interventions should be tailored to support these specific populations, as the research shows that Black and Latinos will require early and targeted interventions to support behavior, as opposed to white male or female students. African American students are disproportionately removed from the learning environment as punishment (Brown & Tillo, 2013). A study by Booker and Mitchell (2011), showed Latino students were 12 times more likely than their White peers to be removed from comprehensive schools and placed in alternative educational settings, due to disciplinary problems.. Interventions should also adapt to the growing needs of all students, considering ethnic and cultural factors, allowing for frequent movement through various levels of support, collecting data to measure progress, and helping drive the decision-making process (Zakeszki et al., 2019).

### **Disproportionality and Special Education**

Although there have been great strides made for students with special needs in regular schools over the last several years, there is much argument that those initiatives are not helping students (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Stigmas surrounding special education and youth can negatively impact student self-esteem and ability to succeed (Shifrer, 2013). Some argue that expectations have been lowered for students with special needs, thus inhibiting students from higher achievement (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Educators must be cognizant of not only under-identifying students who may require special education, which is often emphasized with RTI but also overidentifying students who do not need special education (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Not only is disproportionate identification a problem, but disproportionate

placement in special education or in more restrictive environments must also be considered (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012).

There is often a connotation of ethnic groups disproportionately being represented within special education (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). In America, students of color, particularly African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos receive more special education services than other ethnic groups (Cooc & Kiru, 2018). A study by Shifrer (2018) showed that black and Hispanic males are disproportionately identified as having a learning disability in comparison to female students and those of other ethnic backgrounds. The United States Department of Education clarifies that Learning Disabilities should be confused with learning difficulties that can be correlated to cultural, language, or socio-economic factors (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Learning disabilities are neurological differences, in contrast to learning problems or difficulties that are usually impacted by the environment (Ho, 2004). Historically, underserved ethnic groups have great percentages of students receiving special educational services (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Some would argue that of the thirteen qualifying conditions for Special Education services, under the federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, eight of the categories have subjective qualifying characteristics and are the most common (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Some disabilities have clear external indicators, but the Specific Learning Disability lacks obvious markers (Coughlin, 1997). This ambiguity allows for overrepresentation but can be combatted by strengthening general education early interventions.

Students who are English Learners or Foreign students, typically are underrepresented in special education and it is difficult to determine whether growth is not occurring due to a language acquisition problem or a true learning disability (Cooc & Kiru, 2018). Additionally,

male students tend to be identified as needing special education services. Although Special Education services are meant to help students, it may hinder certain groups of students, when students are inaccurately identified as having a learning disability (Skiba et al., 2008).

Changes in student outcomes will not occur unless there is a change in the instructional practices, including the implementation of new practices and the evaluation of these practices (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012). Over the years there have been many federal initiatives to combat closing the achievement gap, by attempting to provide support to ameliorate environmental factors and provide specialized training (McDermott et al., 2006). Much of the recent research shows that creating a system for supporting students through multi-levels of support can help to identify and address student needs, while potentially decreasing the need for individualized interventions and supports, particularly special education services, when not appropriate (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012).

To attempt to close the achievement gap for marginalized students, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states that “the educational needs of low achieving children in our Nation’s highest poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children” (No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 2002, p. 1440). This forced schools to look towards alternative means to address struggling students. Many districts struggled to meet the expectations, due to unrealistic expectations. NCLB was soon updated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which seemed to place more emphasis on state and local educational agencies. Both initiatives pushed annual assessments and high-quality educators. However, money allocated was left to the states to determine the needs of the students and how to close the achievement gap (Brenner, 2016). The ESSA also encouraged school-wide support, in a tiered manner, for all students (Bohanon, et

al., 2021). ESSA particularly points out the importance of tiered levels of support in the areas of academics, behavior, and social-emotional support. Much research has been conducted on MTSS at the elementary level, showing great success, but little research is focused on secondary levels of education and the impacts of such systems (Bohanon, et al., 2021).

### **Summary**

This literature review indicates that there may be a significant correlation between over-identification and a strong multi-tiered intervention system in schools. Historically, there have been several ways schools have attempted to tackle the challenges of struggling students. First came RTI, then PBIS, then RTI<sup>2</sup>, and currently, we have MTSS. MTSS aims to align both academic and behavioral supports, along with the additional of social-emotional and mental needs into a streamlined, tiered pyramid of supports. This system is founded upon first, best instructional practices to support the major of learners, relying heavily upon data to drive decision-making. Since we know that there is a disproportionate representation of certain ethnic groups and male students receiving special education services, it is important to examine the appropriateness of identification and placement.

There appears to be a gap in research when examining how these interventions and supports impact middle schoolers, in particular. Much of the research focused on elementary-aged students and not the unique needs of middle school adolescents or the impacts of interventions in the secondary educational setting. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the impacts of an MTSS framework on at-risk middle school students at a suburban middle school and it's impacts on disproportionality. At this stage in the research, the concept of disproportionality will be generally defined as the unnecessary and inappropriate qualification for special education services. This dissertation aims to explore the impacts of early intervention

strategies, using the MTSS framework, has on at-risk students and how this impacts disproportionality within special education.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design and Rationale**

A Convergent Parallel Design was used in this study. According to Decuir-Gunby and Schutz (2016), this research design features qualitative and quantitative data collected simultaneously. Each type of data is meant to support the other, with analysis occurring after all data collection has been conducted. At this time, the researcher integrated the sets of data to form pertinent conclusions as a result. In this mixed methods study, both qualitative and quantitative data were essential to answer the research questions and were studied together.

### **Setting and Participants**

For this study, Tier 1, school-wide data for Academic, Behavioral, and Social Emotional Interventions was measured for all students, approximately 1,100 at a suburban middle school in Orange County, CA. According to the California School Dashboard (2022), 49.7% of students at this school are socio-economically disadvantaged, 12.3% are English Language Learners, 14.6% of students have disabilities, and 70.3 % of students are Hispanic. At this school, Tier 1 interventions consisted of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Instructional Strategies, School-wide Positive Behavioral Expectations, and Acknowledgement System, along with a school-wide focus on direct instruction in Social Emotional Core Competencies and a focus on relationship building, through the Dots activity. A detailed description of these interventions is described in Chapter 4. The participants in this study were at-risk Middle Schoolers who, through Tier 1 assessment data analysis, showed a need for further intervention, due to a lack of growth. Each Tier 2 intervention had a different number of participants, based on student needs. Friday School, an academic intervention, is a weekly intervention for one hundred 8th-grade students who are in jeopardy of not promoting from Middle School. The Behavioral Intervention consisted of 15



students placed in a Behavioral Intervention class, meeting three times a week, with daily support from a teacher and weekly support from the counseling department. Twelve students were receiving small group Social and Emotional Support, in the form of lunchtime, small group counseling. Roughly 70 staff members, consisting of teachers, counselors, psychologists, and administrators, were asked to provide feedback on student outcomes and perceptions of interventions through Likert Scale surveys. This survey will ask participants if they would like to participate in a focus group. From the results, nine educators were chosen for a focus group to get an in-depth account of perceptions of interventions and the intervention process. Observations on the implementation of three Tier 2 interventions were conducted with three different interventionists. Counseling team interviews, with one counselor, one counseling intern, and one counseling department support staff were conducted by an interviewer that is not the researcher, to avoid biases.

### **Sampling Procedures**

This study utilized nesting sampling (Decuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016), which identifies a subset of a larger population to examine their experiences further. In this case, overall, school-wide quantitative and qualitative data was collected when examining Tier 1 supports. Additionally, Tier 2 data was collected and analyzed, using a small sample of students who require targeted interventions. Convenience sampling was used for secondary data from Tier 1 and Tier 2 data already available through the researcher's current job, which the researcher was able to easily access. Additionally, data was collected from teachers and other educators which was also easily accessible to the researcher.

## **Instrumentation and Measures**

This mixed-methods study consisted of qualitative and quantitative instruments to answer the research questions. The qualitative instruments used in this study were a focus group, observations, and a structured interview, using questions created by the researcher. The quantitative instrument used in the study was a Likert scale survey. Secondary quantitative data consisted of grade reports, discipline data, fidelity integrity assessment, counseling office data, school-wide implementation tools, and child find data.

### **Staff survey**

Likert scale surveys were given to classroom teachers to measure student outcomes and perception data for students receiving Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions (Appendix A).

General questions of the Likert scale surveys consisted of:

1. Attitudes of the impact of the intervention
2. Perceptions on Special Education referrals

### **Staff Dots activity data**

This data was collected as secondary data to measure school-wide school emotional interventions. This measured the number of students with whom staff members have made personal connections, such as knowing something about their home life, things they do outside of school, etc. This data was collected and analyzed in the Fall of the 2022-2023 School Year.

The collected data consisted of the number of students for whom staff members expressed having a personal connection with and knowledge of personal information over the course of a school year by grade level (Table 3.1). A detailed description of the Dots activity can be found in Chapter 4.

**Table 3.1***Dots Activity Total Number of Students by Number of Dots*

Number of students with...	Fall 2022
Zero Dots	388
1 Dot	360
2 Dots	163
3 Dots	91
4 Dots	44
5 Dots	18
6 or more	13

The collected data consisted of the number of students for whom staff members expressed having a personal connection with and knowledge of personal information over the course of a school year also included year by grade level (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2***Dots Activity, Total Number of Students by Number of Dots and Grade Fall 2022*

Number of students with...	7th graders	8th graders
Zero Dots	257	127
1 Dot	157	200
2 Dots	50	112
3 Dots	21	68
4 Dots	8	36
5 Dots	4	14
6 or more	4	9

**Grade Reports**

Report cards were analyzed each reporting period, or every 6 weeks, to determine the academic impacts of various interventions.

**Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)**

Discipline Reports, including documentation of students who have been sent to the Administration for disciplinary action (office discipline referrals or ODRs), were pulled for each grading period. Minor Discipline Referrals consist of minor behavioral offenses that are managed by teachers within the classroom or by the office and are non-suspendable offenses. Major Discipline referrals are more severe behavioral infractions, often leading to suspension

from class, school, or removal from the school, per the California Educational Code. Aggregated data for ODRs within 12 weeks was recorded (Table 3.3 and Table 3.4).

**Table 3.3**

*Types of Discipline Referrals*

	Major Discipline Referrals	Minor Discipline Referrals
Number of incidents Weeks 1-12 of the 2021-2022 School Year	23	473

**Table 3.4**

*Type of Discipline Infractions*

Type of Infraction	Number of incidents between Week 1-12 of the 2021-2022 School Year
AA - Excessive Absences	9
AD - Excessive Tardiness	63
AE - Student Is Truant	7
AF - Lockout Infraction	1
AG - LV Class w/o Permission	1
AI - Off Limits w/o Permission	1
AN - Excessing Abs/Tardy Ltr	0
AO - First Truancy Letter	0
AJ - No Show to Sarb	2
AK - No Show to DA Meeting	2
AT - Truancy Intervention	14

DA - Class Disruption	24
DB - Campus Disruption	37
DD - Repeated-Def/Disruption	13
DK - Computer/Internet Misuse	5
FG - Gang Related	1
FT - Fighting	3
IC - Minor Misbehavior	6
ID - No Classroom Materials	3
IE - Dress/Uniform Violation	34
IG - Profanity	2
IH - Profanity to An Adult	2
II - Intensive Intervention	0
IL - Pornography	1
MA - Fail to Comply W/Consequences	4
OB - Info Logged in Computer	54
OE - Information form Cwa	2
OJ - Gum	0
OK - Radio/Electronic Devices/Cell Phones	177
TS - Teasing	4
VP - Vaping	1
01 - Disruption, Defiance	3
05 - Possession of a Knife or Dangerous Object	1
09 - Possession of a Controlled Substance	0
10 - Possession, Use, Sale, or Furnishing of a Controlled Substance, Alcohol. Intoxication	2

11 - Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating the Sale of Controlled Substances, alcohol, Intoxicants	0
18 - Caused Physical Injury	1
19 - Caused, Attempted, or Threatened Physical injury	7
21 - Committed Assault or Battery on a School Employee	0
22 - Used Force or Violence	3
24 - Harassment or Intimidation of a Witness	1
28 - Obscene Acts, Profanity, and Vulgarities	1
29 - Property Damage	1
31 - Bullying on the basis of Race, Color, or Origin	3
35 - Property Theft	0

---

### **Counseling Center Attendance**

The researcher also collected data on the number of students who visit the Counseling Center within 6 weeks, as well as the frequency of attendance for each student,. detail information on the attendance data for the Counseling Center. (Tables 3.5 and Table 3.6).

**Table 3.5***Purpose of Counseling Center Visit*

	See a Counselor	Take a break
Number of incidents before Week 1	111	44
Number of incidents Week 1-6	48	18

**Table 3.6***Type of Student Concern*

Concern	Week 7-12	Week 13-18
Grades	5	5
Schedule Change	18	19
Class/Teacher Issue	2	2
Anxiety	3	4
Stress	8	1
Feeling Sad	2	2
Issue with friend	5	1
Report a Concern	2	3
High School Planning	0	0
College/Career	0	1



## Counseling Group Data

Small Group Counseling data served as Tier 2 social-emotional intervention implementation data and was collected using an implementation observation form. Additionally, student pre-post counseling survey data was assessed to determine student outcome data. The average score for each survey question, before and after the intervention, was recorded (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7**

### *Friendship Group Survey*

Questions
I think it is important to make new friends and keep the ones that I have
I know what a healthy friendship looks like
I like the person I am
I feel comfortable starting conversations with new people
I have people that I can talk to when I'm having a hard time
I know how to start talking with a new person
I know how to be a good friend

## Child Find Data

Information about the number of students referred for a Student Study Team Meeting and initial assessment for Special Education, including the number of students who initially qualify

for Special Education services, was analyzed for baseline data purposes consisting of Child Find data for the 2021-2022 School Year, before interventions. (Table 3.80)

**Table 3.8**

*Child Find Data for the 2021-2022 School Year*

2021-2022 School Year	
Number of Students Referred for a Student Study Team Meeting	10
Number of Students Referred for an Initial assessment for Section 504	3
Number of Students Referred for an Initial assessment for Special Education	2
Number of students who qualified for an Initial Section 504 Plan	3
Number of students who qualified for an Initial IEP	1
Number of students were not assessed and had improvements with Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions	5

### **Observations**

This included intervention and interventionist observations, using a researcher-created observation form. Data was collected on the effective implementation of the observed intervention by observing the interventionist's behaviors and strategies. The observation form was used to assess the fidelity of the implementation of the intervention (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1***Intervention Observation Form*

**Effective Intervention Implementation Direct Observation Fidelity Checklist**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Interventionist: \_\_\_\_\_

Intervention Observed: \_\_\_\_\_ Focus of Instruction: \_\_\_\_\_

Group size: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Mark ☒ for each item on the list below

	+ Observed	- Not Observed
<b>Intervention begins and ends of time.</b> Instruction should begin as soon as students enter the classroom and continue for the entire intervention block		
<b>Interventionist is prepared and responsive to interventionist-directed instruction.</b> Students are attentive, responsive, participate, and can state the learning activity and goal. Students perform all tasks assigned by the teacher.		
<b>Interventionist delivers accurate instruction.</b> The interventionist instructs in the area of deficit for the group of students and follows protocol with fidelity.		
<b>Interventionist gives corrective feedback immediately.</b> The interventionist provides feedback to students immediately and conferences with students in order to track their progress and make adjustments to learning goals by reteaching or affirming.		
<b>Interventionist provides specific praise throughout the lesson (rate 4:1)</b> The interventionist provides verbal and nonverbal praise and encouragement to all students motivating them to reach their goals. Successes are celebrated as students increase mastery of skills or benchmarks.		
<b>Interventionist delivers the lesson at a steady pace.</b> The interventionist delivers the lessons at a pace that engages students and follows the length of time the protocol recommends for each lesson or activity.		
<b>Interventionist presents evidence progress monitoring is occurring.</b> (every 10 days for Tier 2 or weekly for Tier 3) The interventionist provides progress monitoring data in graphical form to instructional leaders and problem-solving teams as requested.		

Total number of +/8= \_\_\_\_\_ % Total Effective Instruction Fidelity

NOTES: Please provide feedback on all items that were "Not Observed."

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Observer's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Groups**

For this study, a focus group of nine educators was conducted to gain qualitative data on educator perceptions of student support and special education referral process. Educators were asked, through a Likert Scale Survey?, if they are willing to participate in a focus group. From those that indicated they would be interested in participating, the focus group consisted of four general education teachers who teach various subject areas, two special education teachers that

conduct initial assessments, one school psychologist, and one administrator who oversees special education.

A list of focus group questions (Appendix B); included general categories of questions about:

1. Perceptions of the intervention and selection process
2. Perceptions of their experiences with the students receiving the intervention
3. Perceptions of the staff capacity to provide intervention
4. Perceptions of the identification process
5. Study Student Team Meeting perceptions
6. Improvements for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports and progress monitoring.

## Interviews

For this study, one school counselor, one school counselor intern, and one student support staff clerk were interviewed using six open-ended questions, created by the researcher. Topics included counselor perspectives on how students were selected for and matched with a Tier 2 intervention, along with observation and progress monitoring perception data of students receiving academic, behavioral, and social-emotional, Tier 2 intervention (Table 3.12).

**Table 3.9**

### *Counselor Intervention Questions*

Question	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
Name, role, and how many years in education			
How are students selected for Tier 2 academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions?			
How do you believe Friday School has impacted student grades and academic progress?			

Describe the impacts and outcomes of a counseling group.

How do you believe the Gear N Up class has impacted student behavior?

Name, role, and how many years in education

How are students selected for Tier 2 academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions?

How do you believe Friday School has impacted student grades and academic progress?

Data from primary and secondary research questions, along with the quantitative and qualitative measures that correspond to the data that, was collected to answer each research question (Table 3.10).

**Table 3.10**

*Research Questions*

Research Question	Quantitative	Qualitative
How do Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions impact At-risk middle schoolers?	Intervention Observations Report Card Grade Reports pre/post-intervention ODRs pre/post-intervention Staff Dots activity data Counseling Group Data Child Find Data	Counselor Interview Focus Group

What is the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on Academically and Behaviorally At-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?	Intervention Observations Report Card Grade Reports pre/post-intervention ODRs pre/post-intervention Staff Likert Survey	Focus Group
How do Tier 1 and 2 interventions impact Emotionally At-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?	Intervention Observations Staff Dots activity data Counseling Group Data Teacher Likert Survey	Counselor Interviews
How does a Multi-Tiered System of Support impact the need for an initial evaluation for special education services for at-risk middle schoolers?	Child Find Data	Focus Group

---

### **Reliability**

In Graham's (2012) lecture on reliability and validity, he states that it is important to think about whether or not the study can be replicated, with the same results being attained. If so,

the research is deemed reliable. This can depend upon subject error and biases, which is also important to keep in mind and focus on what the participants speak about, rather than minot details. One strategy that the researcher used to maintain the reliability of the research was to ensure that the researcher was not prompting the participants to give certain answers. Doing this helped the researcher with their own biases and the data collected was more authentic. Another important strategy that helped with the validity of this study is what Cressell (2017) calls *member checking*. In this strategy, the researcher solicited feedback about the findings from the participants.

### **Validity**

In any type of research, the validity of the study is of utmost importance. Graham (2012) speaks about validity which indicated if the evidence reflects the reality of the situation. Validity can be impacted by environmental issues, the testing instrument, or sampling issues. In this study, these issues were solved by using different sampling methods, changing the research setting or time, and using a different testing instrument. It is important that the researcher stayed flexible and open to following the spirit of the study. This helped to ease some of the pressure that the researcher had when conducting research for the first time.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using a Convergent Parallel Design (Decuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016), which collects both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, then compare the data to complete the final analysis. A detailed list of the instruments and measures that were used as primary data in this study can be found below. Additionally, secondary data was used to provide background information and support the primary and secondary research questions examined in this study. The counseling and MTSS team meet to review student outcome data from the prior

school year, such as grades, attendance, behavior reports, school climate surveys, and counseling records. From this data, the areas of greatest need were determined, the areas in which Tier 1 whole school support should be put in place. Additionally, students that have a greater need for support in the areas of academics, behavior, and social-emotional needs are determined and those students are matched to the appropriate Tier 2 intervention.

### **Survey Distribution and Collection**

An educator survey was given to all staff members to gain insight into their perceptions of Tier 1 and Tier 2 academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions, as well as referrals for special education. Each survey consisted of 20-25 Likert Scale questions. The survey was conducted through Google Forms and was sent to participants electronically. Before completing the survey, participants were asked to electronically sign an Informed Consent form, to permit to collect data for this study (Appendix C). The information collected was stored in Google Drive.

