

Behavior Challenges in Primary and Secondary Classrooms: The Educators' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Teachers across the United States have reported an increase in disruptive student behaviors, which create significant challenges for classroom management, instructional time, and teacher well-being. While many schools provide resources intended to support teachers, there is often a lack of time or professional development opportunities to implement these tools effectively. The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers perceive current behavioral challenges, how these challenges affect their instructional practices and emotional health, and what supports they identify as most beneficial. A qualitative design using interviews and open-ended survey responses was employed to gather detailed perspectives from teachers. The findings of the study revealed key themes, including the impact of technology use on student behavior, the importance of support, the influence of time constraints on behavior management practices and the need for targeted professional development. These findings highlight how behavioral challenges affect both instructional practices and teacher well-being. The results of this study have implications for improving professional development, strengthening behavior interventions and informing school policies. These findings contribute to the development of a safer and more supportive environment for teachers and students.

Keywords: student behavior, behavior interventions, teacher well-being, professional development, classroom management, PBIS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Mark and Mary Catherine. Always remember that you can achieve anything you set your mind to, and I will always be right behind you, cheering you on. I love you!

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Teachers across the United States have reported an increase in disruptive student behaviors since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a 2022 survey conducted by *Education Week*, more than 70% of school leaders and teachers reported an increase in classroom disruptions, including defiance, aggression, and general disengagement (Kurtz, 2022). There has been a concerning increase in disruptive student behavior in classrooms, which can significantly impact the learning environment for students and affect teachers, parents, and administrators (Staff, 2024). While teachers and staff are provided with resources focusing on classroom management and student behavior, they often lack the time, training, or support to effectively implement them (Marder et al., 2023). Additionally, negative student behaviors can disrupt the teaching and learning process, causing added mental and emotional strain, which is associated with teacher burnout (Aloe et al., 2014).

Teacher-student interactions create both positive and negative emotions. These relationships are more powerful than any other daily interaction, such as those with co-workers, parents, and administrators (Hagenauer et al., 2015). For example, when teachers set clear expectations and correct behavior fairly and respectfully, students are more likely to feel valued and respected. In contrast, when a student is reprimanded in front of the class, it can lead to feelings of shame or embarrassment, triggering negative emotions and potentially harming the student-teacher relationship. Student development does not just transpire in the classroom, but through proximal and distal interactions that overlap in multiple environments and with multiple people (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Additionally, a lack of administrative involvement and consistency regarding student expectations can significantly impact how teachers respond to

student behavior and the consequences they assign. This study aimed to gather teachers' perspectives on student behaviors in their classrooms, as well as on the curriculum and behavioral tools they find effective or ineffective during times of disruption.

Overview

To better understand teachers' perspectives on student behavior in their classrooms, this study examined the dynamics of teacher-student interactions and classroom management, as well as the curriculum and behavioral tools they viewed as effective or ineffective during these interactions. Public schools in the United States are increasingly characterized by rising behavioral challenges among students (Wright, 2023). These challenges are amplified by concerns about inadequate support and teacher preparedness when working with students with behavioral challenges. Public education operates within a tightly regulated environment shaped by federal mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Schools often operate under mandates that prioritize academic achievement and standardized testing, without the corresponding focus on behavioral supports (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). While there are behavioral mandates such as PBIS, restorative practices, and student codes of conduct, these can vary by country, state, school district, and school type (public, private, or charter). In 2025, \$43 billion was allocated for K–12 formula grants for fiscal year 2024 through the U.S. Department of Education (Wolfe, 2025). In comparison, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act provides \$100 million annually for each of two grant programs (School-Based Mental Health Services Grants and Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants) from fiscal year 2022 to fiscal year 2026, representing a significant contrast compared to academic funding (Federal Support for School Safety and Security, 2021).

States have recognized the discrepancy between academic and behavioral mandates and have implemented state-level programs to collect data. For instance, New York has added the Dignity for All Students Act, requiring school districts to adopt policies for schools to be free of bullying and discrimination, train staff, and annually report on school climate (*Laws and Regulations*, 2015). Similarly, Tennessee passed HB 0322, which mandates safety measures in schools, including installing alert/panic systems, funding for school resource officers and behavioral help staff, and security upgrades (Fullerton, 2023). Pennsylvania's Act 30, an amendment to the Safe Schools Act of 1995, requires annual reporting to the Department of Education, including all incidents of violence, weapons, alcohol, drugs, and tobacco possession (Swanson, n.d.). In Pennsylvania school districts, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey is conducted every two years for students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, as a preventive measure to identify problem behaviors and examine the root causes of these issues (Strategic Prevention Programming, 2023). In 2023, 78.4% of secondary students in Pennsylvania reported feeling safe in school, a decline from 2021, when 82% of the student population felt safe (Strategic Prevention Programming, 2023). Compared to the overall Pennsylvania average, the district examined in this study showed stronger results, with 91.2% of students reporting that they felt safe at school (Strategic Prevention Programming, 2023).

