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# Teacher-Student Relationships: Strengthening the Impact of PBIS on Climate

Kate McPhee

*Georgia State University*, [kleavitt@student.gsu.edu](mailto:kleavitt@student.gsu.edu)

Kiarra Givhan

*Georgia State University*

Emily N. Srisarajivakul

*Georgia State University*, [esrisarajivakul1@student.gsu.edu](mailto:esrisarajivakul1@student.gsu.edu)

Vanessa Ramirez

*Georgia State University*, [vramirez7@student.gsu.edu](mailto:vramirez7@student.gsu.edu)

Ella Taylor

*Georgia State University*, [etaylor39@student.gsu.edu](mailto:etaylor39@student.gsu.edu)

*See next page for additional authors*

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### **Presenter Information**

Kate McPhee, Kiarra Givhan, Emily N. Srisarajivakul, Vanessa Ramirez, Ella Taylor, Kris Varjas, Catherine Perkins, and Joel Meyers

# **Teacher-Student Relationships: Strengthening the Impact of PBIS on Climate**

Center for School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management  
Georgia State University

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- Connect children, youth, and families who may experience behavioral health issues with appropriate services.

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# General Intro & Expected Outcomes

The present study examines how teacher-student relationships (TSRs) are perceived to influence positive student behavior and the implications this influence has for PBIS implementation and school climate



# What are teacher-student relationships?

Based on different theoretical models, TSRs are important for students' growth and development.

- Attachment
- Self-Determination
- Ecological



# What are teacher-student relationships?

Research describes positive TSRs as:

- Close (Pianta, 2001)
- Emotionally supportive (Hughes, Gleason & Zhang, 2005).

Negative TSRs are described as:

- High in conflict
- Marked by dependency (Pianta, 2001; Hughes et al., 2005).



# What are teacher-student relationships?

TSRs differ across student development:

- Early childhood
- Older students

TSR quality is likely impacted by cultural expectations:

- No direct evidence of this
- Impact of similar cultural expectations for communication/behavior (e.g., Murray, Murray, & Waas, 2008; Split & Hughes, 2015; Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012).



# What are teacher-student relationships?

Think about a positive teacher-student relationship in your school. What made it positive?

How do you consider teacher-student relationships within the context of PBIS?



# What are teacher-student relationships?

Thus, for the purpose of this study:

- TSR is considered on a spectrum, with the most positive TSR referring to interactions characterized by comfort, trust, and emotional support between teachers and students.
- The most negative TSR refers to interactions characterized by teacher perceived student disrespect and an absence of comfort, trust, and emotional support between teachers and students.
- Influences of development and cultural differences are considered.

# Teacher-Student Relationship Research

Positive TSRs are correlated with:

- Academic, social, emotional and behavioral competencies (e.g., Roorda et al., 2011; Schmitt, Pentimonti, & Justice, 2012)
- Student growth and success (e.g., Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Roorda et al., 2011 Wu, Hughes, & Kwok, 2010)

They also serve as protective factors for kids from low SES backgrounds and students of color (e.g., Baker, 2006; Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007; Mcgrath & Van Bergen, 2015)

# Findings related to Teacher-Student Relationships and supporting student behavior

Teacher Perceptions (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2003)

Student Perceptions (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; Chhuon & Wallace, 2014)

PBIS and non-PBIS teachers said that building positive relationships is a preventative form of behavior management (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2014)



# PBIS Research

PBIS has been successful with:

- Reducing student problem behavior (e.g., Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton & Leaf, 2009)
- Increasing student academic performance (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010)
- Improving school climate (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2010)

No studies about how TSRs impact PBIS

# Current Study

## Research Questions:

1. What are PBIS team members' views about how teacher-student relationships facilitate positive student behavior?
2. What are PBIS team members' views about how teacher-student relationships hinder positive student behavior?
3. How can the school-wide PBIS framework be used to enhance teacher-student relationships?

# Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 groups that included PBIS teams and mental health providers from 3 public school districts in the Southeastern United States.