### **Interviews**

Counseling team interviews were conducted on the school campus, in a private conference room, post-intervention. Before the interviews, the researcher determined protocols for recording and transcribing the interviews. Before the interview process, participants signed an Informed Consent form to ensure there is written consent to participate in this intervention. The average length of an interview was 10-12 minutes in length and consisted of 6 questions. To ensure accuracy, Zoom was used to record and transcribe each interview. The researcher used the computer-based program Delve to code each transcript. Data from interviews were uploaded to Google Drive.



## **Focus Groups**

For this study, the researcher recruited a Concordia University peer, working outside of the school, to conduct a Focus Group and collect responses about the referral process for special education. The group consisted of general education teachers, special education teachers, a school psychologist, and an administrator overseeing special education. The group of nine educators was asked a series of six questions about their perceptions of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, student outcomes, and the special education referral process. The researcher was cognizant of the time to remain within the parameters of the consented timeframe of 45 minutes. Each participant was asked to sign an electronic agreement to participate in the focus group and to be recorded through Zoom. The Focus Group interview was held through Zoom and was transcribed through Zoom, then coded through the computer coding program Delve. All data was stored in Google Drive for the duration of the data collection process.

## **Observations**

The researcher conducted observations of the implementation of one academic, one behavioral, and one social-emotional intervention while the intervention was taking place, for a minimum of 20 minutes. Extensive notes were taken during this time on a researcher-created intervention observation form to understand the progress students are making while receiving interventions in the classroom setting., using a researcher-created intervention observation form.

## **Data Analysis**

Using the Convergent Parallel Design (Decuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016), both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time and were used to support one another in answering the research questions. The quantitative data were analyzed using univariate analysis. The qualitative data was analyzed through open coding and thematic analysis, using the

computerized system, Delve, to code responses. At the end of the data collection process, both sets of data were analyzed to determine patterns and similarities, known as a phenomenon.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data used in this study were secondary data reports, observations, and an educator survey. The researcher was cognizant of comparisons among various secondary data points and linked the responses to questions (Table 3.10). Secondary data included report card grades, discipline incident data, Dots activity data, counseling group data, and child find data. Primary data included intervention observations, using a researched-developed observation form, and a researcher-developed educator survey. This data was analyzed using univariate analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to determine trends and patterns and determine the impacts on at-risk students.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

In this study, qualitative research was conducted through interviews, focus groups, and observations. The researcher created the questions for both the focus groups and the interviews, and both instruments were recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Next, the researcher used the computer-based coding program, Delve, to move from open coding to clustering words and themes. It was expected that there be around 20-25 codes in the codebook. Codes were expected to be categorized into three to five themes. This was to allow for further analysis of staff perceptions, resulting in a phenomenon. All data was stored in the University's Google Drive.

### **Ethical Issues**

When conducting research involving human subjects, there are several ethical issues to consider. The researcher currently works as a school counselor and confidentiality has been a critical factor in the field. Privacy and confidentiality should always be a top priority in research.

Additionally, all participants should be treated with respect and dignity. Therefore, all information that is shared should and must remain confidential and private, unless the participant has been given permission to share the information or a breach of confidentiality is warranted. This would include when a student expresses intent to harm themselves or others or someone is harming the student. The desire to discuss situations can be tempting, but it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to keep information regarding human subjects private. A common practice in counseling and psychology is to ask the client if it is ok to share information with others, and in this case, without linking the information to the human subject. This is an ethical principle that is of utmost importance in all research.

Additionally, due to the researcher working at the school in which the data is being collected, some ethical issues could arise that may skew the data. Since participants may be hesitant to share certain feedback while the researcher is present, the researcher enlisted the support of a Concordia University fellow Doctoral candidate to conduct interviews. will also conduct Data collection and analysis was also conducted outside of working hours to not cross ethical boundaries and for the researcher to remain fully engaged in the her primary job.

### **Summary**

This research design used a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data in a convergent parallel design, utilizing both primary and secondary data to draw conclusions on the previously mentioned research questions. This chapter discussed the research design that was used to analyze the impacts of an MTSS framework on academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally at-risk middle schoolers. In addition, this study examined the impact between a strong MTSS framework and the need for an initial assessment for special

education services, examining a potential means for combating disproportionality within special education. In the following chapters state the results of the research study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This mixed-method study aimed to provide insight into the impacts of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on at-risk Middle Schoolers, through the research finding of a Staff Survey, intervention observations, a focus group, interviews, and secondary data. Currently, the school at which the study was conducted uses the following Tier 1 Academic interventions including universal screeners, universally designed instructional strategies, formative assessments, or frequent, informal checks for understanding and concept mastery. Behavioral Tier 1 interventions include the PBIS model to teach, model, and acknowledge expected behaviors.

Social-Emotional Tier 1 interventions include Second Step lessons, Dots activity, All About Me staff shirts, and posters, along with Minute Meetings. Second Step is a research-based curriculum that focused on CASEL's five core competencies for Social-Emotional Learning. Chapter 2 provides a detailed description. The Dots activity is aimed to challenge staff members to build meaningful connections with students. A large poster displays the names of every student in the school. Staff members were tasked with placing a colored dot by students for whom they know something about. This detail must be personal and not general. Data is collected to determine which students do not have dots. This became the focus group for staff to intentionally aim to build connections. All staff members at the site made posters about themselves and were posted near their desk/classroom or office to help start conversations with students and peers. Staff members were also encouraged to wear an All About Me shirt on Thursdays, to showcase a favorite TV show, sport, movie, band, or hobby that corresponds with their All About Me posters. During Minute Meetings, counselors met with each 7<sup>th</sup>-grade student for one minute to help build rapport and to help students become aware of the counseling center.

Questions range from favorite pizza topping to asking students to express one thing a counselor should know about them.

Tier 2 interventions implemented at the site where the study was conducted are Friday School, behavioral intervention class (Gear N Up), and small groups counseling. Friday School is a two hour academic intervention period, held on Friday afternoons. Students targeted for this intervention are 8<sup>th</sup> grader students who failed one or more class. Students are divided into classes of 15-20 students, with a teacher supporting study skills and homework completion. This runs for the last six weeks of each term. The behavioral intervention class (Gear N Up) targets students with multiple behavioral infractions, with separate classes for boys and girls. The class aims to build community, positive staff relationships, self-esteem, and leadership skills. Bi-monthly counseling support is also targeted to meet the current behavioral needs for the students. Small group counseling is provided for students who demonstrate the needs for additional social-emotional interventions, based upon Minute Meetings data, counseling center attendance data, and referrals.

For this study, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

Primary Research Question (PRQ):

How do Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions support at-risk middle schoolers?

Sub-Question 1 (SQ1):

What is the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on Academically and Behaviorally At-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?

Sub-Question 2 (SQ2):

How do Tier 1 and 2 interventions impact emotionally at-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?

Sub-Question 3 (SQ3):

How does a Multi-Tiered System of Support impact the need for an initial evaluation for special education services for at-risk middle schoolers?

The research questions led to a phenomenological, convergent parallel research design, using convenient sampling techniques. Primary quantitative instruments used in the study are a 26-question Likert Scale Staff Survey and Intervention Observations. Secondary quantitative data consists of grade reports, discipline data, counseling office attendance data, and child find data. Qualitative instruments used in this study are a staff focus group and structured counseling team interviews, which use questions created by the researcher to determine perceptions on interventions that are provided at the school.

### **Research Question 1**

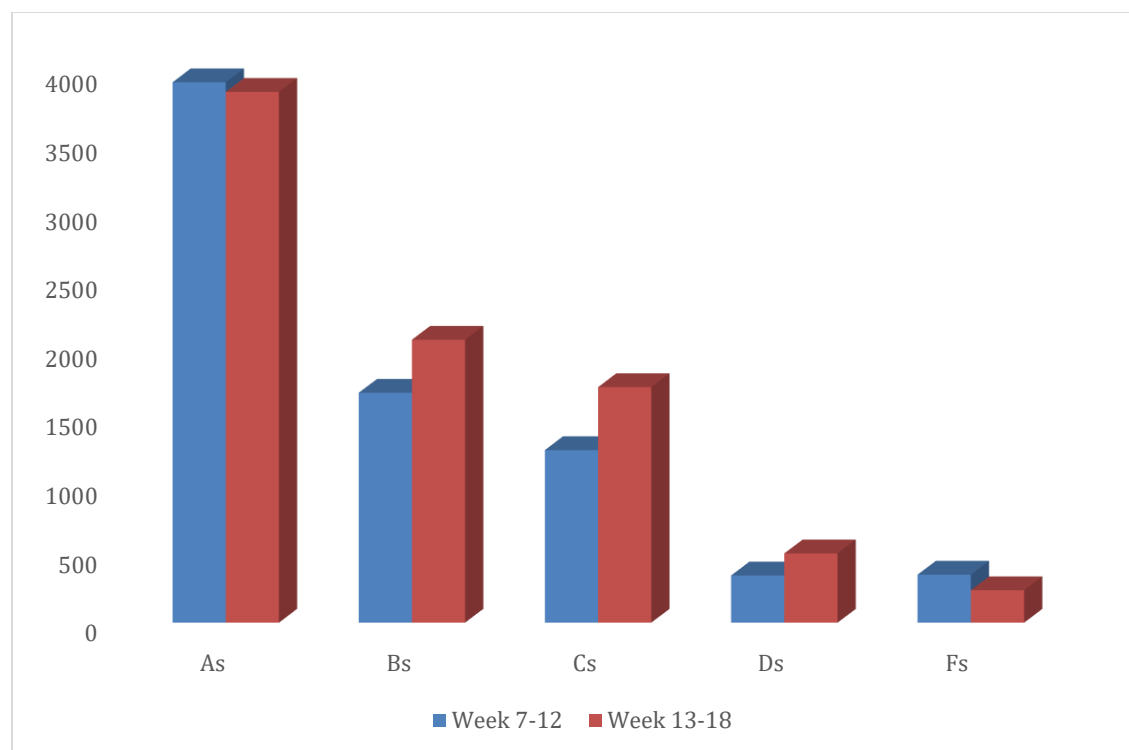
*What is the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on academically and behaviorally at-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?*

Several measures of secondary data were collected to provide valuable insight into student outcomes in the areas of academics and behavior. Staff survey questions consisted of perceptions on current Tier 1 academic supports, including first-best instruction and instructional strategies such as Universal Design for Learning. This survey also measured staff perceptions of Tier 1 behavior supports, such as RAD expectations. Implementation of Tier 2 academic interventions, such as Friday School and academic support classes, along with Tier 2 behavior interventions such as Gear N Up, were measured using a researcher-developed observation form. Behavioral student outcome data measured the number of total discipline incidents, along with

discipline incidents by type, from one school year to the next. Academic student outcomes were measured by analyzing students' report card grades. This was measured before and after interventions were administered. Changes in academic student outcomes were identified by means of analyzing report card grades students have earned from weeks 7–12, before interventions were implemented, to weeks 13–18, after interventions were implemented (Figure 4.1). There was a 32.4% reduction in the number of Fs among students. Additionally, data showed an increase in Ds, by 58.3%, Cs, by 36.7%, and Bs, 23%. This is shown in Figure 4.1, below.

**Figure 4.1**

*Student Grades from Weeks 7-12 to weeks 13-18*



Student outcome data on behaviors was analyzed by examining the total number of discipline referrals received from all students. Table 4.1, below, shows that the number of Major Discipline Referrals stayed the same pre and post-interventions, with 23 referrals, a reduction of



0.0%. The total number of Minor Discipline Referrals increased from 473 to 477, 0.8%, post-intervention.

**Table 4.1**

*Number of Discipline Referrals*

	Major Discipline Referrals	Minor Discipline Referrals
Number of incidents Weeks 1-12 of the 2021-2022 School Year	23	473
Number of incidents Week 1-12 of the 2022-2023 School Year	23	477

School-wide discipline data was analyzed to further analyze the types of discipline incidents that occurred. Out of the 42 disciplinary infraction categories, 20 out of 42 types of infractions showed small decreases in numbers from the 2021-2022 School Year to the 2022-2023 School Year, with interventions in place. The data shows decreases in discipline infractions and incidences (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2**

*Type of Discipline Infraction and Number of Incidents*

Type of Infraction	Number of incidents between Week 1-12 of the 2021-2022 School Year	Number of incidents between Week 1-12 of the 2023 School Year
AA - Excessive Absences	9	28
AD - Excessive Tardiness	63	65
AE - Student Is Truant	7	5
AF - Lockout Infraction	1	0
AG - LV Class w/o Permission	1	2

AI - Off Limits w/o Permission	1	9
AN - Excessing Abs/Tardy Letter	0	48
AO - First Truancy Letter	0	2
AJ - No Show to School Attendance Review Board	2	0
AK - No Show to DA Meeting	2	0
AT - Truancy Intervention	14	14
DA - Class Disruption	24	25
DB - Campus Disruption	37	55
DD - Repeated-Def/Disruption	13	19
DK - Computer/Internet Misuse	5	2
FG - Gang Related	1	0
FT - Fighting	3	1
IC - Minor Misbehavior	6	0
ID - No Classroom Materials	3	0
IE - Dress/Uniform Violation	34	17
IG - Profanity	2	0
IH - Profanity to An Adult	2	0
IL - Pornography	1	0
MA - Fail to Comply W/Consequences	4	6
OJ - Gum	0	4
OK - Radio/Electronic Devices/Cell Phones	177	198
TS -easing	4	1
VP - Vaping	1	1

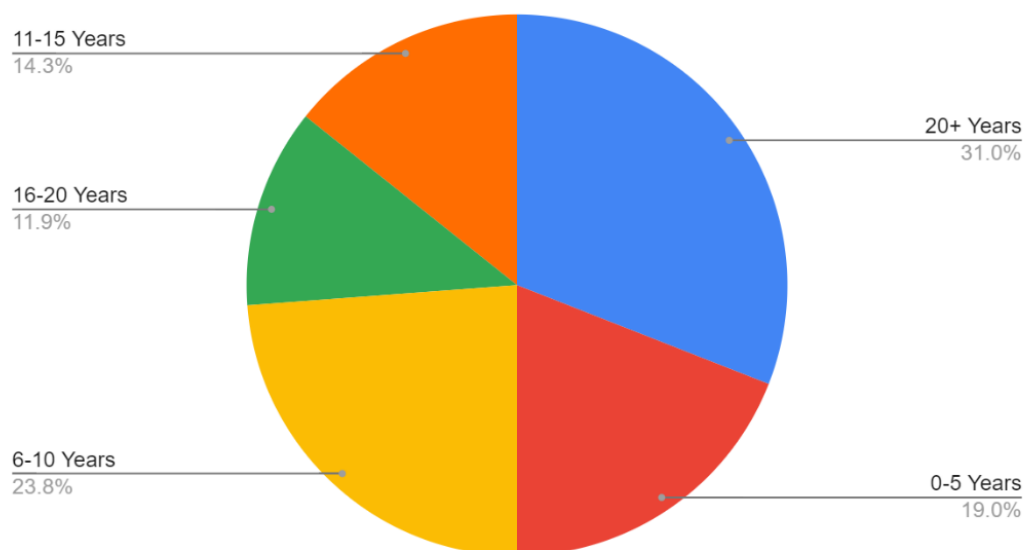
01 - Disruption, Defiance	3	1
05 - Possession of a Knife or Dangerous Object	1	0
09 - Possession of Controlled Substance	0	1
10 - Possession, Use, Sale, or Furnishing a Controlled Substance, Alcohol. Intoxication	2	11
11 - Offering, Arranging, or Negotiating Sale of Controlled Substances, alcohol, Intoxicants	0	1
18 - Caused Physical Injury	1	3
19 - Caused, Attempted or Threatened Physical injury	7	10
21 - Committed Assault or Battery on a School Employee	0	1
22 - Used Force or Violence	3	1
24 - Harassment or Intimidation of a Witness	1	0
28 - Obscene Acts, Profanity, and Vulgarity	1	2
29 - Property Damage	1	0
31 - Bullying on the basis of Race, Color, or Origin	3	0
35 - Property Theft	0	1

Staff survey data shows staff perceptions of academic and behavioral interventions (. Figure 4.2) and detailed with demographic data and number of years each participant has served in education. Those that have under five years of experience in education consisted of 19.0%.

Those that had six to ten years of experience in education made up 23.4% of the population. 14.3% of the participants have 11-15 years of experience. 11.9% of the participants have 16-20 years of experience and 31.0% of the participants have 20 or more years of experience in education.

**Figure 4.2**

*Participant Years of Experience: How many years have you worked in education?*



Continuing with staff demographic data (Table 4.3), results indicated that most survey participants, 57.1% ,were teachers. Administrators made up 11.9% of the participants. Student Support Staff, including counselors, psychologists, and nurses made up 7.1% of the participants. Classified instructional or school support staff made up 23.8% of survey participants.

**Table 4.3***Participant Role at School*

Role at the School	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher	24	57.1
Administrator	5	11.9
Student Support Staff	3	7.1
Instructional or School Support Staff	10	23.8

Survey feedback provided staff perceptions on staff intervention knowledge, teacher implementation of interventions, and the effectiveness of other Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. Most participants, making up 76.2%, either agreed or strongly agreed that most staff members know and understand the school's Tier 1 Academic Supports. Of the participants surveyed, 11.9% disagree and 11.9% neither agree nor disagree (Table 4.4).

**Table 4. 4***Perceptions on Knowledge of Academic Interventions and Supports*

	Frequency	Percentage
Most staff (80%) know and understand our School-wide (Tier 1) Academic Supports		
Strongly Agree	6	14.3
Agree	26	61.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5	11.9
Disagree	5	11.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Of the participants surveyed, 11.9% strongly agreed that most teachers implement Tier 1 Academic Supports and 42.9% agree. 28.6% neither agree nor disagree. 14.3% Disagree and only 2.4% strongly disagree that most teachers implement Tier 1 Academic Support (Table 4.5 ).

**Table 4.5**

*Perceptions of the Implementation of Academic Supports*

Most teachers (80%) implement School-wide (Tier 1) Academic Supports consistently	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	11.9
Agree	18	42.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	12	28.6
Disagree	6	14.3
Strongly Disagree	1	2.4

The majority of participants, 54.4%, agreed that Tier 1 Academic supports are successful for most students. 11.9% strongly agreed, 21.4% neither agree nor disagree, 14.3% disagree and no participants strongly disagree (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6**

*Perceptions of Academic and Behavior Interventions and Supports*

Our School-wide (Tier 1) Academic supports are successful for at least 80% of our students (e.g., First, best instruction, UDL strategies, Universal Screeners, Progress Monitoring)	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	11.9
Agree	22	54.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9	21.4
Disagree	6	14.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Of the participants surveyed, 47.6% agree and 45.2% strongly agree that most staff members understand Tier 1 Behavior supports. Additionally, 4.8% neither agree nor disagree and 2.4% disagree (Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7**

*Perceptions of Academic and Behavior Interventions and Supports*

Most staff members (80%) know and understand our School-wide (Tier 1) Behavior Interventions and Supports (Ex. RAD Behavior Expectations, RAD Points/Store)	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	19	45.2
Agree	20	47.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	4.8
Disagree	1	2.4
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Survey results indicate that 54.8% of respondents agree and 31% strongly agree that most staff members support behavior interventions by teaching and acknowledging R.A.D.

Expectations. In reviewing responses, 7.1% disagreed and 7.1% neither agree nor disagree (Table 4.8).

**Table 4.8**

*Perceptions of Behavior Interventions and Supports*

Most staff members (80%) support School-wide (Tier 1) Behavior Interventions and Supports by teaching and/or acknowledging RAD Expectations	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	31
Agree	23	54.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	7.1
Disagree	3	7.1

Strongly Disagree	0	0
-------------------	---	---

Of the staff members that answered the question of Tier 1 behavior interventions being successful for most students, 19% Strongly agreed, 64.3% agreed, 11.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 4.8% disagreed (Figure 4.9).

**Table 4.9**

*Perceptions of Behavior Interventions and Supports*

Our School-wide (Tier 1) Behavior interventions are successful for at least 80% of our students (Ex. RAD Behavior Expectations, RAD Points/Store)	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	19
Agree	27	64.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5	11.9
Disagree	2	4.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0

For the question regarding students needing extra support and receiving targeted, Tier 2 support, 59.5% of staff members strongly agreed and 35.7% agree that students in need are provided with additional interventions. Only 2.4% of staff disagree and 2.4% of staff neither agree nor disagree (Table 4.10).