Discipline practices are one issue that raises significant concerns regarding fairness, equity, and the rights of both teachers and students. Exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension and expulsion, which remove students from the classroom, are disproportionately applied to students with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds, perpetuating existing inequities (Graves et al., 2023). Teachers face the complex task of addressing the needs of all learners, including those who exhibit behavioral challenges, while also maintaining a safe

and effective learning environment for the whole class. In the absence of clear guidelines and sufficient support, this tension can contribute to teacher burnout and the adoption of reactive discipline strategies, outcomes that raise serious ethical concerns.

The lack of teacher training contributed to teacher stress and burnout, particularly when high expectations are combined with limited support (Aloe et al., 2014). These challenges are not isolated to one grade level or school, but were noted across both primary and secondary settings, and in both general and special education, impacting instructional time, classroom climate, and educator well-being.

Statement of the Problem

Although student behavior can arise from a range of factors, including medical, environmental, or emotional causes, many teachers lack access to training and support specifically focused on behavioral interventions, especially for students who seek attention from adults or peers (Wink et al., 2021; Gimpel & Peacock, 2010). Without sufficient support, teachers were more likely to experience burnout and find it difficult to respond with empathy toward students exhibiting challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Hernandez, Hueck, and Charley (2016) conducted a study in the United States comparing the attitudes of general and special education teachers toward inclusion. Their results showed that special education teachers held more positive views about working with students with disabilities than general education teachers. Similarly, Parchomiuk (2018) carried out a study in Poland that compared the attitudes and interactions of special education teachers with those of general education teachers. The study showed that special education teachers were more likely to share both positive and negative experiences, which may influence how they view students with disabilities. The research also looked at the connection between teachers' empathy and their

attitudes toward students with special needs. Recognizing students' emotional and environmental challenges is important, as this awareness can help teachers prepare for and lessen classroom disruptions (Mahvar et al., 2018).

Since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), the number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has increased significantly, promoting more inclusive educational environments (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). Additional training, which is required for special education teachers and concentrates on student behaviors, may be valuable for all staff, including general education teachers, support staff, and administrators. This would enable administrators to support teachers and staff, even when they are not physically present in the classroom, by increasing awareness of available tools, their use, and their contribution to teacher and student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers perceive challenging student behaviors and how these behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices in their classroom and identify supports that could help address these challenges. Findings from this study were intended to guide improvements in professional development and behavior intervention training programs. Improvements may include skills and resources needed to manage challenging student behavior effectively. This study provides insight into the gaps between policy expectations, professional development, and daily classroom realities by focusing on teacher perceptions.

El Zaatari and Maalouf (2022) asserted that one of the most essential factors in effective learning environments and school climate is school safety. Additionally, they highlighted student relationships, extracurricular activities, peer interactions, and parental involvement as essential

factors that influence effective learning environments. School safety consists of more than just physical safety, but also mental and emotional safety; a feeling of belonging and respect. For many students, the majority of their social interactions occur during school. When students feel as if they belong at school, studies have shown decreased disruptive behaviors and emotional distress, compared to other students who do not feel that they belong (Henry et al., 2021).

Research Questions

1. What types of behavioral challenges are educators currently experiencing in their classrooms?
2. How do educators perceive the causes of these student behavioral issues?
3. How do behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and what supports would be or have been beneficial in managing these challenges?

Significance of the Study

This study addresses a growing concern in public education: the rising incidence of student behavioral challenges and its impact on teacher well-being. While considerable attention has been devoted to student discipline and teacher burnout independently, few studies have examined how administrative support, professional development, and institutional policies intersect to influence teachers' management of behavior in general education settings.

Theoretical Contributions

This study drew on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple factors that shape teachers' experiences with student behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes human development as being influenced by multiple layers of environmental systems. Teachers' everyday experiences with student behaviors and their responses are not shaped solely by individual skills or classroom dynamics within this

framework, but instead, they are influenced by how these systems interact. This framework highlights teacher experiences, not just isolated events, but the results of an interactive system.