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school from each district, and with school mental health professionals (MHPs) from each district.

Schools were currently implementing PBIS

- Length of implementation varied from 1-9 years
  - District 1: 7-9 years
  - District 2: 4-5 years
  - District 3: 1-2 years



# Methods

Interviewees included PBIS Teams and groups of school MHPs from each district

PBIS Team Members	Counselors/Social Workers	School Psychologists	Total
128	32	18	178

- Each team contained between 5 and 14 members
- Interviews were conducted in groups (e.g. MHPs, PBIS teams)
- Georgia State University faculty members conducted interviews, and a graduate research assistant transcribed notes
- Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the research team
- Interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours

# Methods

Inductive/Deductive Coding (Nastasi, 2009)

First version of coding system came from interviews (inductive)

System was adjusted based on review of relevant literature (deductive)

Transcripts were analyzed and coded based on this system

Interviews were coded independently by 2 members of the research team and compared for inter-rater agreement.

Once 90% inter-rater agreement was reached (after 11 interviews), the remaining interviews were coded separately. 10% of each remaining 13 interviews was compared for coder drift. Average inter-rater agreement for those sections was 95%

# Results

24 interviews were coded for factors that helped/hindered positive student behavior and mental health in schools

- Only codes about TSR were examined for this study

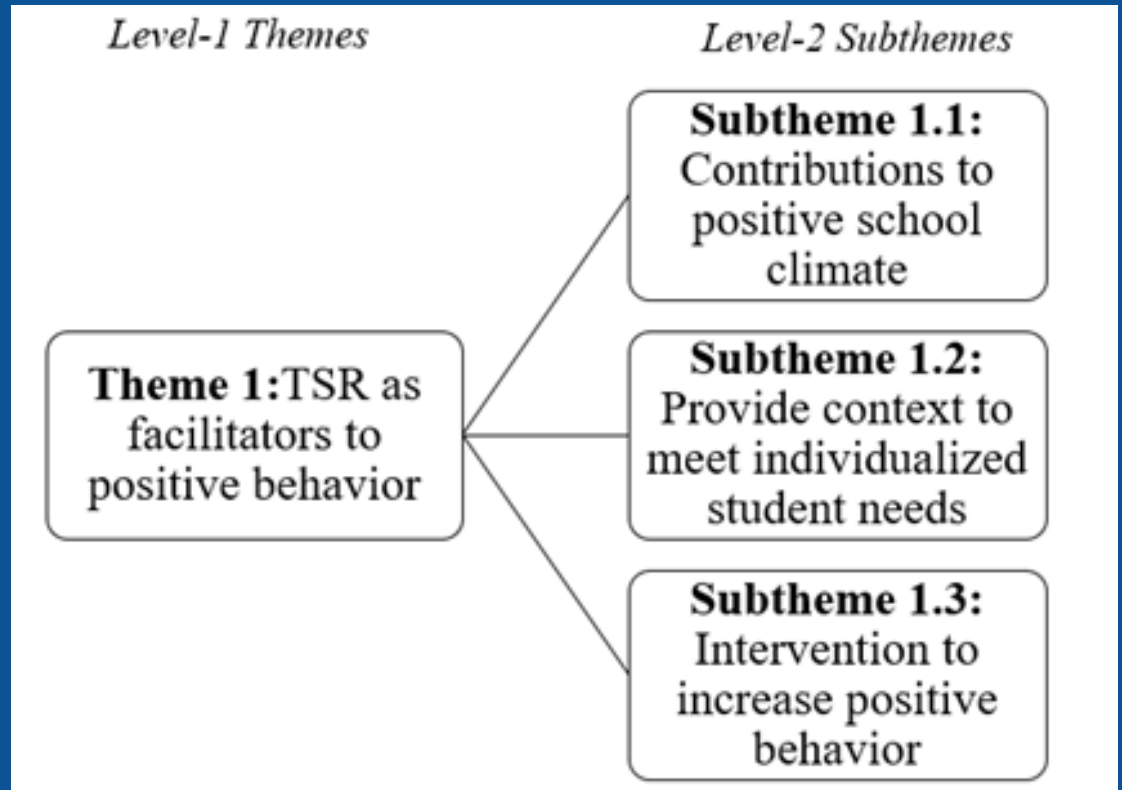
- 14 out of 15 PBIS teams made at least 1 TSR-coded statement without being asked about TSR

- All MHP groups made at least 1 TSR-coded statement

TSR code defined as: “interactions and attitudes about interactions between staff members and students at the school building.”