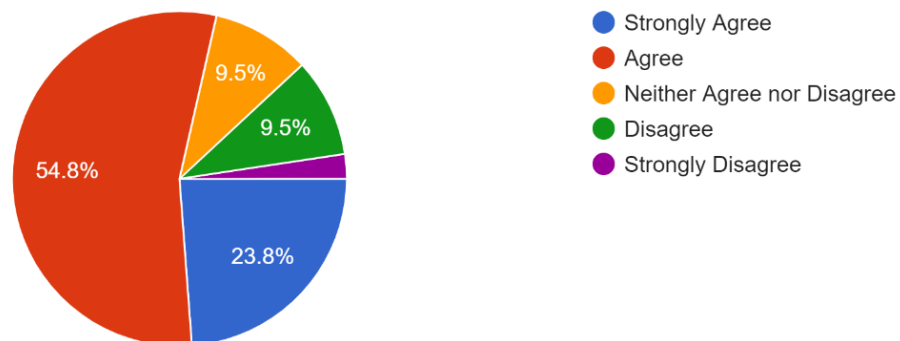
**Table 4.10***Perceptions of Academic and Behavior Interventions and Supports*

For students who need extra academic support (Tier 2, targeted interventions), our school provides additional support and interventions to those students. (Ex. support classes, specialized tutoring, Friday School)	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	25	59.5
Agree	15	35.7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	2.4
Disagree	1	2.4
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Of those students who receive Tier 2 Academic Supports, 54.8% agree the interventions are effective for most students. The next highest response is 23.8% of staff strongly agree, followed by 9.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 9.5% disagreeing, and 2.4% strongly disagreeing (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3**

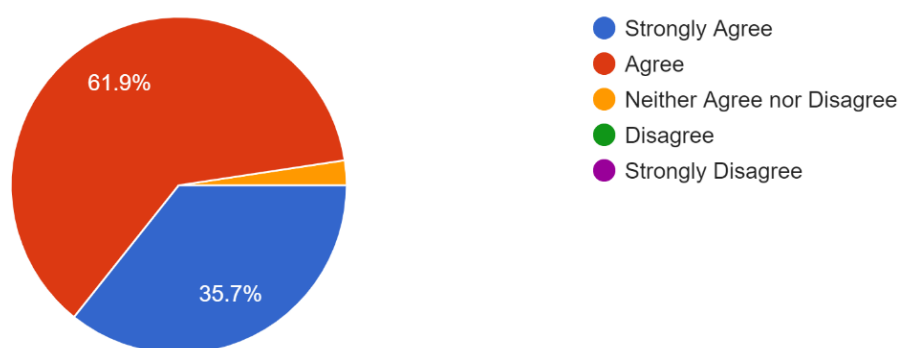
*Tier 2 Academic Supports offered to our students are effective for most students (80%) who receive extra support*



Participant survey results show that 61.9% agree and 35.7% strongly agree that those students who need are in need, receive Tier 2, targeted behavioral interventions. Only 2.4% neither agree nor disagree (Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4**

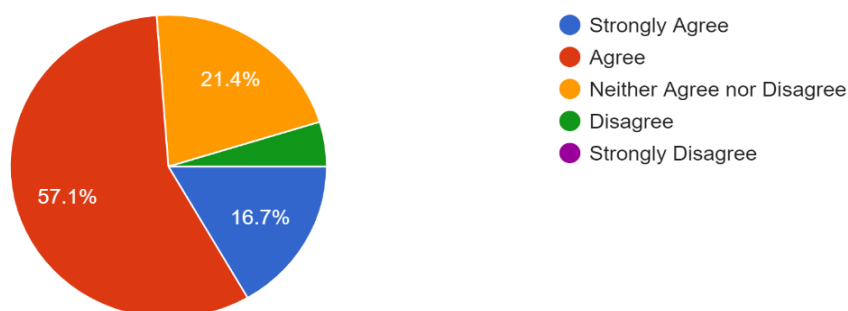
*Perceptions on Tier 2 Behavior Supports: For students who need extra behavior support, our school provides additional support and interventions to those students*



Of those surveyed, 57.1 % agree that the school's Tier 2 behavior supports are effective for most students. This is followed by 16.7% strongly agreeing, 21.4% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 4.8% disagreeing (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5**

*Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Tier 2 Behavior Supports: Tier 2 Behavior Supports offered to our students are effective for most (80%) of the students who need extra support.*



When observing a Tier 2, academic intervention, the researcher noted that the interventionist implemented 71.4% of the essential pieces of a successful intervention or five out of seven items. For the behavioral Tier 2 intervention, the researcher observed six out of seven essential items being implemented or 85.7% of the essential items (Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11**

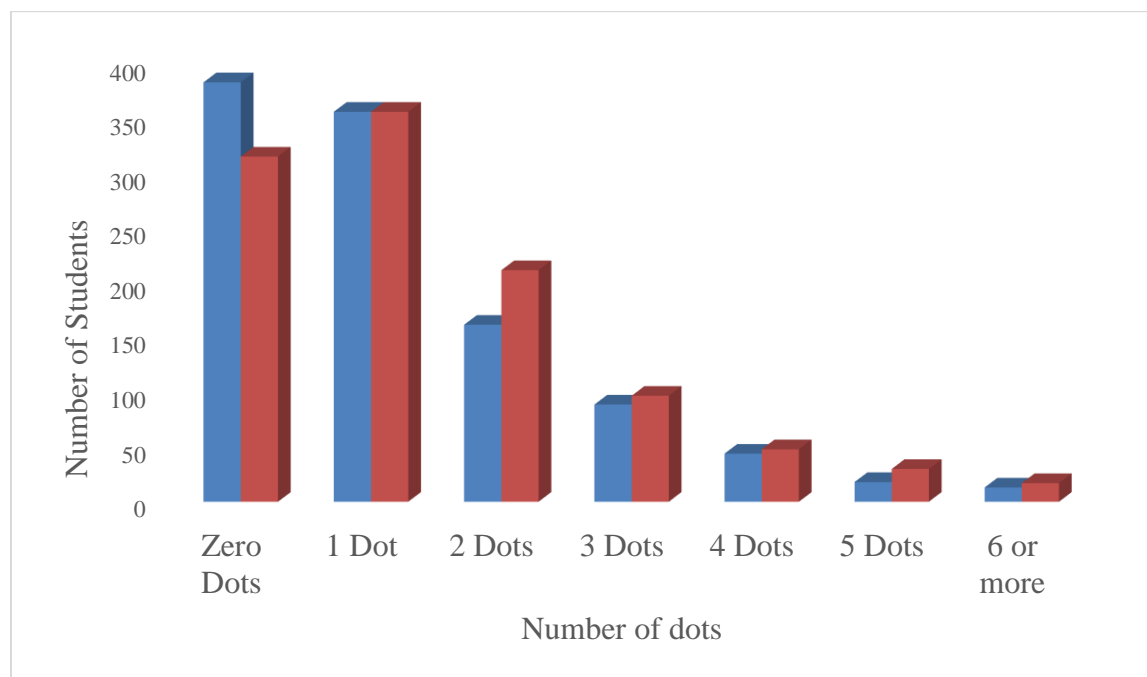
*Intervention Observations*

Number of intervention items observed.	N	%
Academic Intervention (Friday School)	5	71.4
Behavioral Intervention (Gear N Up)	6	85.7

## Research Question 2

*How do Tier 1 and 2 interventions impact Emotionally At-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?*

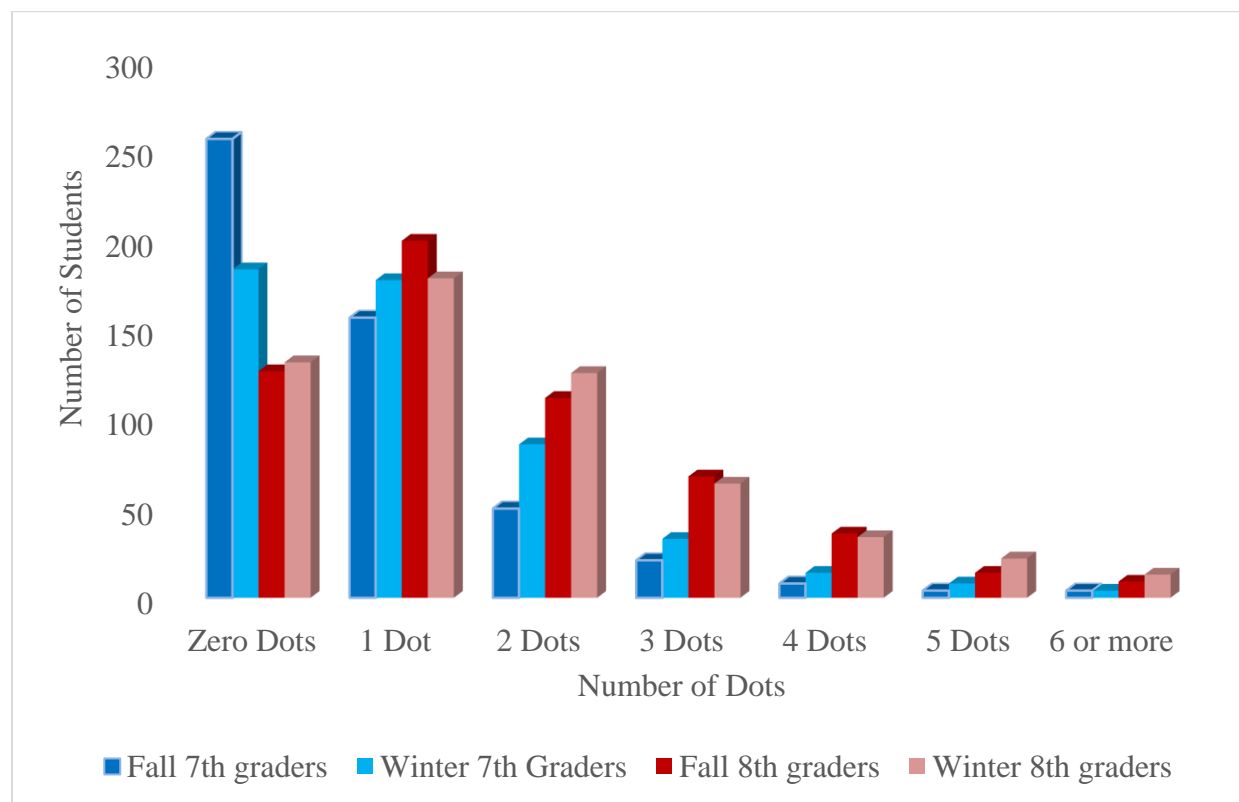
During the Fall Trimester, Dots activity data was collected and analyzed. The Dots activity begins with staff members putting dots on a poster next to any student for whom they have built a connection with this year. A connection was defined as knowing something specific and personal about the student, nothing general or academic was acceptable. This activity was repeated in the winter to see if additional connections were built through intentional relationship-building with those who had few or no dots. The comparison of Dots activity data between the fall (blue) and the winter (red) indicated the biggest change was for students with two dots. This category grew by 30.8%, from 162 to 212. Students without any dots decreased from 384 to 316 or 17.7%. There was also consistent growth in the number of students with three, four, five, and six dots (Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6***Total Number of Students by Number of Dots*

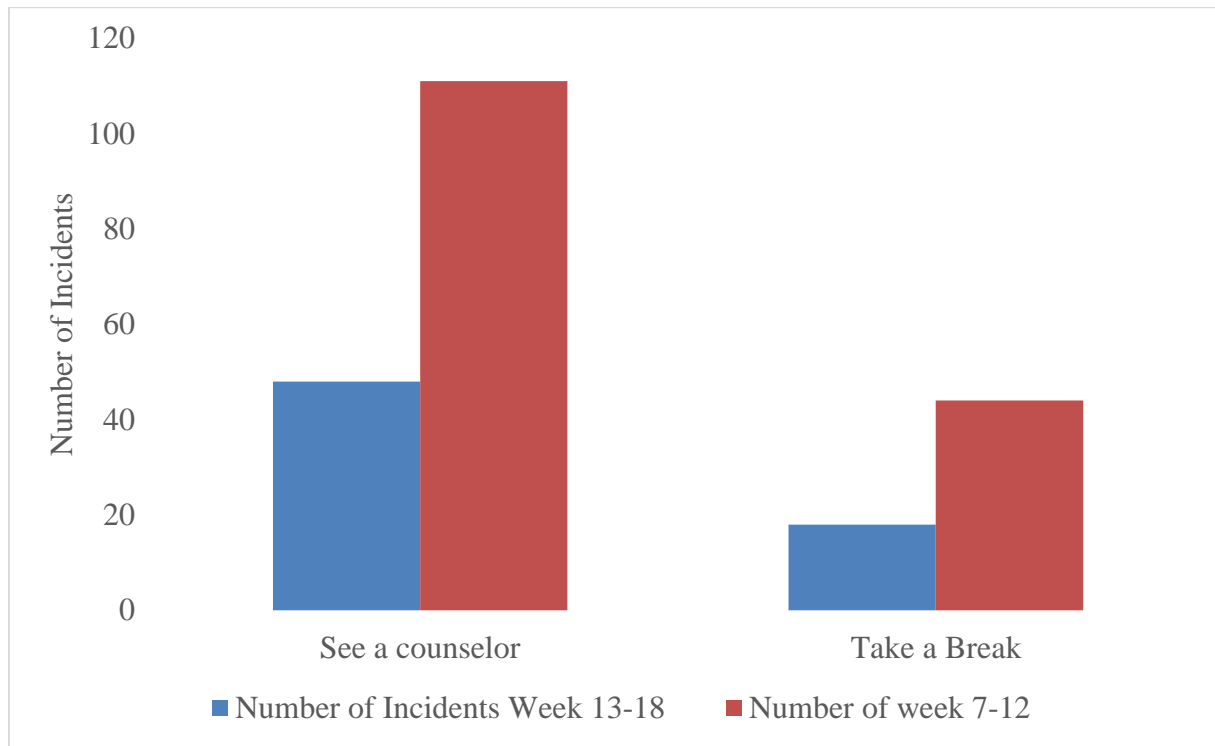
The Dots activity data by grade level, shows a trend of 8<sup>th</sup> graders receiving more dots than 7<sup>th</sup> graders. Additionally, 51.2 % of 7<sup>th</sup> graders did not receive a dot in the fall, in comparison to 22.4% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. In the winter, 36.3% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders did not have dots, in comparison to 23.1% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This shows that 8<sup>th</sup> graders, likely due to having more time to build relationships, tend to build more connections with staff members (Figure 4.7).

**Figure 4.7**

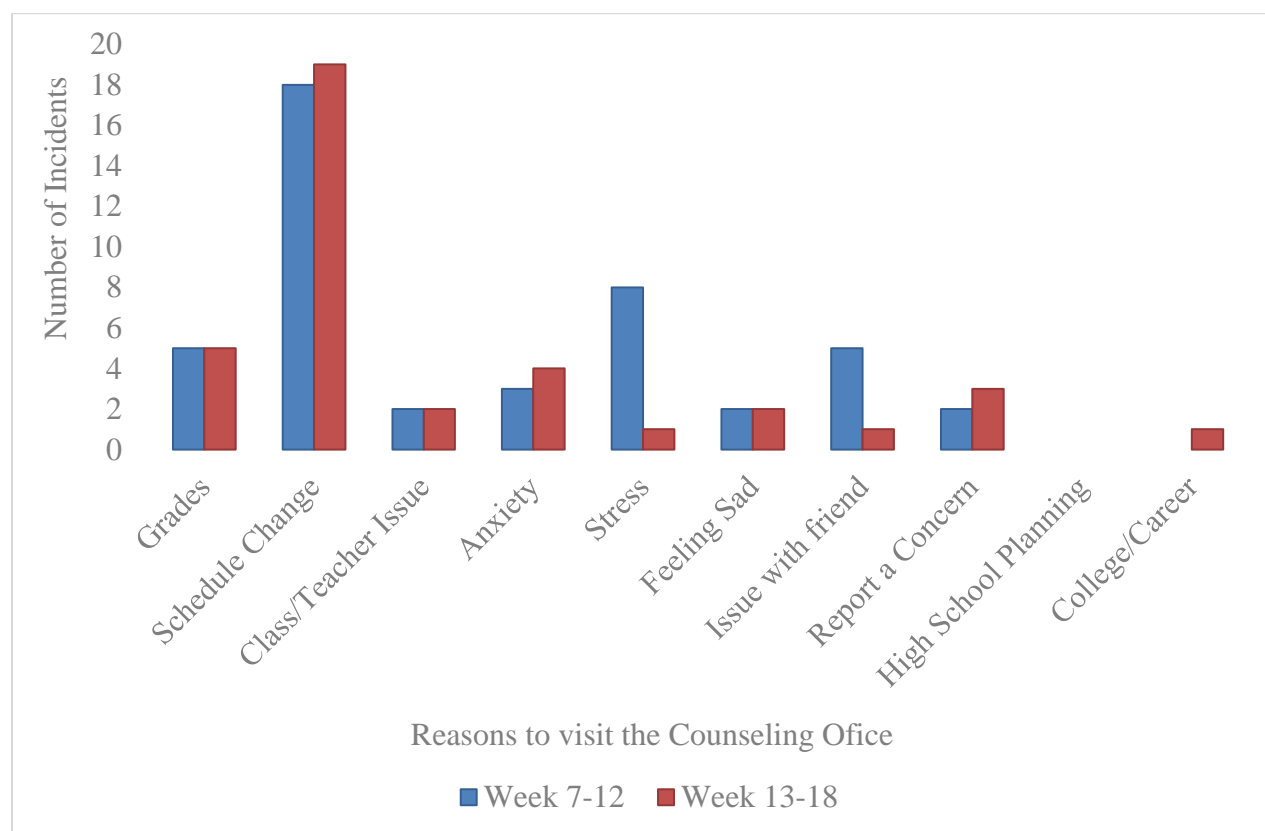
*Dots Activity, Total Number of Students by Number of Dots and Grade*



Data gathered regarding the purpose of student counseling center visits showed a 59% reduction in the number of students who visited to take a break, post-intervention. The number of students who visited to see a counselor, after Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports were provided, reduced by 56.7% (Figure 4.8).

**Figure 4.8***Purpose of Counseling Center Visit*

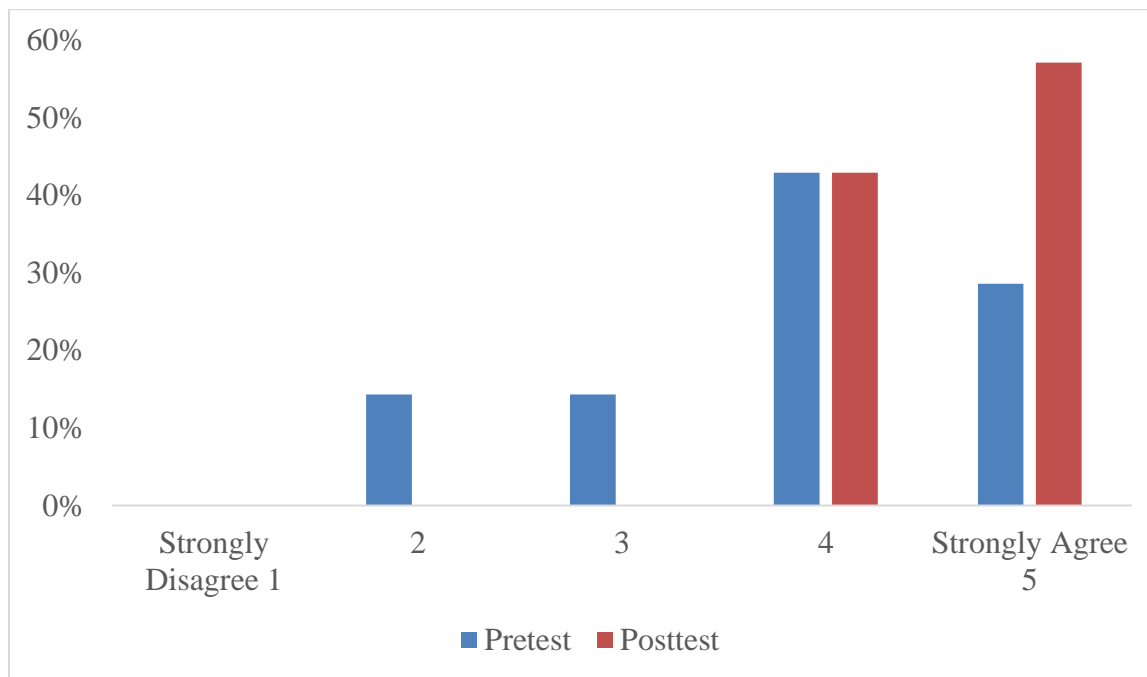
The researcher collected data on the types of students concerns that were self-reported, when students visited the counseling center to see if there was a change after social-emotional interventions had been implemented. The biggest change was related to stress, which decreased by 87.5%. Another large reduction was seen in *issues with friends*, which dropped 80%, post-intervention (Figure 4.9).