Bronfenbrenner's model also applies to students who may demonstrate disruptive behaviors in the classroom. This study recognized that behavioral challenges cannot be viewed in isolation, but reflect a student's interaction with multiple systems, some supportive, others potentially harmful. This perspective helps explain why behavior interventions must be systemic and coordinated, rather than solely focused on student compliance.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and focusing on teacher perspectives, this study highlighted the systemic nature of behavioral challenges, and the importance of multi-tier supports. While there have been studies that focus on student behavior from a teacher's perspective, there are very few recent studies that address new behavioral trends and interventions since COVID-19.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provided practical insights for school administrators seeking to create more effective classroom environments, mitigate teacher burnout, and address disparities in how behavioral issues are addressed. The results may inform future training programs or inform updates to behavior management policies at the school or district level. Ultimately, this study added to our understanding of how to better support both teachers and students in the education system.

Implication for Teachers

The insights gained from this research could lead to the creation of new resources and professional development opportunities for teachers to understand student behaviors better and address them effectively in the classroom. The results could help reduce behavioral challenges,

increase knowledge of behavioral issues, and enable teachers to identify specific behaviors to implement appropriate interventions or support. With the additional professional development, teachers' awareness of their own empathy levels may change, which in turn may influence the overall classroom environment.

Policy Implications

The data collected in this study may support school administrators in revising discipline policies to prioritize restorative practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) over exclusionary measures such as suspension or expulsion. District-level policies could also require the presence of on-site behavioral specialists, school psychologists, or behavior intervention teams. Embedding behavioral expertise within schools has the potential to reduce teacher stress and contribute to more positive and supportive classroom environments. Houchens et al. (2017) examined teachers' perceptions of working conditions in schools implementing PBIS schoolwide compared to those not implementing PBIS. Using the Kentucky survey, Teaching Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL), Houchens and co-researchers selected 151 non-SWPBIS schools to compare to the 151 SWPBIS schools that completed the TELL. Information gathered on the TELL examined teachers' perceptions of teaching conditions and included Likert-style questions on a five-point scale. Teachers who taught in PBIS schools noted clear student and faculty understanding of behaviors, and a stronger atmosphere of professional trust and respect. These findings suggest that PBIS contributed to a more supportive working environment where teachers felt supported and empowered.

Research Implications

The findings of this study provide a basis for further research into teachers' perceptions of student behavioral challenges. Future studies could build upon these results by expanding the

sample size, examining diverse geographic contexts, or investigating the influence of socioeconomic factors. Additionally, continued research focusing on administrators' perceptions of disruptive student behavior could provide valuable insight into the connections or disconnects between teachers' and administration's views.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to educators in a K-12 setting, who are currently teaching in public schools within Central Pennsylvania, during the 2025–2026 academic school year. This study specifically centers on teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding behavioral challenges in their classrooms. Other voices, such as those of administrators, school counselors, support staff, students, and parents, are not included in the participant group, but may be addressed in future studies.

Table 1

Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Administrator	A leadership professional, such as a superintendent, director of special education, principal, assistant principal, or dean of students, responsible for overseeing daily school operations and ensuring a safe, effective, and supportive learning environment for students and staff (Everything You Need to Know About Being a School Administrator, 2025).
Emotional Disturbance	A disability category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) characterized by conditions that significantly impact educational performance, including difficulty maintaining relationships, inappropriate behaviors, persistent mood issues, or physical symptoms

Term	Definition
	related to personal or school problems. These characteristics must be present over a prolonged period (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).
Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	An educational right guaranteeing that students with disabilities receive specialized education and related services at no cost to parents, designed to meet individual needs and prepare students for further education, employment, and/or independent living (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
General Education	The standard instructional program designed for typically developing students, guided by state educational standards and assessed through annual state-mandated testing (Webster, 2019).
General Education Teacher	An educator knowledgeable about grade-level curriculum and academic expectations for students in a typical classroom setting (What Does a General Education Teacher Do? Career Overview, Roles, Jobs NSTA, 2025)
High-Incidence Disability	Disabilities most commonly observed in school settings, affecting approximately 10% of students, including learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, and mild intellectual disabilities (Eagleton, 2021).
Inclusion	The placement of students with disabilities in age-appropriate general education classrooms with additional supports as needed (Lambert, 2008).