Statements were coded as barriers, facilitators or suggested facilitators

# Results: TSRs as facilitators to positive student behavior



# Results: High-quality TSRs and positive school climate

“When you talk about the overall environment of the school itself, **what you have is a collective group of individuals...that actually care about the customers** that come through the door.”

“We’re 84% free and reduced lunch, so that means that we are from a low socioeconomic community. **But ... once [the students] walk in here... you don’t necessarily see the stereotypical low income school**, because of the expectations that have been created and the relationships that our teachers have built.”

“One of my teachers at one of my elementary schools...when [the kids] come in the room, they hug her. **And so if you ask kids who their favorite teacher is, they almost always say her.** Even though she’s the hardest one, academically.”

# Results: TSRs establish context for meeting individual student needs

“A lot of times if you dig down into what happens, a lot of [students] will come to you afterwards, ‘**I had to stay up all night with my brother,**’ ‘I had to do this.’ There’s usually some driving force.”

“I heard one of my students saying ‘I had to get my brother and I out to catch the bus on time because my mom was at work.’ For that particular student, his home life is completely different from somebody else because he is taking care of himself at 9 with younger siblings. ...And I have to sometimes put on my mommy cap because this kid, **probably nobody taps him on the back and says ‘good job, I’m glad you are here today.’**”

“**Most kids in this building trust the adults here,** trust that we are looking out for them, trust that we are doing everything we can to help them, and sometimes these kids just need to vent and get it out and then they can move on, and they know that a lot of teachers here will help them.”

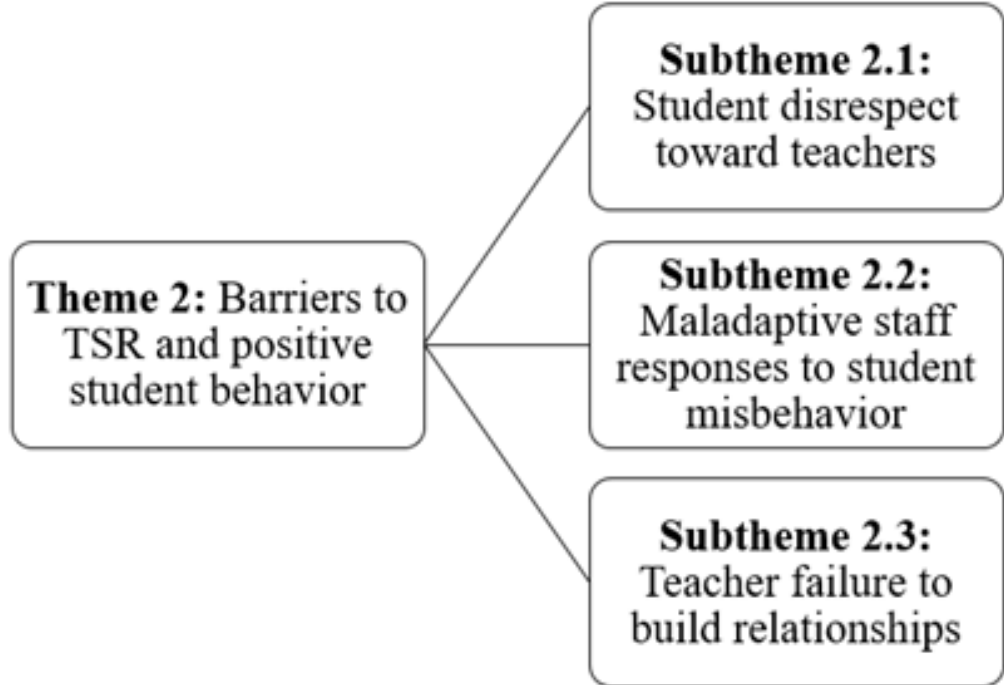
# Results: High-quality TSRs may serve as an informal intervention