**Figure 4.9***Type of Student Concern*

### Counseling Group Data

Small Group Counseling served as Tier 2, social-emotional intervention. Implementation data, including attendance data and participation data, was collected. Additionally, student pre-post counseling survey data was assessed to determine student outcome data. The pre- and post-test data for the question, *I think it is important to make new friends and maintain the ones I have*, revealed that those who strongly agreed with this statement increased by 29% after the intervention. Those who agreed showed no increase or decrease after the intervention.

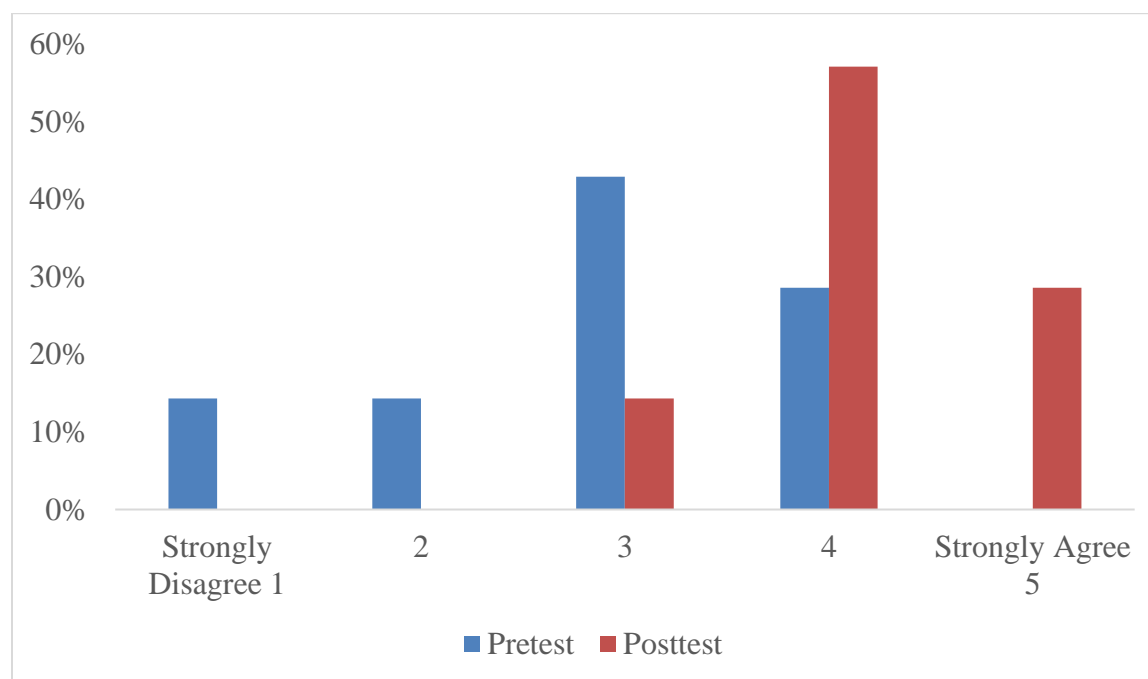


**Figure 4.10***Friendship Group Survey Pretest versus Posttest*

Pre- and post-test data for the question *I know what a healthy friendship looks like*. The data shows a 29% increase in those who strongly agree and a 28.4% increase in those who agree with this statement. In those that neither agree nor disagree, a 28.9% decrease is seen (Figure 4.11).

**Figure 4.11**

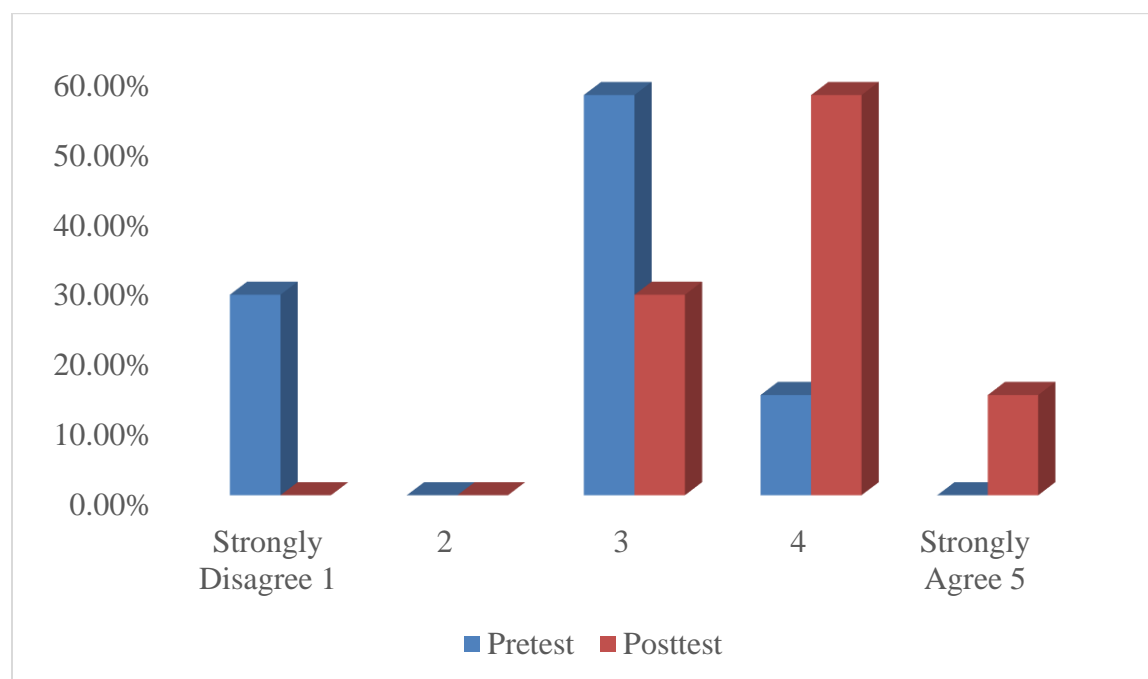
*Friendship Group Survey Pretest v Posttest: I know what a healthy friendship looks like*



pre- and post-test data for the question *I do not feel anxious about coming to school* indicates that 57% of the students surveyed, post-intervention agreed in comparison to the 14.3% who agreed pre-intervention. This is a 42.7% increase (Figure 4.12).

**Figure 4.12**

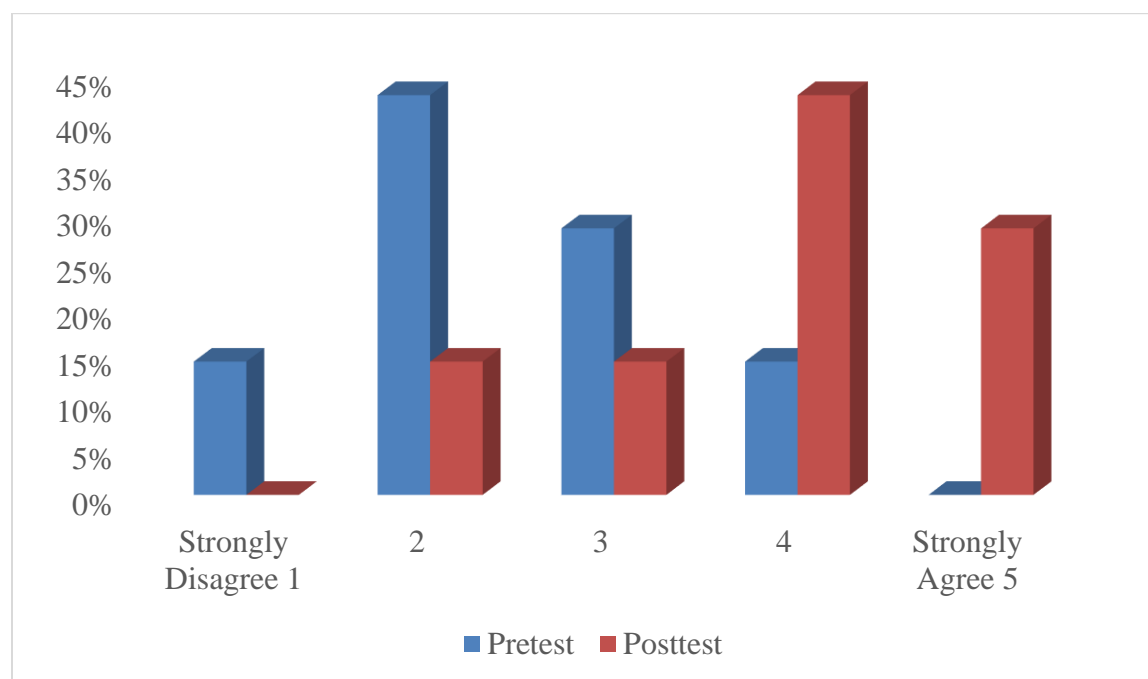
*Friendship Group Survey Pretest v Posttest: I do not feel anxious about coming to school.*



The pre- and post-test data for the question *I feel comfortable starting conversations with new people* resulted in a 29% increase in those who strongly agree and a 28.7% increase in those who agreed after the intervention. Additionally, a 28.9% decrease is shown in those that disagreed, before and after the intervention (Figure 4.13).

**Figure 4.13**

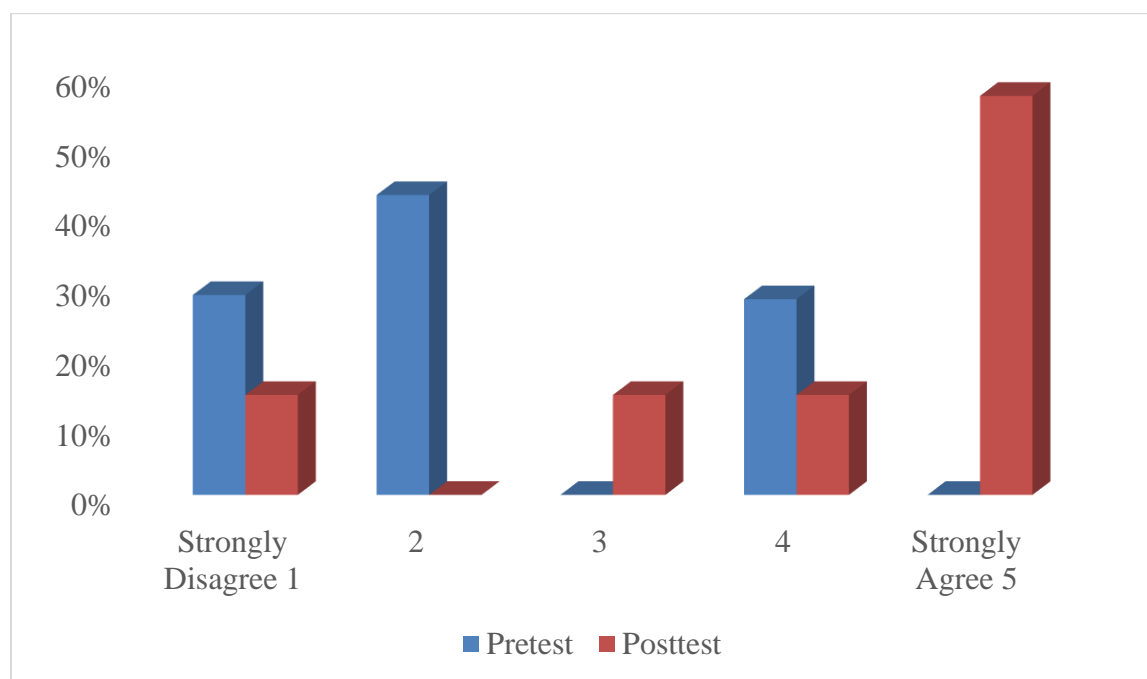
*Friendship Group Survey: I feel comfortable starting conversations with new people.*



The pre- and post-test data for the question *I know how to start talking to a new person* revealed a 57.1% increase in those that strongly agree and a 42.9% decrease in those that disagree (Figure 4.14).

**Figure 4.14**

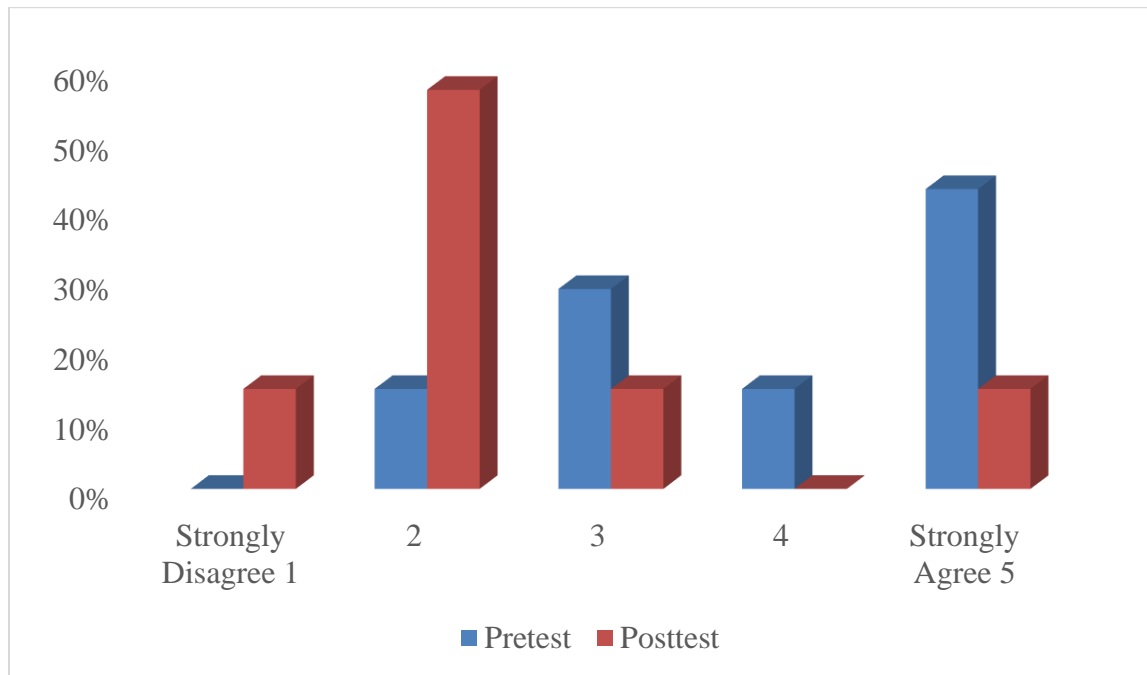
*Friendship Group Survey: I know how to start talking to a new person.*



Pre and post-test data for the question *I feel anxious or nervous when meeting new people* shows a 43.1% decrease in those that disagree with this statement (Figure 4.15).

**Figure 4.15**

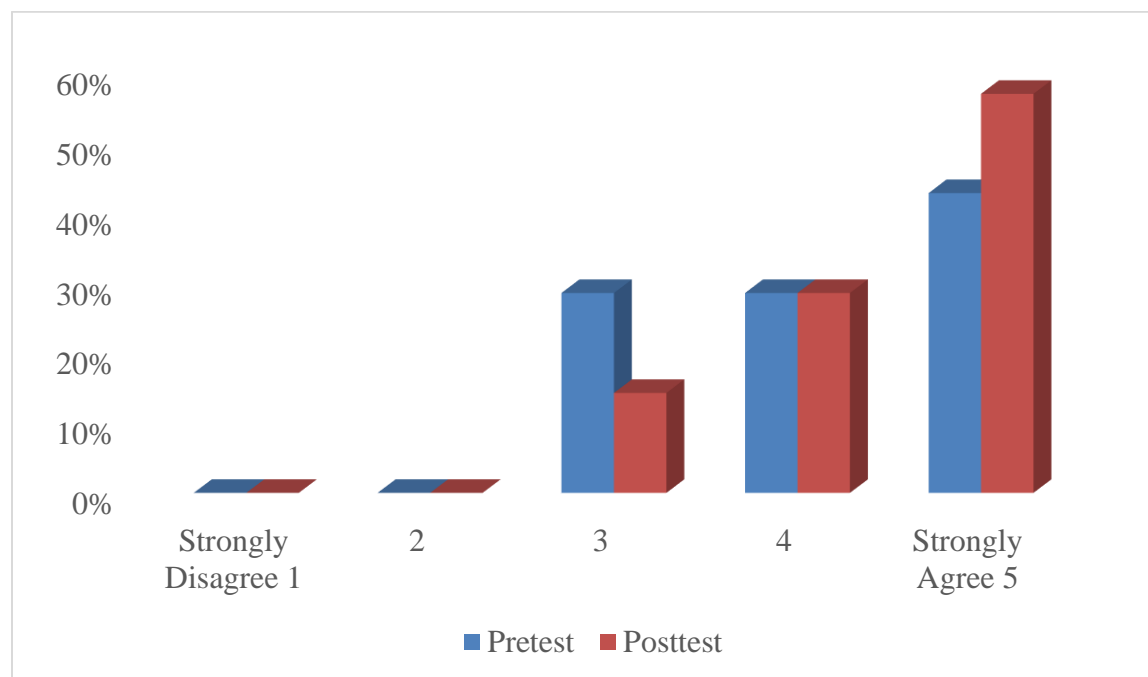
*Friendship Group Survey: I feel anxious or nervous when meeting new people.*



The pre- and post-test data for the question “I have people to spend time with at school, during lunch or nutrition, showed a 14% increase for those who strongly agree, with no change among those who agree (Figure 4.16).

**Figure 4.16**

*Friendship Group Survey: I have people to spend time with at school, during lunch, or nutrition break.*



The majority of survey participants, 47.6%, agree that most teachers understand the five core competencies of SEL and 31% strongly agree (Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12***Perceptions of SEL Interventions and Supports*

Most teachers (80%) understand that Social-Emotional Learning consists of teaching Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Management, and Relationship Skills.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	31
Agree	20	47.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	7.1
Disagree	4	9.5
Strongly Disagree	2	4.8

Participants surveyed were asked if most staff members believe that SEL is important to academic success. Most participants, or 47.6%, agreed and 21.4% disagreed (4.13).

**Table 4.13***Perceptions on the Importance of SEL Interventions and Supports*

Most staff members (80%) believe that teaching Social-Emotional Learning is important to the academic success of all students	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	16.7
Agree	20	47.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	7.1
Disagree	9	21.4
Strongly Disagree	3	7.1

According to participant responses, 61.9% strongly agree that teaching SEL is important to the academic success of all students (Table 4.14).



**Table 4.14***Perceptions on the Importance of SEL Interventions and Supports*

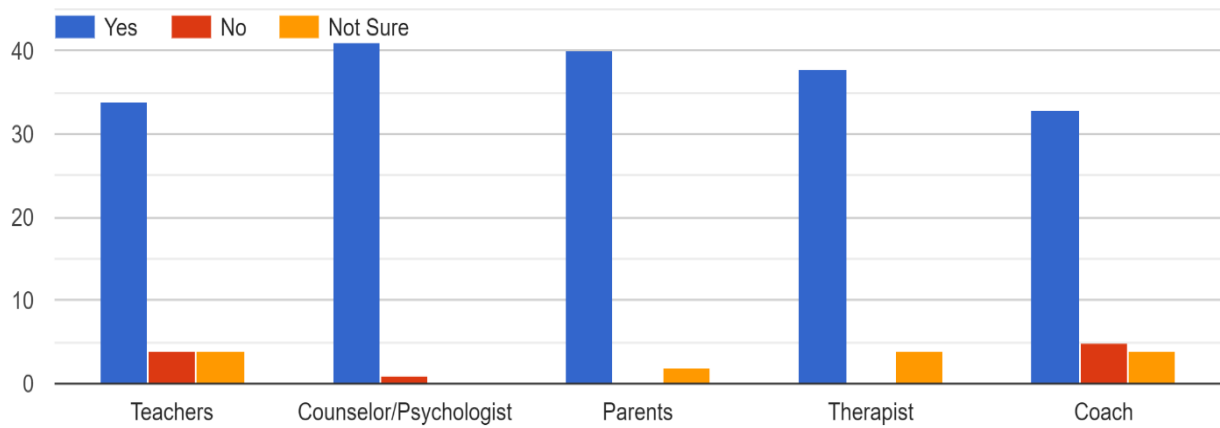
I believe that teaching Social-Emotional Learning is important to the academic success of all students	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	26	61.9
Agree	11	26.2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	7.1
Disagree	2	4.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Survey participants had beliefs about who should be responsible for teaching SEL.