Term	Definition
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	A federal law ensuring students with disabilities receive special education and related services and supporting early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).
Low-Incidence Disability	Disabilities that occur infrequently in school settings, affecting fewer than 1% of school-aged children, including sensory impairments, autism spectrum disorders, and significant intellectual disabilities (Eagleton, 2021).
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	A principle under IDEA requiring that students with disabilities be educated with nondisabled peers in general education settings to the greatest extent appropriate (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	A multi-tiered, evidence-based framework designed to improve student behavior, academic outcomes, and emotional well-being through proactive strategies and consistent support systems (Center on PBIS, 2025).
Special Education	An instructional program designed to address individual student needs while promoting inclusion in general education when appropriate, including services for a wide range of disabilities that affect educational performance (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022).
Special Education Teacher	An educator trained to support students with mild to moderate or moderate to severe disabilities and responsible for implementing

Term	Definition
	Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), ensuring legal compliance, and completing required documentation within mandated timelines (Dragoo, 2024).

Summary

In summary, the study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions of student behavioral challenges in the classroom and identify the resources that are most effective in managing these situations. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into teachers' needs when working with students who exhibit disruptive behavior and to reduce stress for both teachers and students. This research also fills a gap in the current literature by focusing on teachers' views of student behavior in Pennsylvania. Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth review of special education, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and how classroom behavior and learning environments affect teachers.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the range of student behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. These behaviors can range from mild, such as interrupting during instruction, to more severe, such as causing injury to oneself or others. Additionally, the study evaluated the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes.

Grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers, this research aimed to identify recurring patterns in student behavior across educational levels, examine the strategies educators use to address these challenges, and assess what types of professional development or institutional support they perceive as most beneficial.

Ultimately, this work intended to shape policy and practices in teacher training, school leadership, and classroom management strategies in order to create a more positive and productive learning environment.

Research Questions

1. What types of behavioral challenges are educators currently experiencing in their classrooms?
2. How do educators perceive the causes of these student behavioral issues?
3. How do behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and what supports would be or have been beneficial in managing these challenges?

Need for the Study

Classroom disruptions stemming from student behavioral challenges have increased significantly in recent years, with 70% of teachers citing increased behaviors from 2019 to 2023, yet there has been little corresponding expansion in support for educators and school staff (Staff, 2024). These behavioral incidents affect not only the student in crisis but also impact teachers and other students by disrupting instructional time and creating a less safe and supportive learning environment. Such disruptions are associated with negative academic, social, and emotional outcomes, contributing to feelings of insecurity among both students and teachers (Blank & Shavit, 2016).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2025), one in five children between the ages of three and seventeen has been diagnosed with a mental, developmental, or behavioral disorder. However, with the right support and strategies, these students can thrive. Furthermore, over 7.5 million students are currently served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Despite the growing prevalence of students with disabilities and behavioral needs, there has not been a proportional increase in teacher preparation, professional development, or access to effective classroom management strategies. This lack of preventative support is increasingly cited by educators and school staff as a contributing factor to burnout, stress, and, ultimately, teacher attrition (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Herman et al., 2020).

Research has shown that chronic exposure to behavioral disruptions and a lack of effective support mechanisms can lead to emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction, and decreased teacher efficacy (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As teachers struggle to meet the academic and behavioral needs of increasingly diverse classrooms, many report feeling underprepared to manage students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Stormont, Reinke, &

Herman, 2011). Without access to ongoing training in trauma-informed practices, positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), and social-emotional learning frameworks, teachers are left to navigate these complex situations alone, often leading to reactive rather than proactive disciplinary approaches (Fisher, 2020).

Public Education

The first known American public school was the English Classical School, founded in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1821. This institution later became known as The English High School and served as a prototype for what Horace Mann would later define as the "common school" a universal, publicly funded system open to all children (Kober & Rentner, 2020). These early schools emphasized core subjects, including reading, writing, and arithmetic, and were designed to educate students into virtuous, civic-minded citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

In the early 1900s, Elizabeth E. Farrell established the first *ungraded classroom* in New York City, providing individualized instruction for students with developmental and behavioral challenges (University at Buffalo, n.d.). As the first Inspector of Ungraded Classes, she helped integrate special education into the public school system, laying the groundwork for more inclusive educational practices. Farrell's work transformed public education for exceptional children, which led to the founding of the Council for Exceptional Children, which remains a leading organization in the field (Council for Exceptional Children, n.d.).