“I would say that a lot of times interventions may not be directly related to PBIS, where individual teachers recognize problem students and they are working with them directly. **Just developing that intimate, ‘you can talk to me if you need to talk’ to have someone to go one on one with.**”

“We try to put safety nets in place, so if the student is not doing well behaviorally or academically, **we do ‘TLC,’ teacher loving care.** ...We do supports for both behavioral and academics, and students can also refer themselves”

“**Building those relationships, the rapport with our kids, it’s intentional.** So when we identify a kid, even if they’re walking down the hallway and we see them stressed, we pull them to the side and say, ‘I notice dadada,’ and we have that conversation.”

# Results: Barriers to TSR quality & positive student behavior





# Results: Descriptions of student disrespect toward teachers

“I think there is lots of blatant disrespect. Which, I think it escalates. **Because when a child is disrespectful, a teacher gets offended.** I think it just kinda snowballs.”

“We grew up with certain expectations, and just understood that there were certain things that were said and not said. ...Whereas now, **a lot of the students have point of view and they are allowed to voice that point of view** ... And it can create a divide between the adults and the students, occasionally, because **it really borders on disrespect.** Being disrespectful in terms of our perception of it.”

“Some of these kids like to push it to the point until they get a negative reaction. **And you can be as patient as you can be, but they want to push it until they get a negative reaction** so they can get the attention that they don't get other places”

# Results: Maladaptive staff responses to student misbehavior

“I can’t tell you how many students I am forced to write up because their behaviors were inappropriate, but the way that they were treated by the teachers **makes me want to suspend the teachers just as much as the children...**they get on little power trips in their rooms, they become little mini dictators and they are horrible leaders”

“And **yelling at [students] the first time they walk into the door in the morning, some kids -- that’s going to set them off.** It’s a bad way to start the day; they may have had a really, really terrible morning already. And that is not [teachers’] fault, but how [they] handle it is.”

“I don’t know how many times you can tell an adult, **‘you have such an impact on this child. If you tell them that they are not smart, then they are going to start to believe it.’** And that’s one of my pet peeves- don’t yell at the kids, take them outside and speak to them quietly. Why would you want to embarrass the child in front of the class? It’s a huge factor.”

# Results: Teachers' failure to build relationships with students

“The foundation of behavior is totally based upon the relationship. **If you have no relationship with that student, how are you going to reach them?** Why would they care about what you think? Why would they care about your class rules? I don't see many teachers understanding that.”

“**But it's the teachers who don't build those relationships where you are seeing the biggest problems...** And [they] have the highest referral counts.”

“[Teachers think] that every child is the same. You know some [students] may be able to handle having those high expectations and some just, **you've got to know that child.** You've got to know when to kind of back off a bit.”