Results show that the mode response was counselor, with 41 votes, followed by parents, with 40 votes. Therapists received 38 votes, followed by 34 votes for teachers and 33 votes for a coach (Figure 4.17).

**Figure 4.17**

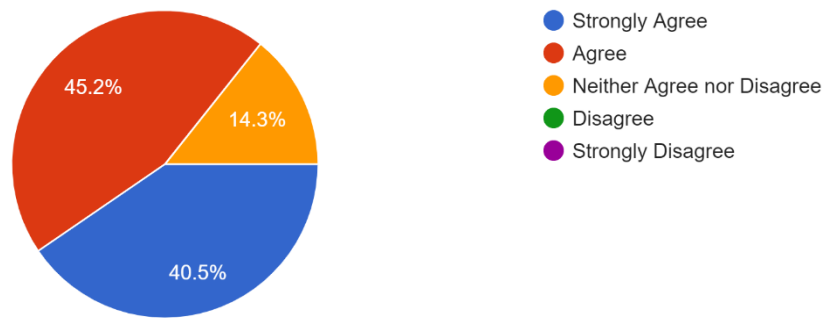
*Perceptions on the responsibility of teaching Social-Emotional Learning: I believe teaching Social-Emotional Learning is the responsibility of...*



When asked if the school effectively provides additional support for students struggling with SEL, 45.2% agreed and 40.5% strongly agreed. 14.3% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed. None of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. (Figure 4.18).

**Figure 4.18**

*Perceptions on providing social-emotional learning support: If a student is struggling in the area of Social-Emotional Learning, our school effectively provides additional supports for these students*



Interviews with the Counseling Department were conducted to gather data on staff perceptions of social-emotional interventions ( Tables 4.15 to 4.20) and to describe the background information on each staff member, including their role and how many years they have worked in education (Table 4.15).

**Table 4.15***Question 1: Role and how many years in education*

Participant A	I'm a counselor and I left education for a little and then came back. Let me think I'm gonna say, like 8, sure. Well, go to 8, maybe 9.
Participant B	I am a school counseling intern at Santiago right now, and I've been in education just for the past 2 years. I'm in my master's program. So just really, my fieldwork has been like my first real exposure to education.
Participant C	I currently work here in the Wellness Center here at {the school , doing counseling support, and in education, I've worked for {the District} for, like 4 years. I wanna say so for 4 years. And then I currently am a grad student at Cal State Long Beach for school psychology.

The question of how students are selected for Tier 2 interventions was asked of the counseling department. Participants agreed that Tier 1 data was used to determine which students needed further intervention, meaning that when Tier 1 supports did not work, students were referred for Tier 2 support (Table 4.16).

**Table 4.16**

*Question 2: How are students selected for Tier 2 academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions?*

Participant A	So, for our academic interventions, we use grades and Aeries to run queries and look at Ds and Fs and decide...looking at how many students there are, what interventions we can put in place for them. Behavioral, we work a lot with again, we can use Aeries to look at students that have had behavior issues that were entered and also work with our assistant principal, who is in charge of discipline, and usually he'll give us some students. Social emotional interventions, I think we've done a few different things we did minute meetings at the beginning of the school year, where we met with all of our students literally for 1 minute, but from that minute just asking a few general questions to get to know them a lot of them expressed, you know, different struggles, or if they are having trouble making friends, or they had anxiety...We also track the students that are coming into the wellness center. They check in so we can look at, you know, the students that are checking in more often than others that kind of go from there.
Participant B	I think the goal is always to have it be data driven. Obviously so. I think at least what I've perceived from our time here has been. We've really tried to use our, you know, tier, one interventions to fuel tier 2, one. So, like, even, for example, like we did our minute meetings. And now I'm running group with girls based on that minute meeting data that all said that they were feeling high levels of anxiety. And so that's kind of how it got to recruit for that group. And same thing I did with like a social skills group. So, I think a lot of it is obviously data driven, and some of it comes from those tier 1 interventions, and I think otherwise. It's a lot of obviously it like identifying needs looking at that, we have our existing grades, attendance, those kinds of things, too.
Participant C	Well, they would go through universal screening like the minute meetings at the beginning of the year or like heads up checkup, which was their suicide assessment. And then from there they select a few students that probably need more attention, or, like Friday school, same deal up, and then they'll move them into those categories for tier 2.

The next question focuses on the impact of Tier 2 Academic Intervention, Friday School.

Overall, participants described positive results for students (Table 4.17).

**Table 4.17**

*Question 3: How do you believe Friday School has impacted student grades and academic progress?*

Participant A	One, I think their grades are improving. I think it helps a lot of these kids because they- it seems like they're really connecting with the Friday school teachers and they know {the counselors} really well, so I feel like those extra connections like I've had students that before wouldn't really engage. And now they're coming up and telling us that they're really excited they're passing all their classes, or that they got one of their grades up, and you know they're excited to share that. So, I think grades are improving. But we're also just making the connections with those students that probably need it a little bit more. And I think that also encourages them to do better in school. So, it's kind of a win-win.
Participant B	I would definitely say, it's positive. I think a lot of those students from the feedback. I've heard from them myself. They've really loved the like individual attention from Friday school, getting that like a little bit more one-on-one time with the teachers to have a bit more like a bit more of a focus kind of a study hall. I can't. I know personally several students who has helped them bring up all of their grades. There's one girl that I know was failing. Every class, last trimester, and now is passing, all of them so I definitely think Friday school has paid a huge role in helping not- I don't think every student takes advantage of it, but I think for the ones that choose to, and are willing to. I think it has made huge improvements for them.
Participant C	I would say that it gives them the opportunity to better their grades. But I do run some of the data for Friday's school, and just kind of see how they're improving. And so far it's not looking great right now. They're grades I wouldn't say have improved substantially, but I do think this trimester is gonna be different, just because they did include more study skills lessons and just making sure that they know how to like clean out your backpack, how to like make sure that you are studying to your best ability. So, I think it's gonna make progress next trimester now that they have these skills and they're gonna apply them. But right now, I do think it gives them an opportunity to do better. But they're not. They're not showing right now.

Question 4 asks participants to describe their perspectives on the Tier 2 SEL intervention of counseling groups, including the Friendship Group and Coping Strategies Group. Overall, the perceptions of the counseling groups were positive and beneficial to students.

**Table 4.18**

*Question 4: Describe the impacts and outcomes of a counseling group.*

Participant A	<p>So, I haven't run any of the groups this year. We've had our interns. I mildly participated last year in a brief group, but I do think it- a lot of the groups that we have done so far. It's helped those students connect with other students where maybe they normally don't have those connections yet. We kind of had our making friends group and our anxiety group, and a lot of those students are very similar. So, I think they kind of bonded and connected over that, and a lot of those students are the ones that come in the Wellness center during like nutrition and lunch now. So, I don't know specifically about those outcomes but you know the fact that they've connected with other students or they're making connections and coming in the wellness center is a positive.</p>
Participant B	<p>I think there's a lot of opportunity- I think probably the outcomes that I look for when I run groups are- our students learn the attitude, skills, knowledge like those 3 things. Obviously, are they like we can, you know, I like to measure with like a pre- and post-test. But I look to see like, are they learning a new skill? Are they learning to attitude You know, and beliefs, and can we like measure those things? So, like in my anxiety group I'm doing right now, like we're working on coping skills, so that's like something tangible that they can take with them. And hopefully the outcome will be that they leave the group, knowing how to do something that they didn't it previously know before, or to cope in a way that they didn't before but I also think one of the biggest outcomes of groups is like that community aspect of feeling like you're not alone in whatever the context is like somebody else is going through what you're going through, and that you guys are learning together. I always think that's like a really powerful part of groups, too, is like, yes, you're teaching skills, practical things but also there is that aspect of just like unity that comes through groups too. So always kind of that by-product of the group is the aspect of like relational you know closeness, too.</p>
Participant C	<p>I would say the impact would be that it's very beneficial for these groups to have a space that they can talk to. And it's more targeted to what they, you know are needing, whether it be anxiety or making friends, or I don't know anything like that, and it gives them an opportunity to learn new skills like social skills or academic skills and outcomes, I would say just it really depends on how much they take from those counseling groups, and how I don't know how beneficial the activities in those groups were, but hopefully they're positive.</p>

Question 5 focuses on the behavioral intervention support class, Gear N Up, and participant perceptions of its impact on students. Participants believed that there are positive, observable changes in both the boys and girls intervention group, with detailed perceptions (Table 4.19).

**Table 4.19**

*Question 5: How do you believe the Gear N Up class has impacted students?*

Participant A	So, I will say a lot of the boys, it is an all voice class, the boys- actually- No, I'm sorry we have a boys and girls class. Those students were very well known before, you know, as the students that would be up in the office all the time, and I don't see many of them in the office anymore. So, I think that it's definitely helped. And there's been more than a few that have made very obvious changes in their behavior. And there like. I don't want to say appreciation of school, but like they're more invested in their schoolwork and just kind of an overall like positive improvement. So, I don't know that I know the - you know, numerical statistics, or anything for that. But I will say that a lot of those students have stayed out of trouble this should year. It's been a lot less aware to me and a lot more focus on being at school, and you know, getting better grades.
Participant B	So I push into the gear and up class every other week with the girls, and lead a group, and I think that it has been huge for them, and I think the biggest thing that I've heard from them is they love their teacher, and they love like I think the adults support that they receive in that class has been huge for them, and kind of the accountability of just having somebody that is aware of them in like a more, you know, close proximity. I think the students that I've worked with just have not a lot of people in their life that believe in them. So, I think that I've noticed they have been really responsive to having adults that are like paying attention to them, and like really just rooting them on. Yeah. And I think I kind of the same way that you know we're talking about groups before, like, I think, having each other and like having those relationships has been really good for them to just to feel like, okay, yeah, I, maybe, made some mistakes or I maybe have kind of put myself in the situation where I need to be in this class but now I'm in it with other people, and I have these teachers that believe that I can get my grades up and believe that I can get my grades up and believe that I can get my grades up and believe that I- the one girl that I was talking about before she actually she's in the gearing up group too, like. Believe that I can get my grades up and are looking for solutions, and I also think the gearing up class has given eyes to us for specific



Participant C

students like, you know that we can help figure out what they need to be successful, to like. I think it's given us a bit more like a laser focus on meeting those specific students' needs that make sense.

Well, there's 2 classes, there's one for girls and there's one for boys. I think the boys class is really difficult, because there's a lot more kids in that class then there is the girls group. I think the girls class has like 4 or 5 girls in it, while the boy group has, I think it's like 12 - 15. So just in size, the dynamic is so different. And I think the girls class has a very since- it's such a small group, they have a very like targeted kind of lesson, that they get, because there's more time to talk to all of them individually, and I think it's had very positive like impact on their behavior. I know a lot of them in that class, they were struggling a lot with them grades and just kind of disruptive behavior, and now they're doing a lot better, just because of activities that they're doing in that class. But again, with the boys it's a little bit harder, because they do tend to kind of wanna mess around because they're so much bigger in that class. I mean, there's only one person in that room kind of making sure that those activities are going the way that they're going. But in general, I do think it's had a very positive impact on their behavior.

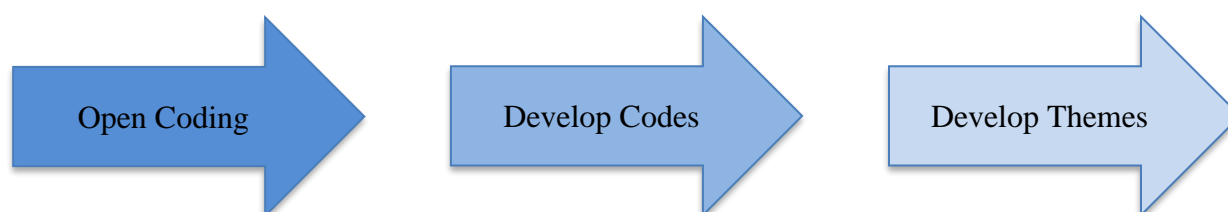
---

The Thematic Analysis process determined themes from the counselor interviews.

Interview transcripts had been coded, using open coding, to develop codes that were then grouped into themes (Figure 4.19).

**Figure 4.19**

*Thematic Analysis Diagram*



Using the illustrated process (Figure 4.20), the researcher used open coding from interview transcripts to develop codes. These codes were grouped into four themes: Building Connections, Positive Perceptions, Data Driven Supports, and Student Outcome Improvements (Table 4.20).

**Table 4.20***Evolving Themes from Counseling Team Interviews*

Evolving Themes	
Themes	Codes
Building Connections	Staff/Student Connection, Connection with other students
Positive Perception	Positive student attitude, positive staff attitude/perception
Data-Driven Supports	Grades, Wellness Center attendance, school attendance, data-driven, Aeries data, minute meetings, groups, referrals
Student Outcome Improvements	Skills building, behavior improvement, academic improvement, increased engagement

**Research Question 3**

*How does a Multi-Tiered System of Support impact the need for an initial evaluation for special education services for at-risk middle schoolers?*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2022) states that it is the Local Education Area's responsibility to identify students who may have a disability and provide support in the least restrictive environment. Most schools use interventions, such as the MTSS model, along with holding a Student Study Team (SST) meeting to fulfill this legal requirement. Child Find data for 2021-2022 versus the 2022-2023 School Year indicated 50% of students who were referred for an SST were also referred for an initial assessment for Special Education or Section 504 in the 2021-2022 schoolyear. In contrast, only 37.5% of students were referred for initial assessment in the 2022- 2023 school year. In the 2022-2023 school year, 62.5% of students for whom an SST was held were able to be successful with Tier 2 or Tier 3

interventions. This is an increase from the 50% of students in the previous school year (Table 4.21).

**Table 4.21**

*Child Find Data*

Item	2021-2022 School Year	2022-2023 School Year
Number of Students Referred for a Student Study Team Meeting	10	16
Number of Students Referred for an Initial Assessment for Section 504	3	1
Number of Students Referred for an Initial Assessment for Special Education	2	5
Number of students who qualified for an Initial Section 504 Plan	3	1
Number of students who qualified for an Initial IEP	1	4
Number of students were not assessed and had improvements with Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, after a Student Study Team Meeting	5	10

Of the participants surveyed on if they perceive that targeted interventions help most students be successful in the general education setting, 61.9% agreed and 26.2% strongly agreed. (Table 4.22).

**Table 4.22***Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral*

Providing targeted supports for students (ex. Reading Class, Study Skills Class, Friday School) helps most middle school students be successful in the general education setting.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	11	26.2
Agree	26	61.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4	9.5
Disagree	1	2.4
Strongly Disagree	0	0

When asked if students were properly matched with appropriate interventions and supports, most participants, 59.5%, agreed. In addition, 21.4% strongly agreed (Table 4.23).

**Table 4.23***Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral*

Students are properly matched with appropriate interventions and supports, according to their needs.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	9	21.4
Agree	25	59.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5	11.9
Disagree	3	7.1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Participants were asked if a special education referral should be made for students not passing a class or understanding the material. Most participants, 51/2%, disagreed and 24.4% strongly disagreed (Table 4.24).

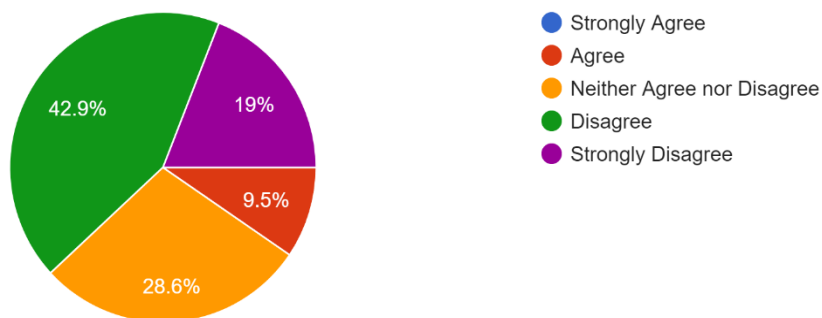
**Table 4.24***Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral*

If a student is not passing my class or not understanding the material, I should refer the student for special education assessment.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	3	7.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7	17.1
Disagree	21	51.2
Strongly Disagree	10	24.4

The next question asked educators if a special education referral should be made for students with low test scores. Of those surveyed, 42.9% disagreed with this statement. Those that neither agreed nor disagreed were 28.6% (Figure 4.20).

**Figure 4.20**

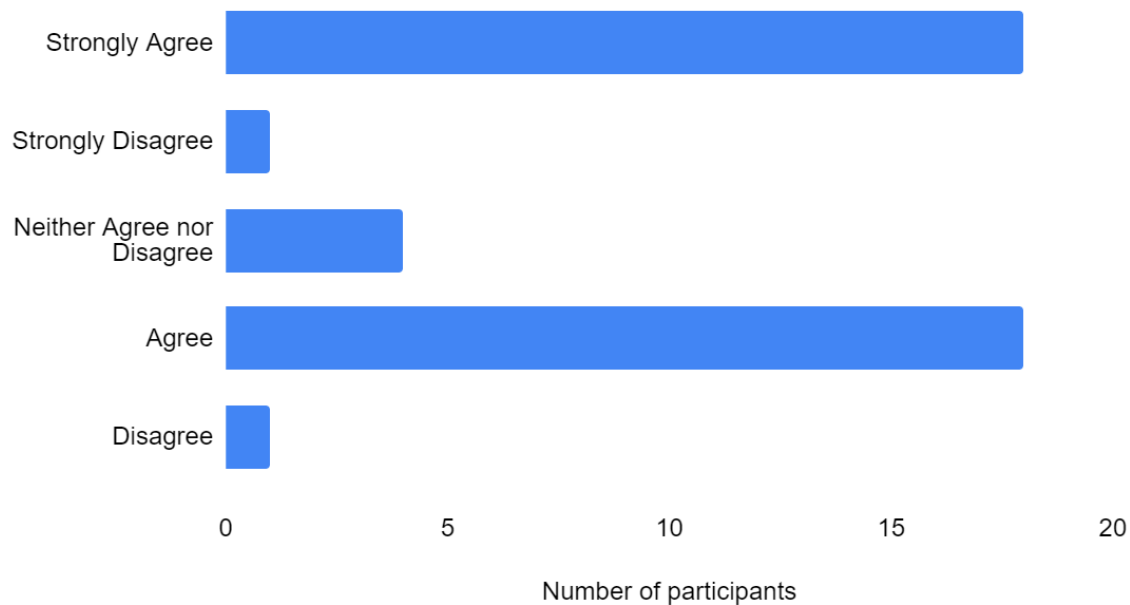
*Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral: If a student in my class has a low Lexile score, math score, or SBAC score, I should refer the student for special education.*



Participant answers to the question that teachers should exhaust every classroom support and teaching strategy before making a referral to special education resulted 42.9% for those who agree and those that strongly agree (Figure 4.21).

**Figure 4.21**

*Perceptions on Interventions and Special Education Referral:* General Education teachers should exhaust every classroom support and teaching strategy before referring a middle school student for special education assessment



Participants were asked if middle school students who continue to struggle academically, behaviorally, or social-emotionally (based upon teacher observation) cannot be supported enough in general education and should be referred for Special Education services. 31% disagreed and 31% neither agreed nor disagreed (Figure 4.22).