By the mid-19th century, professionalization of teaching became a critical aspect of the expanding school system. The establishment of normal schools, specialized institutions for teacher training, began in the 1830s. Massachusetts again led the way, opening the first public

normal school in 1839. These institutions marked the beginning of formalized teacher education and reinforced the idea that teaching should be a respected and skilled profession.

Major social reforms continued into the 20th century. In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), declaring that racial segregation in public schools was inherently unequal and, therefore, unconstitutional (National Archives, 2024). This decision marked a pivotal moment in civil rights history, laying the legal groundwork for educational equity.

Federal involvement deepened during the Great Society era with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, ESEA aimed to close achievement gaps for disadvantaged students by allocating federal funds to public schools, particularly through Title I, which targeted schools in low-income communities. The act also provided support for textbooks, teacher training, and special education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).

Further legislative progress came in 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later renamed IDEA), which mandated that students with disabilities have access to free and appropriate public education. The law provided federal support to states to ensure educational protections and services for students with special needs and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

In the early 21st century, accountability became a central focus of educational policy. President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law in 2002, a reauthorization of ESEA that imposed rigorous standards for academic achievement. Under NCLB, schools were required to administer annual standardized tests in reading and math, and progress was measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks. The law aimed to

close the achievement gaps between student groups, particularly among minorities and low-income populations (The White House, 2002).

NCLB faced criticism for its overreliance on standardized testing and its use of punitive measures against underperforming schools. In response, President Barack Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, replacing NCLB. While ESSA maintained a commitment to equity and continued standardized testing, it returned more decision-making authority to states, allowing for more localized accountability systems and educational innovation (ESSA, 2015).

Special Education Law and IDEA

Special education law in the United States has evolved significantly over the past several decades to protect the rights of students with disabilities and to ensure they receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). The legal foundation for special education was established through a series of federal laws and court decisions that aimed to eliminate discrimination and promote equal access to education. For example, in 1972 The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) sued the commonwealth of Pennsylvania after children with intellectual disabilities were denied access to public education. The court ruled that these students could not be excluded from public schools and that doing so violated their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment. As a result, the state was required to provide free public education and appropriate protections for students with disabilities. This case helped lay the groundwork for later federal special education laws, including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as IDEA.

The cornerstone of special education law is IDEA, originally enacted in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). This legislation mandated that public schools provide FAPE in the LRE to students with disabilities. It also required that each eligible student receive an Individualized Education Program (IEP) tailored to their specific needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). See Table 2 below for a detailed overview of the six principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Walsh, 2024).

Table 2

Six Principles of IDEA

#	Principle	Description
1	Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	Every student with a disability is entitled to a free education tailored to their individual needs, designed to provide meaningful educational benefit.
2	Appropriate Evaluation	Students must receive nondiscriminatory, comprehensive evaluations using multiple measures to determine eligibility and educational needs.
3	Individualized Education Program	Each eligible student must have a written IEP that outlines present levels of performance, goals, services, accommodations, and how progress will be measured.

4	Least Restrictive Environment	Students with disabilities must be educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, with removal from general education occurring only when necessary.
5	Parent and Student Participation	Parents (and students, when appropriate) have the right to participate in all decisions related to identification, evaluation, placement, and services.
6	Procedural Safeguards	Legal protections ensure that parents and students can challenge decisions, access records, receive prior written notice, and resolve disputes through due process.

Prior to IDEA, many children with disabilities were either excluded from public education entirely or placed in segregated settings without access to meaningful instruction. Landmark court cases such as *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) affirmed the rights of students with disabilities to public education and laid the groundwork for federal legislation. Later, *Gaskin v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (2005) reinforced these rights by requiring Pennsylvania to improve access to inclusive, community-based educational services for students with disabilities, ensuring compliance with IDEA and emphasizing least restrictive environments (*Gaskin v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, n.d.). Unfortunately, in 2010, the advisory panel established under the Gaskin settlement, concluded

that the provisions of the agreement had not been fully implemented (Elks, 2010). While some improvements were noted, including increases in professional development and training opportunities, gains in least restrictive environment (LRE) placement were minimal, particularly for students with low-incident disabilities (Elks, 2010). The panel's recommendations from the 2010 meeting included, making LRE a high priority for all children in Pennsylvania, promoting meaningful inclusion, and ensuring continued parent education and ongoing support and monitoring by the Department of Education (Elks, 2010).