# Results - PBIS practices that increase positive TSR

**Theme 3:** PBIS  
practices increase  
positive TSR

**Subtheme 3.1:**  
Opportunities for  
praise foster positive  
interactions

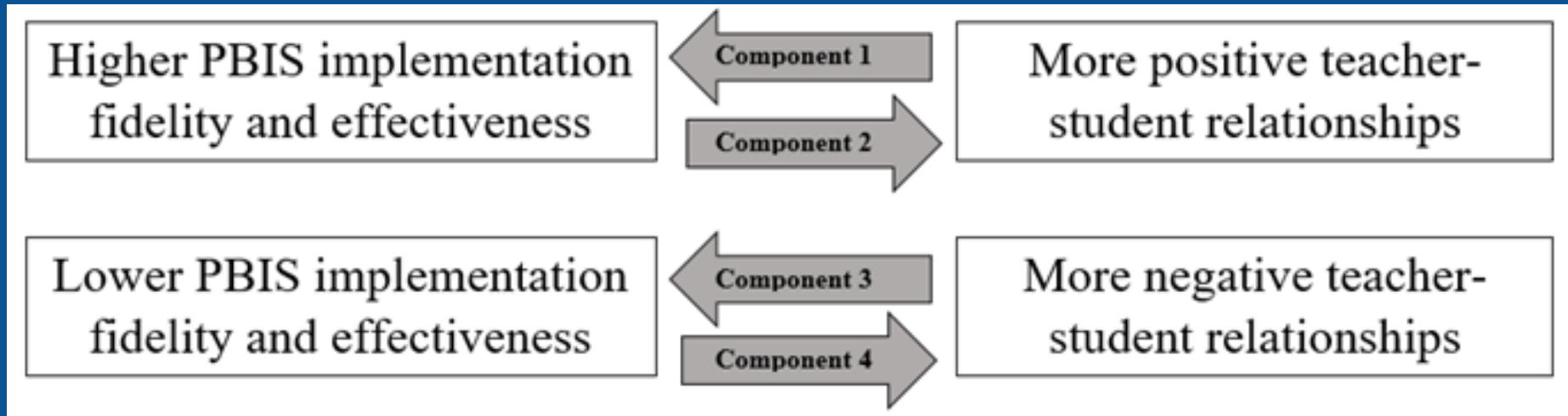
# Results: Opportunities for praise foster positive interactions

“I think one of the strengths of PBIS is, it allows you to be in relationships, or stronger relationships, it enhances your relationships with your students...Simply because, **one simple act of recognition can go a long, long way.**”

“[PBIS is] helping you build those positive relationships with those kids too. Because with some kids it’s always the negative and they get tired of that... **But with this you’re finding the good, and rewarding those kids repeatedly,** and it allows for them to come in and be focused on that.”

“There’s one thing we do with PBIS that none of my other coworkers are doing. **We give our students the opportunity to praise and give positive feedback to their teachers** on a regular basis.”

# Discussion: Proposed bidirectional model of influence between TSR & PBIS



# Component 1: Positive TSR and more effective PBIS

Participants said that building positive TSRs...

1. Helped build a caring environment where students felt safe
2. Increased school staff's ability to productively and positively address student needs
3. Could be a preventative means to behavior management

→ This has implications for PBIS implementation!

## Component 2: Effective PBIS and more positive TSRs

Participants said that PBIS encourages positive interactions between teachers and students

→ This suggests that implementing PBIS could help systematically improve teacher-student relationships



## Component 3: Negative TSR and less effective PBIS

Positive TSRs are beneficial, but participants listed some factors that can hinder their development:

1. Student disrespect
2. Maladaptive teacher responses to student misbehavior
3. Lack of intentionality in building TSRs

→ This has implications for PBIS implementation!

## Component 4: Poor PBIS and more negative TSRs

No statements that supported this component

Theoretically could be true!

Limitation: we didn't ask directly about TSRs in the context of PBIS

# Implications

PBIS Teams should consider the state of TSRs in their schools.

Ask: Does staff value building positive TSRs? How could this impact PBIS implementation (positively or negatively)?

Consider: measuring TSR quality and/or training school staff on building relationships with students (especially in schools with culturally diverse student bodies)

Consider: how to use PBIS practices (e.g., praise) for improving TSR quality



# Future Directions

Interview school personnel about TSR directly:

- More about what influences positive/negative TSR
- More about how TSR interacts with PBIS (specifically, the bidirectionality of the relationship)

Investigate how TSRs fit into the idea of implementing culturally responsive PBIS within diverse communities

Eventually: more quantitative work

# Questions?

<http://schoolsafety.education.gsu.edu>

The Center for Research on School Safety, School Climate, and Classroom  
Management  
30 Pryor Street SW  
Atlanta, GA 30302  
(404) 413-8482

Directors: Dr. Kris Varjas & Dr. Joel Meyers

Center Representatives: Kate McPhee, Emily Srisarajivakul & Vanessa Ramirez

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