**Figure 4.22**

*Perceptions on Special Education Referral: Middle School students who continue to struggle academically, behaviorally, or social-emotionally (based upon teacher observation), cannot be supported enough in general education and should be referred for Special Education services*

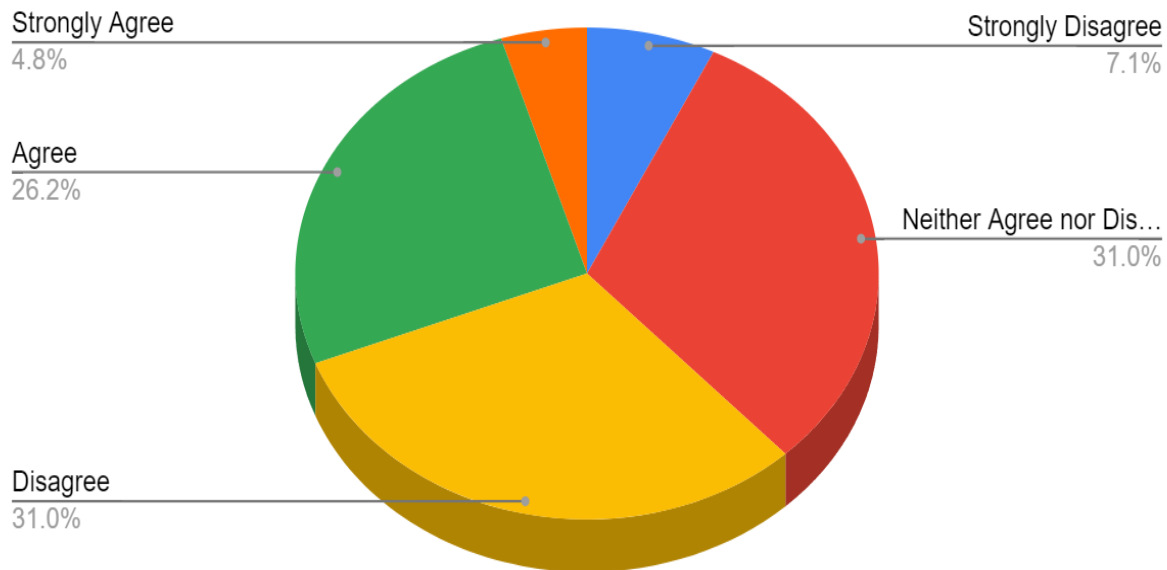


Table 4.25 shows the results of a Social-Emotional Intervention Observation. This observation used the Intervention Observation form shown in Chapter 3.

**Table 4.25**

*Intervention Implementation Observations*

Number of intervention items observed	N	%
Social-Emotional Intervention	6	87.5

The role and number of years of experience in education for all educator focus group members are described with participants' responses to Question 1 (Table 4.26).

**Table 4.26**

*Question 1: What is your Role at the School, and how many years have you worked in education?*

---

Participant 1	I'm a math teacher here, math seven. I've been part of education now for 11 years.
Participant 2	I have been a part of education for I guess two and a half years and my role here is a science teacher and the ASB teacher.
Participant 3	I'm the special education coordinator and I have been in education for 24 years.
Participant 4	I'm the school psychologist and I've been in education for about 25 years.
Participant 5	I'm an instructional aid here at Santiago and I've been here 2 years now.
Participant 6	I'm an education specialist and I've been in education for five years.
Participant 7	I've been in education for seven years and I am a seventh and eighth grade history teacher and I am almost hopefully an education specialist if my credential application goes through.
Participant 8	I have been in education for 20 years. I'm at Disneyland so I apologize. And I'm the assistant principal here.

---

Two educators' provided feedback on their perceptions of the referral process for special education in detail (Table 4.27).



**Table 4.27**

*Question 2: Describe the referral process for a special education referral.*

Participant 6	<p>Okay, so when we get initials for an IEP, what basically the process is there's usually a teacher or a parent suspicion for suspected disability and they'll send out a meeting request to just as a team come together as an SST- One second.</p> <p>So, they'll request some sort of student support team meeting and we'll hold an SST meeting and then we'll discuss concerns, document supports or recommended supports that we can put in place to support this student. We try to implement supports for six weeks before kind of reevaluating how it worked if they were successful or not. At times we have no reason to not move forward with assessment. So, there are a few cases where it's clear that we need to do something to begin the assessment process right away. And in those circumstances we'll get a signed assessment plan. We usually still meet as an SST team and in that meeting we'll sign an assessment plan and then that's usually how it starts. So, it's either parent request or teacher request. We try to have that meeting and we try to document supports first, but there are certain circumstances where that is not applicable and we move forward right away.</p>
Participant 3	<p>we also know our legal responsibility if we feel that a parent is requesting consideration, that it doesn't have to be a formal request or anything in writing, that it is on our um-It is our responsibility to help that family get that request properly responded to. Sometimes families will allude to it and they're not really sure what they're asking for but we feel like we are and so we help them through that process.</p>

Question three focuses on educator perceptions on how the changes they have seen in students who are receiving Tier 2 supports (Table 4.28).

**Table 4.28**

*Question 3: Of the students that are receiving tier two interventions such as Friday School, mentoring, support classes, or gear n up, what changes have you seen in their behaviors or in their work habits?*

Participant 7	I can speak to that a little bit since I, I'm involved in Friday school. I think that once there's a student who's been placed in Friday school and they know that they're in Friday school, they know that they have a little bit of extra pressure on them to get things done. And I don't want to say that they're singled out, but I do want- I do feel like they do act differently because for some of them they know that they can't get out of Friday school because they just have too many assignments to make up and some of them are really in the middle. So, the ones that are in the middle, I do see a big change because they're rushing to get work, turned in to they're teachers, they don't need to go. And then the ones who are kind of stuck there, they know that they can get extra support in Friday school, there's a little bit of resignation, but they do know that there's now a place where no matter what, they're going to be getting the support. So, for the ones who are on the cusp of being in Friday school, they know that they're more motivated to get work in and those who are already stuck in it, they know that they can use it to their benefit.
Participant 6	I can think of a few students offhand who just having that adult whose kind of mentoring them, whether that's the gearing up or a specific support class with the specific teacher pairing that it's just like come full circle. There's been a few kids where we were just like, I think they just need a person on campus kind of checking in with them. And I can think of one student who last year he was just a total pain, was constantly getting in trouble in class out of class, couldn't seem to make a good decision. And this year he's getting all A's and B's really proud of himself. His attendance has improved, he's in class, he's awesome a lot of the time. He's one of the first ones done with his work. And just that confidence built and that's a student on an I E P and then I can think of a few kids off of an I E P that I've seen in Friday school or who are in other support classes and just having that person checking in with them, just this confidence that really has helped them be successful.
Participant 2	I just wanted to add also that I think that these supports that we have created a lot of more self-advocates on campus. Like I have students now asking me more for help or what they can do and reaching out more. Some students from the beginning of the year that might have not reached out to me now do, and I think that

has a lot to do with these supports like we have Friday school and everything like that.

Participant 8

With preparing for the SBAC , what we did was we, each teacher chose about 10 students per for the morning session and 10 students for the afternoon session that we want to have tests in our classroom that we just know we have a strong relationship with or they you know- or students can request who they want to work with as well. Just noted who they seem to work best with. But just that mentor relationship we've found to be really successful overall. So, we're even doing that as we prepare for the SBAC.

Question four provides educator insight into perceptions about the training that staff members receive on interventions in academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning (Table 4.29).

**Table 4.29**

*Question 4: How are staff members trained to provide academic, behavioral, or social-emotional interventions and often?*

Participant 4

I feel like it's almost just kind of a continual process that goes on throughout the year. We don't just sit down one time and for example, special ed identification. We don't just say, okay, here's what we do, here's the steps and be done. I mean they have the multi-tiered systems and we have like the PBIS, the social emotional learning, like all of that stuff is kind of ongoing throughout the school year in different respects. I mean sometimes they are; you know we're having a formal staff meeting and there's some sort of training or something. But I think that the pieces are incorporated just throughout kind of the day-to-day process of how the school runs.

Participant 9

So, for the last few years actually on campus and our staff meetings, the focus has been MTSS and that has been a huge component in almost every staff meeting that we've had for probably the last two to three years. And up until recently, gearing up for the SBAC, we've had some element of training in MTSS, some training and social emotional learning that we've been implementing in our classroom with these second step lessons, social emotional lessons that usually connect from class to class to class. So, each department's responsible for about three of these lessons a year, making a total of 12 or something like

Participant 1

that for the entire year between all the departments. So, it, it's fairly regular, just like Participant 4 was saying, this ongoing process

Well, they pretty much hit it. I was just going to say I feel like at least once a month we're doing something what we're learning you know formally in a meeting, kind of touching up on either the behavior, SEL, or academic focus. But I think there's also a lot of, as there is in schools, a lot of back and forth between departments or I know the special ed department has helped me outside of meetings tremendously. Just like Participant 8 has helped me outside of department meetings when I'm really trying to focus in and zero in on some of the SBAC using data and then collecting more data and just kind of using that to feed my instruction. And we just do a lot of social-emotional focus. And I know being a math teacher at points, it could be a little bit frustrating, but I do realize at this age, not a lot of the kids are going to remember how to do one step rational inequalities. But every student does need to know how to cope with their emotions and how to deal with that. And then that whole mentor focus that we were saying earlier that we're building with kids, I think we hit on that a lot too. I know that the Dots activity that I think that Counselor 4 and team put together, it really brought a focus on, hey, how many of these kids maybe we're not reaching out to or there's a teacher missing. And I think that a lot of us put it on our own shoulders as we should to try to connect with kids that feel like they're not connect-being connected with. But every meeting that we do, I feel like is focused on one of these different types of interventions, even if it's not like formally this is an intervention.

---

Several detailed descriptions of perceptions on the SST process are described by several participant educators (Table 4.30).

**Table 4.30**

*Question 5: Describe your views on Student Study Team Meetings (SSTs). How are they structured? What is the purpose? How effective are these meetings in developing supports for students?*

Participant 8	So, the SST process is along the same lines as the MTSS method of putting supports in place before we jump the gun with what we're doing for our students. So, the intention behind that is to answer the question of what are we doing for our students before we jump to assess them for special education. Of the student and spend some time thinking about whether or not those support they're working, talking to their peers, talking to other team members for looking for suggestions. And then after that six weeks or so of time, if things are still not working, then we can look to more serious support. So, the theory behind it is that we are not trying to just assess students every other day and or provide, you know give them a label of special ed when they don't need that because we know that there's a lot of students who can have their met without having to be assessed for special education
Participant 7	I just don't know specifically where the delineation is between the formal process and the informal cause that's just always how I've done it in the past couple kids that I've had.
Participant 4	Me coming from, I'm not in the classroom. A lot of times if there's an SST request, we've done some things like Participant 7 was saying leading up to it, let's try this, let's call home. But having the SST I get all of the feedback from the teachers. They're the ones who see them on a daily basis and know their work production, their motivation, their ability to process information. Sometimes they just look at me and they have a blank stare. Those are all things that I don't know, I typically don't know these kids prior to this process. But I think it also helps to you know collaborate with families as well. And we have a lot of things set up at the school after school tutoring and supported classes and a lot of things put in place. And also, so we're not over identifying for special education too because low cognition doesn't necessarily mean a learning disability, so to speak. So, there's a lot of those things that go on with just the process and trying to figure out.
Participant 2	I just wanted to add my perspective on the SST as a general education teacher. So, I just want to say that the whole process to me feels very like organized and collaborative. There's a whole process to it because before we are asked to fill out a Google form and then during that in which we give all of our notice strengths and areas of growth for the student. And then in the

meeting when the meeting is actually scheduled, I like how a lot of members are there, there's general education teachers, there's other staff members, family members. And so, it's kind of multiple perspectives on that student, which I really like. It's really interesting, especially because I'm just viewing the students strengths and weaknesses in a general education classroom. And I can tell also during the meeting that all the feedback from the teachers has been read and is taken under consideration during the meeting. And then after the meeting we get a copy of the notes and are asked to review and sign it. And so, I like to then look back at the notes to look at anything I might have missed or forgotten to help me help the student.

Participant 6

And I think this is a perfect example of the two different processes and how they kind of relate because this year Counselor 4's really been trying to implement the round table. So, it's like the pre-meeting, which is exactly what Participant 7 was talking about. And I think some teachers, like he said, he takes the lead on that and so he will contact home. I was telling him the other day, I've never seen someone contact so many parents, which is great. you know so it's, you have some teachers who really are great about that, those first steps and initiating that themselves. And then there's other teachers who don't want to take the lead on that. And so, the kids will sometimes fall through the cracks because they don't want to be initiating those emails or those phone calls home on the round table. So then when it comes to the SST time, we don't have a lot of background and Counselor 4 can do as much as she can as the council in facilitating that. But there are definitely holes I think in this process if we're looking at where we as a school can continue to improve. I know we've been in countless SST meetings where there's four of us there and the kid has eight teachers and I'm not one of them. You know what I mean? So, I think we really need to improve in this area, which is why I was interested to hear everyone else's feedback. There's certain teachers who will be at every single meeting and that's why they're here right now because again, they're willing to do extra, but some teachers won't even come to the SST and they're the ones who might have expressed concerns to begin with. So, I think this is an area where we really do need to improve. But again, I do love the round table process when it's being used. I don't think it's being used on a whole scale though.

---

Question six asks educators how interventions are monitored and about who monitors their effectiveness (Table 4.31).

**Table 4.31**

*Question 6: How are Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions monitored? Who monitors if the intervention is working?*

---

Participant 9	So as one of the teachers that's usually involved in the mix, we tend to get an evaluation form prior to the SST that asks us what our viewpoints are on the kids, where the areas of strengths and weaknesses are at to answer them just candidly as best as possible. So that way when we get to the SST, they have a baseline. And then following that, we'll usually have a form that comes to us a couple of weeks, maybe a month after the interventions have been tried to see if they're working and ask us to rate them according to a percentage scale. And once we've done that, then all of that usually gets fed back to the case manager or gets fed back to either Counselor 4 or Participant 6 or Participant 4 or Participant 3. And then they'll usually approach us. Now I'm a history teacher so I don't tend to get a whole lot of information back because the kids don't stress or worry too much about history. It's usually with math or English that we tend to see some of those like extra supports needed. But I do get the forms on a regular basis and I know that they are being read just like I think maybe Participant 6 was mentioning a minute ago.
Participant 3	I think as far as tier three, we all know that you know it because of the IDEA and Ed Code law tier three is monitored just inherently because of the internal you know monitoring requirements that we have. And I think that's where we're really trying to, as a whole on campus, really press into tier one and two and not have tier three be the only intervention that we provide. And I think that we're doing a good job. I do think that that's the vision that everybody has is recognizing the value of fortifying tier one and two and that there is a place for tier three interventions, but it's not the only intervention. And so, I think that we're doing a better job. I think that it is a very organic process as it should be. And I certainly think that the pandemic, it has had a significant impact on the world as a whole and especially when we're looking at those interventions at that tier one and tier two level. But at the three level, you know the monitoring is embedded because of our responsibility to adhere to federal and state law. But one and two, I think we are being a lot more intentional. And the monitoring is a team effort. It's all the way from administration to staff to office staff to related service provider. It's a whole approach.
Participant 6	And we have two different teams that are looking at it. So, we have a tier one team and this year we're, we were a lot more focused I think on the tier two cause we were going through a lot

---

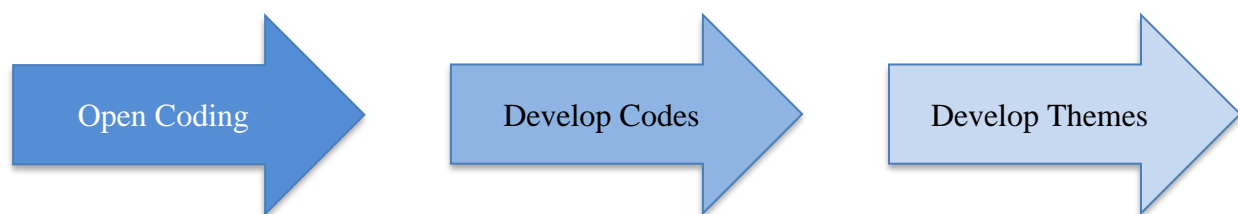
of trainings for that. But it was PBIS, MTSS, we have an MTSS team, we also have a PBIS team. So, it's kind of like we're all trying to look at it from different angles and a lot of it falls on Counselor 4 and Counselor 1 and Participant 8 and the Assistant Principal are who does discipline. So as a team we try to support and there's a lot of teachers as a part of that team. But I do think it falls a lot on like our administrators and counseling team, an office team who are inputting all the data too. And then the teachers implementing the supports. I know Participant 1 does a lot for a lot of those kids too and things like that.

---

The qualitative data collected through an educator focus group was analyzed through open coding to determine various codes and themes (Figure 4.23 ).

**Figure 4.23**

*Thematic Analysis Diagram*



### **Focus Group**

The process led the researcher to five categories that represent staff perceptions of the special education referral process (Table 4.32).



**Table 4.32***Evolving Themes from Staff Focus Group on Special Education Referral*

Evolving Themes	
Themes	Codes
Collaboration with an educational team	Staff Cooperation/Involvement, Working with families, Collaboration with teachers/support staff, SST
Behavior Change	Accountability, Motivation, Attendance
Relationship Building	Building connections
Positive Perception	Positive perception
Knowledge of the Referral Process	Knowledge of special education referral process

### Summary

The data presented in the chapter reveals the impacts of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional early interventions on at-risk middle school students, based on student outcome data, implementation data, and perception data. Quantitative data was analyzed using univariate analysis and qualitative data was analyzed through a computerized program called Delve. The impacts of these early interventions on the need for initial evaluation for special education was also researched. When examining academic and behavioral interventions, the research showed a reduction the number of Ds and Fs, along with a reduction in most behavioral infractions, after interventions were implemented with fidelity. Staff responses regarding these interventions were overall positive on their perceptions of the intervention process and the ability for students to receive support. Social-emotional interventions also yielded positive perceptions from the

counseling team, along with improvements in student outcomes and perceptions after receiving social-emotional Tier 2 support. Data collected on the impacts of these interventions and the need for initial evaluation for special education services saw a reduction in initial assessments and qualifications when Tier 2 interventions were implemented.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This study focused on the impacts of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional early interventions on at-risk middle schoolers in a suburban Southern California town. The study also examined the impacts of these interventions and the need for an initial assessment for special education. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of key research findings, answers to research questions, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research. Forty-two middle school educators completed a Likert scale survey to provide perception data regarding staff knowledge of interventions, staff implementation of interventions, student access to further interventions, and the effectiveness of interventions provided. The counseling department provided interviews about social-emotional interventions and supports. A focus group of nine educators, including teachers, education specialists, support staff, and administrators, provided perception data surrounding the special education process and Tier 2 supports. Student outcome data, including grades, discipline data, and group counseling data, was collected. Implementation data was gleaned from intervention observation. Results of this study showed an increase in student outcome data when interventions were provided, with fidelity. This chapter details the results of the study.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study aimed to determine the impacts of interventions on at-risk middle schoolers, using the MTSS framework. Research by Eagle et al. (2015) shows that the need for restrictive interventions can be ameliorated by using the MTSS framework. This framework allows for students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs to be met, systematically and effectively, through one comprehensive system. Using convenience sampling and a convergent parallel design for data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected

simultaneously. All research was conducted at a suburban middle school of approximately 1,100 students, in Southern California. Of the 70 employees of the school, 44 staff members completed a Likert scale survey to provide perception data on all three research questions. Counseling department interviews and an educator focus group were also conducted to provide further perception data. Intervention observations were performed to gain implementation data. Secondary data was used to determine student outcomes, before and after interventions were implemented.

Darling and Cook (2018) present research supporting an increase in academic outcomes when students are provided with the proper supports. Barriers to learning can also be reduced when there is a focus on supporting all the needs of a child, including social-emotional and behavioral needs (Bal, 2018; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Sugai et al., 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2022). Research by Mcloughlin and Noltemeyer (2012) reminds educators to be mindful of the disproportionate identification of students requiring special education, including placements within special education. The Every Student Succeeds Act encourages the use of tiered levels of support for all students (Bohanon, et al., 2021). This further perpetuates the notion of providing early interventions to decrease the overidentification of special education services. The findings in this dissertation support the parameters of ESSA and previous research on the effectiveness of tiered levels of supporting the whole child.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The researcher arrived at conclusions to each research question, using the data presented in Chapter 4.

## Question One

*What is the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions on Academically and Behaviorally At-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?*

Student outcome data shows a 32.4% reduction in the number of Fs earned by students, after academic interventions were implemented, including both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. Additionally, data showed an increase in Ds, by 58.3%, Cs by 36.7%, and Bs, by 23%. The Tier 2 academic intervention implemented was Friday School. Friday School is a targeted academic intervention for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who have failed one or more classes during their time in Middle School. Students are picked up from their last period class by a staff member and escorted to the Library. Once school ends and most students have cleared the campus, Friday School teachers arrive in the Library to collect their assigned group of students. Teachers then take their small group of students, typically around 15, to a separate classroom for a two hour block on targeted academic intervention. Students have direction for weekly instruction on study skills, followed by independent homework time. Teachers monitor student assignments and grades, along with providing small group or individual re-teaching. This intervention was put in place for the five weeks between the middle to end of the grading period.