In 1990, the law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, expanding services and strengthening protections. IDEA has since undergone several reauthorizations, most notably in 2004, emphasizing accountability, research-based instruction, and the alignment of special education with general education reforms, including the No Child Left Behind Act (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Additionally, laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and extend protections beyond the scope of IDEA, including in areas such as extracurricular activities, transportation, and postsecondary education (National Education Association, 2024). Together, these laws ensure that students with disabilities have access to equitable educational opportunities, appropriate services, and legal safeguards.

Definitions of Behavioral Challenges

Disruptions during instructional time are common in classrooms and can range from minor disruptions to major disruptions. Teachers are prepared for minor disruptions and are easily able to address and continue teaching the lesson with little negative impact on the

classroom environment and students. Behavioral disruptions exist on a continuum and can have varying degrees of impact on teaching and learning (Ødegård & Solberg, 2024).

Minor behavioral disruptions include behaviors such as task avoidance, talking back to the teacher, walking around the classroom without permission, or talking over peers during discussions. Moderate behavioral disruptions share similar characteristics but occur more frequently and with greater intensity. These may involve persistent defiance, emotional outbursts, or repeated refusal to follow instructions (Ødegård & Solberg, 2024). At the far end of the continuum, major behavioral disruptions are defined as actions that result in significant harm or distress to others, including behaviors characterized by physical aggression, bullying, or antisocial conduct. Such behaviors not only threaten classroom safety but also require intensive intervention and support (Ødegård & Solberg, 2024, p. 2).

In recent years, managing student behavior has become the most commonly cited concern among public school teachers, many of whom report feeling underprepared to address these challenges effectively (Baloglu, 2009). Among students receiving special education services, approximately 30% are diagnosed with Disruptive Behavior Disorders (DBDs) such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) or conduct disorder (CD) (Alperin et al., 2023). Students with DBD often receive Special Education services under Emotional Disturbance (EDB). These are pervasive, chronic, or severe conditions that impact students, who frequently receive school-based interventions and referrals due to the intensity and frequency of their behavioral needs (Wang et al., 2012). These growing behavioral concerns demonstrate the urgent need for teacher training and more consistent implementation of evidence-based classroom management strategies.

Mental Health and Behavioral Screenings

As previously noted, there has been a clear rise in behavioral disruptions in classrooms across school settings. While these behaviors are often observed and documented, a key concern remains: Are schools using effective screening practices to identify students who may need mental health or behavioral support (Oliver et al., 2011)? Teachers are often the first adults in a school to notice when a student is struggling, but many lack the training or background needed to fully understand or respond to behavioral health concerns (Green et al., 2017). According to Eklund et al. (2009), schools typically identify students in need of support in one of two ways, either through referrals from staff members such as teachers or paraprofessionals (referred to as “key informants”), or through the use of universal screening tools. However, both approaches come with significant challenges.

Teacher observations and “key informant” reports can be inconsistent or inaccurate and may be shaped not only by their professional experience but also by personal beliefs about mental health, their stress levels, and even implicit biases (Green et al., 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As a result, some students, particularly those with internalizing symptoms like anxiety or depression, may go unnoticed because their behaviors are less disruptive. Teachers tend to focus more on visible academic or behavioral concerns, rather than less obvious mental health struggles, and they may not feel equipped to interpret emotional warning signs in the classroom.

Universal screeners offer a more structured approach. These tools may involve self-report surveys, teacher reports, or data collection based on discipline records, and in theory, universal screening can help schools catch students in need of services before problems escalate (Gould et al., 2009). Research by Husky et al. (2011) showed that about one in five students screened were identified as needing mental health support, but only a small number were actually receiving

services. This points to a significant gap between identifying at-risk students and providing them with the necessary support.

There are also practical limitations. Non-anonymous screenings can raise concerns about confidentiality, and some parents may opt out or be hesitant to participate. Screenings also take time and resources, which can strain schools already stretched thin (Green et al., 2017). Even when students are identified, follow-ups can be weak. Lustig et al. (2022) found that only 5.4% of students flagged through screening were connected to mental health services, and many still showed signs of being at risk a year later.

Identifying students with mental health and behavioral needs and ensuring they receive timely support is essential. Not only does it help the individual student succeed, but it also contributes to a more stable classroom environment.