Discipline data shows that the total number of Major Discipline Referrals remained the same, but Minor Discipline Referrals totals were reduced by 0.8% from the 2021-2022 school year to the 2022-2023 School Year. Although there was not a significant reduction in overall discipline referrals post-intervention, research shows a reduction in the number of behavioral infractions in 20 of the 42 types of behavioral infractions when comparing weeks one to twelve of the 2021-2022 school year and weeks one to twelve of the 2022-2023 school year. The main Tier 2 intervention consisted of the Behavior Intervention Class, for a separate boys and girls

class. Intervention focused on leadership skills, responsible decision making, team building, and self-esteem. Along with the teacher, the counseling department supported these students by providing bi-monthly group counseling and restorative circles. Data collected in this study confirms the findings of Darling and Cook's (2018) that show when sufficient supports are put in place and student deficits are intentionally supported, positive academic outcomes should increase. Data collected in this study indicate that intentional interventions do have a positive impact on the increase in grades and reduction of discipline infractions.

Staff members were surveyed to gain insight into their perceptions regarding Tier 1 and Tier 2 Interventions. Responses indicate that 76.2% strongly agree or agree that most staff members know and understand Tier 1 academic supports and 54.8 % believe that most teachers implement Tier 1 academic supports consistently. When asked about the success of Tier 1 academic interventions, 65.3% agreed or strongly agreed that these interventions are successful for most students. The majority of staff members (95.2%) believe that those students who need extra academic support, are provided with interventions. Of those who participate in additional interventions, 78.6% of staff members believe these interventions have shown positive effects on students, improving academic skills and outcomes. Staff perceptions regarding behavior supports indicate that 92.8% believe that most staff members understand school-wide behavior interventions, yet only 85.8% believe that most staff members teach or have knowledge about these school-wide behavior expectations. When students require additional behavioral support, 97.6% of staff members believe that support is provided, but only 73.8% of those staff members believe those supports are effective. Implementation data shows a high observation of essential elements of a successful intervention. This data indicates a strong knowledge and process for academic and behavioral supports, but the perception of the effectiveness of these supports is not

as strong. It appears that many staff members do not believe that their peers are implementing interventions effectively or at all. This could also indicate that the intervention did not fit the students' needs. Observations on the behavioral intervention of the behavioral intervention class (Gear N Up) were conducted, with a 87% implementation rate. The Gear N Up class consists for those with multiple behavioral infractions; boys and girls class; intervention class aims to build community, positive staff relationships, self-esteem, leadership skills; bi-monthly counseling support.

Qualitative data from counseling department interviews indicate positive perceptions on academic interventions, from a non-teacher perspective. One participant shares "... now [students are] coming up and telling us that they're really excited they're passing all their class, or that they got one of their grades up, and you know they're excited to share that. So, I think grades are improving." Another counseling department staff member states "... I do think this trimester is going to be different, just because they did include more study skills lessons." Overall, perception and implementation data show positive impacts on academic and behavioral student outcomes for at-risk middle school students.

## **Question Two**

*How do Tier 1 and 2 interventions impact social-emotionally at-risk middle schoolers, as measured by student outcome, perception, and implementation data?*

Quantitative data shows that expected student outcomes increase after interventions are provided. School-wide the Dots activity data shows an increase in staff-student relationships when intentional relationship-building strategies were implemented. The Dots activity included all staff members. A giant poster including names of all students attending the school was displayed in the office hallway. Staff members were tasked to place a colored sticker, or dot,

next to the name of each student whom they believed to have built a relationship with, meaning they knew something personal about the student such as their favorite hobby, activity, or something about their home life. This information was analyzed and a focus group of students that did not receive dots was presented to staff. Staff members were tasked with building connections with these students, in particular. After six weeks, the Dots activity was redone, to analyze progress in building staff-student connections. The data showed a decrease of 17.7% in students with no dots earned during the Dots activity or those who staff members have not made personal connections with, from the fall to the winter trimesters (Figure 4.6). There was decrease of 56.7% in student visits to the counseling center after Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions were put in place. (Figure 4.8). Counseling groups were formed to further meet students' needs. Through the Minute Meetings data, counseling attendance data, and referrals, students who exhibited a need for social skills support were selected to participate in small group counseling, to focus on learning skills to make and maintain healthy, positive friendships. The friendship group (Figure 4.10 through Figure 4.16) showed increases in expected outcomes. These include knowing how to start conversations with new people, which fall into with 57.1% in the strongly agreed category, and knowing what a healthy friendship looks likes, which yielded a 42.7% increase in those that agreed.

Staff survey results provided perception data on staff views on the knowledge, attitudes, and effectiveness of social-emotional interventions. Of those surveyed, 78.6% strongly agreed or agreed that most staff members understand the five core competencies of social-emotional learning. Although 88% strongly agree or agree that social-emotional learning is important to academic success, educators believe that counselors and parents should be responsible for



teaching these skills. Survey results also show that most educators believe that students are effectively provided with Tier 2 supports, when struggling socially-emotionally.

Qualitative data was collected through counseling department interviews. Four themes were yielded from these interviews: building connections, positive perception, data-driven supports, and student outcome improvements. Results show that data is used to drive decisions regarding which students need more support. One participant shares that “the goal is always to have it be data-driven... We’ve really tried to use our... tier one interventions to fuel tier 2..” When looking at perceptions of Tier 2 supports, in the form of group counseling, Participant B shares:

But I look to see like, are they learning a new skill? Are they learning new attitudes... and beliefs, and can we like measure those things? So, like in my anxiety group I'm doing right now, like we're working on coping skills, so that's like something tangible that they can take with them. And hopefully the outcome will be that they leave the group, knowing how to do something that they didn't it previously know before, or to cope in a way that they didn't before but I also think one of the biggest outcomes of groups is like that community aspect of feeling like you're not alone in whatever the context is like somebody else is going through what you're going through, and that you guys are learning together. I always think that's like a really powerful part of groups, too.

Participant A stated that “We kind of had our making friends and our anxiety group, and a lot of those students are very similar. So, I think they kind of bonded and connected over that... “

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative data show that when social-emotional interventions are implemented with fidelity and positive perceptions, they result in positive student outcomes.

### Question Three

*How does a Multi-Tiered System of Support impact the need for an initial evaluation for special education services for At-risk middle schoolers?*

Data collected in this study indicates a reduction in the need for initial evaluation for special education services, when Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, using the MTSS framework, are implemented with fidelity. Quantitative student outcome data (Table 4.21) shows a 13.5% reduction in the number of students who were referred for an initial assessment for special education. Data also shows that 62.5% of academically, behaviorally, and/or social-emotionally at-risk students saw success with general education interventions in the 2022-2023 school year. This is an increase of 12.5% from the previous school year. Staff perceptions from an educator survey suggested that 88.1% staff members believe that students have success in targeted interventions (Table 4.22). When asked if students were properly matched with appropriate interventions for their needs, 80.9% of staff members agreed or strongly agreed. When observing a social-emotional intervention, 87.5% of targeted goals were observed. This shows the intervention was implemented with fidelity.

Qualitative perception data was gathered to answer this research question c through an educator focus group and included nine educators in roles of general education teachers, special education teachers, instructional aides, student support staff, and administrators. Five evolving themes emerged from this focus group: collaboration with an educational team, behavior change, relationship building, positive perception, and knowledge of the referral process. Focus Group Participant 1 shares, *But I think there's also a lot of, as there is in schools, a lot of back and forth between departments [Participant 8] has helped me outside of department meetings.* Participant 8 speaks about the collaboration through SST meetings and says, *...we'll hold an SST meeting*

*and then we'll discuss concerns, document supports or recommend supports that we put in place to support this student.* Behavior change was discussed by most of the participants of the focus group. Staff members have seen academic, behavioral, and social-emotional growth from Tier 2 interventions. Participant 6 provides an example of behavior changes seen amongst students:

There's been a few kids where we were just like, I think they just need a person on campus kind of checking in with them. And I can think of one student who last year he was just a total pain, was constantly getting in trouble in class out of class, couldn't seem to make a good decision. And this year he's getting all A's and B's really proud of himself. His attendance has improved, he's in class, he's awesome a lot of the time. He's one of the first ones done with his work.

As a result of these behavior changes, there has been a change in relationship building between staff and students. Participant 2 shares that *these supports that we have created a lot of more self-advocates on campus. Like I have students now asking me for more help or what they can do and reaching out more.* Throughout the focus group, there was an overall positive perception of the supports that have been provided for students. This has been shown with positive comments about practices, supports, and their effectiveness. Knowledge of the special process is apparent during this focus group. The group appears to understand the first steps on the process, with Participant 6 expressing,

*We'll hold an SST meeting and then we'll discuss concerns, document supports or recommended supports that we can put in place to support this student. We try to implement supports for six weeks before kind of reevaluating how it worked if they were successful or not. At times we have no reason to not move forward with the assessment.*

Participant 3 adds, *We also know our legal responsibility....it is our responsibility to help that family get that request properly responded to.* These mixed measures show that properly implemented early interventions can reduce the number of middle school students who are referred to special education.

### **Implications for Practice**

Data collected through this study shows that early interventions, implemented with fidelity, can effectively support students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. If the MTSS framework and features are properly implemented, especially the Whole Child Domain, a reduction in the need for initial referral to special education services will decrease. In practice, providing early interventions can also reduce the number of students who are initially referred to and assessed for special education in middle school. Most often, these student needs are effectively and promptly addressed through early interventions, when implemented with fidelity. Perception data showed that although most staff members understand Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, interventions were implemented school wide. Based upon research conducted in this study, students were properly referred for further intervention, when needed. Outcome data shows that for students who participate in Tier 2 interventions, that were provided with fidelity, an increase in expected behaviors was seen.

As a school counselor, the data collected in this study provides valuable information that can be applied to current practices, to better support the needs of students. Effective school counselors must work collaboratively with a variety of school community members (ASCA, 2019). The knowledge gained from educator perspectives on Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports, as well as effective implementation of these interventions is essential to the daily work that counselors perform. The American School Counselor Association's Mindsets and Beliefs for School

Counseling focus on standards to meet student success in the domains of academics, social-emotional, and college/career. Aligned with MTSS, school counselors can use the conclusions derived from this study to build a Multi-Tiered, Multi-Domain System of Support for counseling departments. The focus on implementing early interventions to reduce the amount of need for further counseling interventions should be implemented in each domain of school counseling. Counselors should also focus on implementation data to ensure the fidelity of interventions provided, to maximize success.

### **Implications for Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model (1979) and its focus on youth behaviors being influenced by their family, peers, and surrounding community relates to the MTSS framework and tiered levels of support for students. Golden and Earp (2002) share that environmental changes or social relationships should determine change, as behaviors change in these settings. Dulaney and Hallman (2013) state that MTSS aims to create integrated models to support all students' needs through school-wide support systems, thus, changing the learning environment to better support the needs of students. Golden and Earp (2012) remind readers that behavior change comes from multi-levels of interventions. This goes hand in hand with the premises of MTSS and its focus on an integrated model of tiered levels of support (Eagle et al., 2015).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations in this study revolved around the research design. Implementation data was collected through observations of three Tier 2 interventions, one academic, one behavioral, and one social-emotional. The researcher chose not to collect further implementation data through a larger observation sample or qualitative data such as interviews or open-ended surveys. This also

included data on intervention pieces of training provided to teachers or the intervention provider. These limitations did not compromise the integrity of the research.

Delimitations involved the number of educators who completed the survey. Out of 75 educators targeted, 42 chose to participate in the survey. Participants were emailed the survey link and Informed Consent form. Since the survey was anonymous, it was challenging to send reminders to those who did not participate or to determine if multiple responses from the same participant were submitted. Only half the number of teachers at the school submitted survey responses. The researcher hoped to have more teachers participate in the survey so that more teacher input was collected.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

It is recommended that further research focus on the implementation of interventions of both Tier 1 and Tier 2. Based on the research in this study, there seems to be a disconnect between the training and universal implementation of interventions. This study examined a sample of interventions. Although an increase in student outcome data was seen with this sample, perhaps a greater increase would occur with better implementation of interventions. Further research on a wider range of intervention implementations should be considered. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies examine professional development that is provided for interventions to see if this factor would increase the fidelity and follow-through of Tier 1 and Tier interventions.

Further research is also suggested around special education re-evaluation. This study focused on MTSS's impacts on the need for initial evaluation, but there may be different results when looking at the re-evaluation of students already receiving special education services. Research may include current and past teacher feedback, as well as feedback on previously

implemented interventions. Additional research may include initial and triennial review data, including academic and psycho-educational input. This may further support the concern of over-identifying students who require special education services and inappropriate special education services and placement (McLoughlin & Noltemeyer, 2012).

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study shows that when students who are identified as needing additional supports are provided with early interventions most academic, behavioral and social emotional needs can be met within the general education setting. Most educators believe that it important to support behavioral and social-emotional needs, as they are connected to academic success. Middle School educators are knowledgeable in the unique needs of middle school students and are willing to implement schoolwide, Tier 1 supports in all domains. This study also shows that most educators believe that Tier 2, target supports, can be successful for most students and are willing to collaborate with other school community members. With proper implementation of interventions, students who need more support can thrive in the general education setting and will not require special education service.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, R. M., McKenna, J. W., & Mitchell, B. (2019). Supporting all students: Creating a tiered continuum of behavior support at the classroom level to enhance schoolwide multi-tiered systems of support. *Preventing School Failure*, 63(1), Article 1.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2018.1501654>
- Alessi, E. J., & Kahn, S. (2019). Using psychodynamic interventions to engage in trauma-informed practice. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 33(1), 27–39.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/02650533.2017.1400959>
- American School Counselor Association. (2019). ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs (4th ed.). *American School Counselor Association*.
- Anderson-Ketchmark, C., & Alvarez, M. E. (2010). The School Social Work Skill Set and Positive Behavior Support: A Good Match. *Children & Schools*, 32(1), 61–63.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/cs/32.1.61>
- Anyon, Y., Atteberry-Ash, B., Yang, J., Pauline, M., Wiley, K., Cash, D., Downing, B., Greer, E., & Pisciotta, L. (2018). It's All about the Relationships": Educators' Rationales and Strategies for Building Connections with Students to Prevent Exclusionary School Discipline Outcomes. *Children & Schools*, 40(4), 221–230.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/cs/cdy017>
- Ardasheva, Y., Newcomer, S. N., Ernst-Slavit, G., Morrison, S. J., Morrison, J. A., Carbonneau, K. J., & Lightner, L. K. (2019). Decision-making practices of experienced upper elementary teachers during small group instruction to support English learners. *Elementary School Journal*, 120(1), 88–108.
- Iowa Department of Education.. (2022). *At risk*. Iowa Department of Education.



<https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/learner-supports/risk>

Austin, L. J., Parnes, M. K. F., Jarjoura, G. R., Keller, T. E., Herrera, C., Tanyu, M., & Schwartz, S. E. O. (2020). Connecting youth: The role of mentoring approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence: A Multidisciplinary Research Publication*, 49(12), 2409–2428.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01320-z>

Barrett, C. A., & Newman, D. S. (2018). Examining MTSS Implementation Across Systems for SLD Identification: A Case Study. *School Psychology Forum*, 12(1), 30–43.

Belfield, C., Bowden, A., Klapp, A., Levin, H., Shand, R., & Zander, S. (2015). The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning. *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, 6(3), 508-544.  
doi:10.1017/bca.2015.55

Berger, E., & Martin, K. (2021). Embedding trauma-informed practice within the education sector. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 31(2), 223–227.

<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/casp.2494>

Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2014). Principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities (CEEDAR Document No. IC-8). University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center. <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>

Bleak, K., Hogue, L., Abernathy, T. & Oikonomidoy, E. (2019). Overcoming Disproportionality, One Teacher at a Time. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 30(1), 34-37.

Bohanon, H., Wahnschaff, A., Flaherty, P., & Ferguson, K. (2018). Leading Schools Under Pressure: Considerations of Systems Theory and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support Efforts During School Actions. *School Community Journal*, 28(1), 195–216.

- Bohanon, H. S., Wu, M.-J., Kushki, A., LeVesseur, C., Harms, A., Vera, E., Carlson-Sanei, J., & Shriberg, D. (2021). The role of school improvement planning in the implementation of MTSS in secondary schools. *Preventing School Failure*, 65(3), 230–242.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1908215>
- Booker, K., & Mitchell, A. (2011). Patterns in Recidivism and Discretionary Placement in Disciplinary Alternative Education: The Impact of Gender, Ethnicity, Age, and Special Education Status. *Education and Treatment of Children* 34(2), 193-208. [doi:10.1353/etc.2011.0016](https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2011.0016).
- Bouton, B., McConnell, J. R., Barquero, L. A., Gilbert, J. K., & Compton, D. L. (2018). Upside-Down Response to Intervention: A Quasi-Experimental Study. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 33(4), 229–236.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/ldrp.12171>
- Bradshaw, C. P. (2013). Preventing Bullying through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): A Multitiered Approach to Prevention and Integration. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(4), 288–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2013.829732>
- Brenner, D. (2016). Rural educator policy brief: Rural Education and the Every Student Succeeds Act. *Rural Educator*, 37(2), 23–27.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brown, C.A., & Tillio, C.D. (2013). Discipline Disproportionality among Hispanic and American Indian Students: Expanding the Discourse in U.S. Research. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2, 47-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v2n4p47>
- Bursuck, B., & Blanks, B. (2010). Evidence-based early reading practices within a Response to

- Intervention system. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(5), 421–431.
- Caballero, C., Scherer, E., West, M. R., Mrazek, M. D., Gabrieli, C. F. O., & Gabrieli, J. D. E. (2019). Greater Mindfulness Is Associated with Better Academic Achievement in Middle School. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 13(3), 157–166.
- California School Dashboard (CA Dept of Education). (2022). Retrieved December 22, 2022, <https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/30666216085328/2022>
- Cárdenas-Hagan, E. (2019). Dyslexia identification within a response to instruction and intervention model: Have we fulfilled our promise. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 45(1), 29-32.
- Carlson, L. A., & Kees, N. L. (2013). Mental Health Services in Public Schools: A Preliminary Study of School Counselor Perceptions. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X150160401>
- CASEL - CASEL. (2022). Retrieved June 17, 2021 <https://casel.org/>
- Cook SC and Rao K. Systematically Applying UDL to Effective Practices for Students With Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 41(3):179-191.  
doi:10.1177/0731948717749936
- Core Components-Rtl2—Multi-Tiered System of Supports (CA Dept of Education). (2020). Retrieved January 2, 2023 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/rticorecomponents.asp>
- Coughlin Dan. 1997. The Person with a Learning Disability as a Minority Group Member. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 30(5):572–75. doi: 10.1177/002221949703000514.
- Center on PBIS. (2022). <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-1>
- Center on PBIS. (2022). <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/tier-2>

- Chitiyo, J., May, M. E., Mathende, A. M., & Dzenga, C. G. (2019). The relationship between school personnel's confidence with using the school-wide positive behaviour intervention support model and its sustainability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(3), 232–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12445>
- Choi, J. H., McCart, A. B., Miller, D. H., & Sailor, W. (2022). Issues in Statewide Scale up of a Multi-Tiered System of Support. *Journal of School Leadership*, 32(5), 514-536  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10526846211067650>
- Ciotto, C. M., & Gagnon, A. G. (2018). Promoting Social and Emotional Learning in Physical Education. *JOPERD: The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 89(4), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2018.1430625>
- Cook, N., & Kiru, E. W. (2018). Disproportionality in Special Education: A Synthesis of International Research and Trends. *The Journal of Special Education*, 52(3), 163–173.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466918772300>
- Continuum of Support*. (2022). OCDE- CA MTSS. Retrieved October 6, 2022,  
<https://ocde.us/MTSS/Pages/default.aspx>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cruz, R. A., Kulkarni, S. S., & Firestone, A. R. (2021). A QuantCrit Analysis of Context, Discipline, Special Education, and Disproportionality. *AERA Open*, 7, 23328584211041350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211041354>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success. (Report). *Learning Policy Institute*.  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-report>

- Decuir-Gunby, J., & Schutz, P. A. (2016). *Developing a mixed methods proposal: A practical guide for beginning researchers (Mixed Methods Research Series)* SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Definition of MTSS - Multi-Tiered System of Supports (CA Dept of Education).* (2022). Retrieved May 20 2022 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/mtsscomprti2.asp>
- Dever, B. V., Raines, T. C., Dowdy, E., & Hostutler, C. (2016). Addressing disproportionality in special education using a universal screening approach. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(1), 59-71.
- Dickinson, K. J., & Gronseth, S. L. (2020). Application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles to Surgical Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Surgical Education*, 77(5), 1008–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsurg.2020.06.005>
- Dix, K. L., Slee, P. T., Lawson, M. J., & Keeves, J. P. (2012). Implementation quality of whole-school mental health promotion and students' academic performance. *Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 17(1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2011.00608.x>
- Dobia, B., Parada, R. H., Roffey, S., & Smith, M. (2019). Social and emotional learning: From individual skills to class cohesion. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 36(2), 78–90.
- Drevon, D. D., Hixson, M. D., Wyse, R. D., & Rigney, A. M. (2019). A meta-analytic review of the evidence for check-in check-out. *Psychology in the Schools*, 56(3), 393–412 <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/pits.22195>
- Duerden, M. D., & Witt, P. A. (2010). An Ecological Systems Theory Perspective on Youth Programming. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration*, 28(2), 108–120.
- Dulaney, S. K., & Hallam, P. R. (2013). Superintendent perceptions of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS): Obstacles and opportunities for school system reform. *AASA Journal of*

*Scholarship and Practice*, 10(2), 16, 30- 44

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

Eagle, J. W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Snyder, A., & Holtzman, E. G. (2015). Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): Collaboration Between School Psychologists and Administrators to Promote Systems-Level Change. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 25(2/3), 160–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929960>

Eppler-Wolff, N., Albertson, J., Martin, S., & Infante, L. (2020). In the Nest: Case Studies from the School-Based Mental Health Collaboration. *Journal of Infant, Child & Adolescent*

- *Psychotherapy*, 19(4), 371–392. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15289168.2020.1845075>

Emerson, S. D., Gagné Petteni, M., Guhn, M., Oberle, E., Georgiades, K., Milbrath, C., Janus, M., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Gadermann, A. M. (2022). Social context factors and refugee children's emotional health. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 57(4), 829–841. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s00127-021-02173-y>

Farkas, G. (2020). Achievement Gaps and Multi-Tiered System of Supports in California. *Policy Analysis for California Education, PACE*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605086.pdf>

Ferreira, M., Martinsone, B., & Talić, S. (2020). Promoting Sustainable Social Emotional Learning at School through Relationship-Centered Learning Environment, Teaching Methods and Formative Assessment. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*,

22(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2020-0003>

Francisco, M. P. B., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and special education.