Classroom Environment and Learning

A teacher's core responsibility is to facilitate student learning within a safe, structured environment. However, research consistently shows that learning is severely compromised in chaotic or emotionally tense classrooms (Frenzel et al., 2018). Frenzel and colleagues conducted interviews with 1,643 students in fifth to tenth grade, and 69 teachers during three points of the school year. They report that emotions are not only transmitted one-way, but teachers and students mutually influence each other, emphasizing the importance of shaping classroom climate and learning environment (Frenzel et al., 2018). Chronic disruptions not only compromise lesson delivery but can also deteriorate the school climate, weaken student-teacher relationships, and hinder overall academic achievement.

These misbehaviors have long-term consequences, including exacerbating teacher attrition, especially among early-career educators. Ingersoll et al. (2018) report that many novice

teachers feel unprepared and unsupported in managing classroom behavior and find the resultant stress a key factor driving them out of the profession. For instance, within three years, nearly two-thirds of new teachers leave, many citing poor classroom management as a primary cause.

The role of classroom culture and emotional climate becomes clear when studying student outcomes. Ma and Willms (2004) found that among seven school-level variables, classroom disruption had the strongest negative correlation with achievement, far outweighing other factors. Additionally, Côté-Lussier and Fitzpatrick (2016) showed that when students perceived their classroom as safe and supportive, they experienced fewer depressive symptoms and greater engagement, reflecting positive mental health outcomes.

Research also highlights a reinforcing cycle; teacher burnout and ineffective management strategies lead to increased student misbehavior, which in turn exacerbates burnout, a cycle that persists unless interrupted by effective interventions. For instance, emotionally exhausted teachers often rely on reactive rather than proactive strategies, exacerbating disruptive behavior in class.

Behavioral Classroom Management

Behavioral challenges continue to pose barriers to classroom management and effective instruction, with approximately one-third of teachers reporting substantial interference due to such behaviors (Aloe et al., 2014). Aloe et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 quantitative studies involving teachers across all grade levels to assess relationships among key variables including student misbehavior and the three dimensions of teacher burnout which are, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The findings indicate that behavioral challenges present a significant barrier to effective classroom instruction. The authors suggest that enhancing teachers' classroom management skills through targeted training

and professional development may mitigate these negative effects. If not addressed, these disruptions can hinder carefully planned lessons, reduce instructional time, and contribute to teacher stress and burnout.

When behavioral issues are persistent, educators may struggle to maintain student engagement or to dedicate time to developing creative, differentiated instruction that meets all learners' needs. While strong classroom management can buffer the impact of behavioral challenges, such strategies are often narrowly focused on teacher conduct and responses. However, teaching quality is shaped by a more complex interplay of variables, including administrative support, student socio-emotional development, peer dynamics, and the broader school culture (Fauth et al., 2020).

Proactive classroom management strategies are generally more effective than reactive approaches because they focus on fostering a structured and positive learning environment that prevents behavioral issues before they arise (Oliver et al., 2011). When teachers establish clear expectations and maintain consistent routines, they create a classroom climate that naturally discourages disruptions. These proactive strategies are particularly beneficial for students who require additional behavioral support. Techniques such as offering verbal praise and using prompts to reinforce on-task behavior have been shown to significantly improve student engagement and success by 20-30%, especially when implemented with a higher praise-to-reprimand ratio (Caldarella et al., 2020). When students clearly understand what is expected of them and experience a predictable and supportive environment, they are more likely to self-regulate and remain focused, leading to fewer and less severe behavioral incidents (Day et al., 2015).

Effective classroom management not only fosters order and predictability but also enhances time on task, a critical variable linked to academic achievement and student success (Marder et al., 2023). However, this raises several key questions about teacher preparation and institutional support: Are educators adequately trained in proactive, research-based classroom management techniques? Are they receiving mentorship and ongoing professional development focused on behavior intervention strategies?

A lack of administrative consistency or clear behavioral policies can lead to confusion, diminish teacher authority, and send mixed messages to students. Teachers may hesitate to enforce consequences if they fear being undermined by administration or parents, which can destroy classroom control and diminish instructional time (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Administration Support

Another important factor influencing student behavior and overall classroom climate is the level of support teachers receive from school administrators during instances of serious behavioral disruptions. Research underscores the value of consistent administrative presence in classrooms, which is linked to higher academic achievement and more favorable perceptions of principals as effective instructional leaders (Robinson et al., 2008). When principals and administrators are actively engaged, teachers are more likely to feel confident in their roles and take initiative in addressing classroom challenges. As Ertürk (2021) notes, teachers who feel supported by their administrators are more inclined to "take an active role in making and implementing creative and original decisions and developing risk-taking and problem-solving skills" (p. 190).