*Education Sciences*, 10(9), 238. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090238>

Freeman, R., Miller, D., & Newcomer, L. (2015). Integration of Academic and Behavioral MTSS at the District Level using Implementation Science. *Learning Disabilities -- A Contemporary Journal*, 13(1), 59–72.

Gage, N. A., Rose, C. A., & Kramer II, D. A. (2019). When Prevention is Not Enough: Students' Perception of Bullying and School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports.

*Behavioral Disorders*, 45(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0198742918810761>

Garcia, M. M., Collet, S. J., & Montserrat, C. (2021). Benefits, positive factors and difficulties perceived by mentors participating in a mentoring programme aimed at youth in residential care. *European Journal of Education*, 56(3), 496–510.

<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/ejed.12460>

Golden S.D., & Earp, J.A.L. (2012). Social Ecological Approaches to Individuals and Their Contexts: Twenty Years of Health Education & Behavior Health Promotion Interventions. *Health Education & Behavior*. 39(3):364-372.

<https://doi:10.1177/1090198111418634>

Goodman-Scott, E. C., Edirmanasinghe, N. A., Moe, J., & Boulden, R. (2022). Assessing the Influence of Multitiered Systems of Support Training on School Counselors' Perceptions of School Counseling Activities: Results of a National Study. *Professional School Counseling*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221138232>

Graham R Gibbs. (2012, October 24). *Reliability, validity, generalizability and credibility*.

*Pt .1 of 3: Research Quality* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NQHeI8GD54>

Grasley-Boy, N. M., Gage, N. A., & Lombardo, M. (2019). Effect of SWPBIS on Disciplinary Exclusions for Students With and Without Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 86(1), 25–39.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402919854196>

Green, A. L., Ferrante, S., Boaz, T. L., Kutash, K., & Wheeldon, R. B. (2021). Social and emotional learning during early adolescence: Effectiveness of a classroom-based SEL program for middle school students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(6), 1056–1069.

<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/pits.22487>

Guo, S., Liu, J., & Wang, J. (2021). Cyberbullying Roles Among Adolescents: A Social-Ecological Theory Perspective. *Journal of School Violence*, 20(2), 167–181.

<https://doi:10.1080/15388220.2020.1862674>

Guy-Evans, O. (2023, June 09). *Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*. Simply Psychology. [www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html)

Ho Anita. 2004. “To Be Labeled, or Not to Be Labeled: That Is the Question.” *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 32(2):86–92.

<https://doi: 10.1111/j.1468-3156.2004.00284.x>

Hong, J. S., Espelage, D. L., & Lee, J. M. (2018). School climate and bullying prevention programs. In H. Shapiro (Ed.). *The Wiley handbook on violence in education: Forms, factors, and preventions*, 359-374. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118966709.ch17>

Houri, A. K., & Miller, F. G. (2020). A Systematic Review of Universal Screeners Used to Evaluate Social-Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Kindergarten Readiness. *Early Education & Development*, 31(5), 653–675.



<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10409289.2019.1677132>

Hunley, S. A., McNamara, K., & National Association of School Psychologists. (2010). *Tier 3 of the RTI model: Problem solving through a case study approach*. Corwin Press.

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. (2022). Individuals With

Disabilities Education Act. September 2, 2022 <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

Jackson, C. K., Porter, S. C., Easton, J. Q., Blanchard, A., & Kiguel, S. (2021). Linking Social-Emotional Learning to Long-Term Success: Student Survey Responses Show Effects in High School and Beyond. *Education Next*, 21(1), 64–71.

James, A. G., Noltemeyer, A., Ritchie, R., Palmer, K., & University, M. (2019). Longitudinal disciplinary and achievement outcomes associated with school-wide PBIS implementation level. *Psychology in the Schools*, 56(9), 1512–1521. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22282>

Jonsson, U., Olsson, N. C., Coco, C., Görling, A., Flygare, O., Råde, A., Chen, Q., Berggren, S., Tammimies, K., & Bölte, S. (2019). Long-term social skills group training for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder: a randomized controlled trial. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28(2), 189–201.

<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s00787-018-1161-9>

Karge, B. D. (2023). *Watch, listen, ask, earn: How school leaders can create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities (An education leader's guide to navigating the complexities of special education)*. Solution Tree Press.

<https://www.solutiontree.com/watch-listen-ask-learn.html>

Keller, T. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2021). Influence of program staff on quality of relationships in a community-based youth mentoring program. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1483(1), 112–126. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/nyas.14289>

- Loss, J. (2008). Intervention Concepts in Prevention. In W. Kirch,(Ed.) Encyclopedia of Public Health. Springer [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5614-7\\_1864](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5614-7_1864)
- Lowrey, K. A., Hollingshead, A., Howery, K., & Bishop, J. B. (2017). More Than One Way: Stories of UDL and Inclusive Classrooms. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 42(4), 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796917711668>
- Mariani, M., Bayani, J., & Farmanara Kneidel, L. (2022). Addressing the Social/Emotional Needs of Students During the Pandemic. *Professional School Counseling*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221090529>
- McDermott R., Goldman S., Herve, V. (2006). “he Cultural Work of Learning Disabilities. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6):12–17. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035006012>
- McCloughlin, C., & Noltemeyer, A. (2012). Disproportionality in education and special education: A guide to creating more equitable learning environment. Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd.
- McKinney, E., Bartholomew, C., & Gray, L. (2010). RTI and SWPBIS: Confronting the Problem of Disproportionality.. ERIC # EJ886223. *Communique (0164775X)*, 38(6), 1, 26, 28-29
- Minkos, M. L., & Gelbar, N. W. (2021). Considerations for educators in supporting student learning in the midst of COVID-19. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(2), 416–426. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22454>
- Morgan, J.L. (2016). Reshaping the Role of a Special Educator into a Collaborative Learning Specialist. *Multi-tiered system of supports*. Multi-Tiered System of Supports – Curriculum and Instruction Resources (CA Dept of Education). (2021). November 18,

2022 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri>

Myers, D. M., Briere, D. E., III, , & Simonsen, B. (2010). Lessons Learned From Implementing a Check-in/Check-out Behavioral Program in an Urban Middle School. *Beyond Behavior*, 19(2), 21–27.

National Center on Intensive Intervention. (2022). Selecting an MTSS Data System <https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/selecting-mtss-data-system>

Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & Mcloughlin, C. S. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review*, 44(2), 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-14-0008.1>

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Public Law 107-110, January 8, 2002. 115 Stat. 1425

O’Brien, T., & Roberts, A. (2019). A domains-based approach to meeting social, emotional and mental health needs. *Support for Learning*, 34(2), 179–192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12247>

Orange County Department of Education - California MTSS Framework. (2022). December 2, 2022, <https://ocde.us/MTSS/Pages/CA-MTSS.aspx>

Osagiede, O., Costa, S., Spaulding, A., Rose, J., Allen, K. E., Rose, M., & Apatu, E. (2018). Teachers’ perceptions of student mental health: the role of school-based mental health services delivery model. *Children & Schools*, 40(4), 240–248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdy020>

Parker, J., Olson, S., & Bunde, J. (2020). The Impact of Trauma-Based Training on Educators. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 13(2), 217–227. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s40653-019-00261-5>

Payton, J. W., Wardlaw, D. M., Graczyk, P. A., Bloodworth, M. R., Tompsett, C. J., &

- Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Social and emotional learning: A framework for promoting mental health and reducing risk behavior in children and youth. *The Journal of School Health*, 70(5), 179–185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2000.tb06468.x>
- Positive Environments, Network of Trainers (2022) About Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports. <https://www.pent.ca.gov/pbis/about/index.aspx>
- Robertson, H., Goodall, K., & Kay, D. (2021). Teachers' attitudes toward trauma-informed practice: Associations with attachment and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). *Psychology of Education Review*, 45(2), 62–74.
- Rodriguez, B. J., Loman, S. L., & Borgmeier, C. (2016). Tier 2 Interventions in Positive Behavior Support: A Survey of School Implementation. *Preventing School Failure*, 60(2), 94–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2015.1025354>
- Sailor, W., Skrtic, T. M., Cohn, M., & Olmstead, C. (2021). Preparing Teacher Educators for Statewide Scale-Up of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 44(1), 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406420938035>
- Santre, S. (2022). Mental health promotion in adolescents. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 18(2), 122–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342221120709>
- Sawyer Hunley, & Kathy McNamara. (2010). *Tier 3 of the RTI Model: Problem Solving Through a Case Study Approach*. Corwin.
- Scheuermann, B. K., & Nelson, C. M. (2019). Sustaining PBIS in Secure Care for Juveniles. *Education & Treatment of Children (West Virginia University Press)*, 42(4), 537–556. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1353/etc.2019.0025>
- Schoppee, T. M., Scarton, L., Bluck, S., Yao, Y., Keenan, G., Samuels, V., Fitchett, G., Handzo,

- G., Chochinov, H. M., Emanuel, L. L., & Wilkie, D. J. (2022). Dignity therapy intervention fidelity: a cross-sectional descriptive study with older adult outpatients with cancer. *BMC Palliative Care*, 21(1), 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-021-00888-y>
- Shifrer D. (2018). Clarifying the Social Roots of the Disproportionate Classification of Racial Minorities and Males with Learning Disabilities. *The Sociological quarterly*, 59(3), 384–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2018.1479198>
- Shifrer, D. (2013). Stigma of a Label: Educational Expectations for High School Students Labeled with Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 54(4), 462–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146513503346>
- Siqueira de Souza, M., Benevides Soares, A., & Pizarro de Freitas, C. P. (2022). Social Emotional Learning (sel) Program Among Fifth graders, Three and Six Months Later. *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, 31(1), 35–48.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.15446/rcp.v31n1.83042>
- Skiba Russell J., Ada B. Simmons, Ashley C. Shana Ritter, Gibb M. Karega Rausch, Jason Cuadrado, & Choong-Geun Chung 2008. Achieving Equity in Special Education: History, Status, and Current Challenges. *Exceptional Children* 74 (3), 264–88.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290807400301>
- Strogilos, V., & King, S. M. E. (2019). Co-teaching is extra help and fun: Perspectives on co-teaching from middle school students and co-teachers. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(2), 92–102.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12427>
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2020). Sustaining and Scaling Positive Behavioral Interventions and

- Supports: Implementation Drivers, Outcomes, and Considerations. *Exceptional Children*, 86(2), 120–136. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0014402919855331>
- Townsend, E. (2020). Debate: The impact of school closures and lockdown on mental health in young people. *Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 25(4), 265–266.  
<https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/camh.12428>
- Velez, M. S., Barton, E. E., Yoder, P. J., & Wright, J. C. (2021). Systematic Prompting of Peer-Related Social Behaviors in a Small Group Academic Instructional Context. *Behavioral Disorders*, 46(2), 67–79. <https://doi-org.cui.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0198742920911649>
- /Violence Prevention/Injury Center/CDC. (2022, January 18). *The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html>
- Webster, L., & Muro, J. (2022). Professional Counselors' Roles and Opportunities in Special Education Advocacy. *Journal of Counselor Practice*, 13(1), 60–78.  
<https://doi.org/10.22229/pro1312022>
- Weingarten, Z., Zumeta Edmonds, R., & Arden, S. (2020). Better Together: Using MTSS as a Structure for Building School–Family Partnerships. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 53(2), 122–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920937733>
- Welenofsky, J. (2022, August 2). *Program Support*. El Dorado Charter SELPA. October 8, 2022  
<https://charterselpa.org/program-support-resources/>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Educator Likert Scale Survey

8/5/23, 11:04 AM

Staff Survey

**RISKS:** If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let the researcher know and discontinue participation if appropriate.

**BENEFITS:** This project will help educators consider important prevention work to support the needs of students, while maintaining the least restrictive environment for student learning and growth.

**CONTACT:** For questions about the research or the survey process, please feel free to contact Roshni Patel anytime at roshni.patel@eagles.cui.edu

**RESULTS:** The results of this study will be published in the researcher's doctoral dissertation at Concordia University Irvine.

#### CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I agree to participate in the research study.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, I am willing to participate in an interview
- ☐ No, I would rather not participate.

#### Demographic Information

2. How many years have you worked in education? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0-5 Years
- ☐ 6-10 Years
- ☐ 11-15 Years
- ☐ 16-20 Years
- ☐ 20+ Years

## 3. Role at the school \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Teacher      *Skip to question 4*
- ☐ Administrator      *Skip to question 6*
- ☐ Student Support Staff (counselor, psychologist, nurse, speech pathologist, etc.)  
*Skip to question 6*
- ☐ Instructional or School Support Staff      *Skip to question 6*

## Teacher Info

## 4. I teach \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 7th graders
- ☐ 8th graders

## 5. I primarily teach \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ English
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Science
- ☐ History
- ☐ PE
- ☐ Elective
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_



6. Most staff (80%) know and understand our Schoolwide (Tier 1) Academic Supports (Ex. First, best instruction, UDL strategies, Universal Screeners, Progress Monitoring) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

7. Most teachers (80%) implement Schoolwide (Tier 1) Academic Supports consistently (Ex. First, best instruction, UDL strategies, Universal Screeners, Progress Monitoring) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

8. Our Schoolwide (Tier 1) Academic supports are successful for at least 80% of our students (Ex. First, best instruction, UDL strategies, Universal Screeners, Progress Monitoring) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9. Most staff members (80%) know and understand our Schoolwide (Tier 1) Behavior Interventions and Supports (Ex. R.A.D. Behavior Expectations, R.A.D. Points/Store) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

10. Most staff members (80%) support Schoolwide (Tier 1) Behavior Interventions and Supports by teaching and/or acknowledging R.A.D. Expectations \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. Our Schoolwide (Tier 1) Behavior interventions are successful for at least 80% of our students (Ex. R.A.D. Behavior Expectations, R.A.D. Points/Store) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. For students who need extra academic support (Tier 2, targeted interventions), our school provides additional support and interventions to those students. (Ex. support classes, specialized tutoring, Friday School) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. Tier 2 (targeted) Academic Supports offered to our students are effective for most students (80%) who receive extra support (Ex. support classes, specialized tutoring, Friday School) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. For students who need extra behavior support (Tier 2, targeted interventions), our school provides additional support and interventions to those students. (Ex. Gear N Up, GRIP, Check In Check Out, Mentoring) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. Tier 2 (targeted) Behavior Supports offered to our students are effective for most (at least 80%) of the students who need extra behavior support. (ex. Gear N Up class, Mentoring, Check In Check Out) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. Most teachers (80%) understand that Social-Emotional Learning consists of teaching Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Management, and Relationship Skills. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. Most staff members (80%) believe that teaching Social-Emotional Learning is important to the academic success of all students \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. I believe that teaching Social-Emotional Learning is important to academic \*  
success of all students

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

19. I believe teaching Social-Emotional Learning is the responsibility of \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
<b>Teachers</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Counselor/Psycholog ist</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Parents</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Therapist</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Coach</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. If a student is struggling in the area of Social-Emotional Learning, our school effectively provides additional supports for these students. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

### Section 3

21. Providing targeted supports for students (ex. Reading Class, Study Skills Class, Friday School) helps most middle school students be successful in the general education setting.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree



22. Students are properly matched with appropriate interventions and supports, according to their needs.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

23. If a student is not passing my class or not understanding the material, I should refer the student for special education assessment.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

24. If a student in my class has a low Lexile score, math score, or SBAC score, I should refer the student for special education assessment

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

25. General Education teachers should exhaust every classroom support and teaching strategy before referring a middle school student for special education assessment.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly Disagree

26. General education Middle School students who continue to struggle academically, behaviorally, or social-emotionally (based upon teacher observation), cannot be supported enough in general education and should be referred for Special Education services.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

#### Further Feedback

27. I am interested in providing more information and would like to be part of an educator focus group (one, 30-45 minute group session, held after school on 3/8), conducted by a Concordia colleague.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

28. Name and email address- if you would like to participate in an educator focus group

## Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

### Focus Group Questions

1. What is your Role at the School, and how many years have you worked in education?
2. Describe the referral process for a special education evaluation.
3. Of the students that are receiving Tier 2 interventions such as Friday School, mentoring, support classes, Gear N Up, etc., what changes have you seen in their behaviors and/or work habits?
4. How and how often are staff members trained to provide academic, behavioral, or social-emotional interventions?
5. Describe your views on Student Study Team Meetings (SSTs). How are they structured? What is the purpose? How effective are these meetings in developing supports for students?
6. How are Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions monitored? Who monitors if the intervention is working?

### Appendix C: Informed Consent

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to examine the impacts of Tier 1 and Tier 2 academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions on At Risk Middle Schoolers, along with the correlation between these interventions and the need for initial evaluation for special education. This study is being conducted by Roshni Patel, under the supervision of Dr. Belinda Karge, Professor in the School of Education, Concordia University, Irvine. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, Concordia University Irvine, in Irvine, CA.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports on At-Risk students at a suburban middle school in California and its relationship to the disproportionality of special education services.

**DESCRIPTION:** You are being asked to fill in a survey that asks some questions about your perceptions regarding Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions and supports, along with the special education referral process. You may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation is completely voluntary and you may opt out of participation at any time.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your identity will remain anonymous. The school name will not be reported. The findings, reported in my doctoral dissertation, will simply say that data was collected from educators in a suburban middle school in Orange County, California. All data, recordings, and findings will be stored either in a locked file, or in the researcher's private computer that is protected by security software and passwords. All records will be destroyed by January 1, 2024.

**DURATION:** The researcher plans to conduct a survey and follow up interviews. The entire data collection phase should last from February 1, 2023- March 1, 2023. The survey should take about ten minutes to complete, but follow-up interviews will take approximately fifteen minutes and the focus group will take approximately 30 minutes.

**RISKS:** If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let the researcher know and discontinue participation if appropriate.

**BENEFITS:** This project will help educators consider important prevention work to support the needs of students, while maintaining the least restrictive environment for student learning and growth..

**AUDIO:** Consent form will be given to participant

**CONTACT:** For questions about the research or the survey process, please feel free to contact Roshni Patel anytime at (714) 618-5460 or at roshni.patel@eagles.cui.edu

**RESULTS:** The results of this study will be published in the researcher's doctoral dissertation at Concordia University Irvine.

**CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:**

**I agree to participate in the research study described by completing the Likert scale**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Yes, I am willing to participate in an interview.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **No, I would rather not participate.**

**Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_