Kurt and Duyar (2023) suggest a supportive school climate, one that promotes psychological safety and encourages teacher initiative, helps explain the link between

administrative support and teacher satisfaction. This quantitative study focused on public school teachers and explored the relationships between organizational and psychological variables through surveys. The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was employed to measure factors such as teachers' satisfaction with their profession. A teacher's belief that their school valued their contributions and cared about their well-being was a strong positive predictor of job satisfaction. Kurt and Duyar (2023) concluded that enhancing organizational support and cultivating psychologically safe schools were critical strategies for improving teacher satisfaction, commitment, and retention.

Administrative leadership can shape environments that strengthen teacher commitment and increase job satisfaction, which demonstrates the importance of an engaged administration (Kurt & Duyar, 2023; Li, Xu & Kim, 2025). Research also shows that social and institutional support can reduce teacher burnout by helping educators manage stress, feel valued, and maintain emotional resilience (Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012).

Beyond instructional leadership, the emotional and psychological support provided by administrators plays a critical role in teacher well-being. Offering validation, acceptance, and guidance in managing stress and conflict contributes significantly to teachers' perceptions of their work environment and overall job satisfaction (Bhantumnavin, 2000; Ertürk, 2021). This is especially vital for educators who regularly confront challenging student behaviors and rely on administrators to offer support both inside and outside the classroom.

Ertürk (2021) found that a teacher's job satisfaction is strongly influenced by the level of support they perceive from their school principal; as administrative support increases, so too does satisfaction with their teaching role. Even the perception of support, whether it is frequently acted upon, has been associated with higher job performance, improved morale, and greater

professional engagement (Aarons et al., 2009). When educators feel genuinely supported and valued by the administration, they are more likely to engage in problem-solving, implement innovative strategies, and seek help when needed without fear of judgment.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a research-based, tiered framework aimed at enhancing student behavior, academic performance, and overall school climate. Unlike punishment-centered approaches, PBIS emphasizes proactive prevention, positive reinforcement, and data-informed decision-making to create supportive environments for all students (Rholetter, 2024).

Developed in the 1980s at the University of Oregon, PBIS arose in response to exclusionary disciplinary methods and was later mandated by the 1997 IDEA revisions, which require the use of positive behavioral strategies for students with disabilities (Rholetter, 2024). PBIS operates as a decision-making structure, not a fixed curriculum, that guides educators in selecting, implementing, and monitoring evidence-based practices across all levels of schooling (Rholetter, 2024; Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a three-tiered framework designed to promote positive behavior and improve student outcomes through a continuum of support. Tier One, or Universal Support, targets all students and focuses on proactive strategies such as teaching, modeling, and reinforcing appropriate behaviors (National Education Association, 2020). Tier Two is intended for approximately 10–15% of students who require additional support beyond Tier One. Research indicates that Tier Two interventions can effectively reduce minor behavioral incidents, improve student attendance, and enhance academic performance (Anderson et al., 2010). Tier Three provides individualized and intensive

support for the 3–5% of students exhibiting chronic or severe behavioral challenges. At this level, students often undergo Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and receive customized Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) to address specific needs (Eiraldi et al., 2019).

For authentic inclusion, professional development for PBIS must be deliberately adapted to address the needs of students with severe disabilities, covering school-wide expectations, data collection, reinforcement strategies, and structured supports tailored for these learners (Landers et al., 2012). Students with disruptive behaviors need intensive support to ensure PBIS is implemented with fidelity.

Teacher Perspectives of PBIS

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) helps teachers and staff establish consistent expectations for student behavior, leading to a more positive school environment (Sugai & Horner, 2002). When used consistently and effectively, SWPBIS is associated with fewer office discipline referrals, which can improve how teachers view the overall health of their school and support higher student achievement (Houchens et al., 2017). Corbin et al. (2022) investigated the role of implementation climate in SWPBIS feasibility among 348 Kindergarten to 5th grade teachers across 39 elementary schools. Using a four-item version of the Feasibility of Intervention Measure (FIM), the School Implementation Climate Scale (SICS), and the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), researchers documented teachers' perceptions in schools with varying levels of implementation climate. They found that teachers in schools with a more supportive implementation climate viewed SWPBIS as more feasible and, in turn, achieved higher implementation averages, demonstrating that positive teacher perceptions are associated with greater implementation fidelity.

Teacher perceptions are also influenced by the program's ability to address equity in disciplinary practices. Teachers reported greater clarity in handling office referrals and increasing confidence in making equitable decisions when an equity-focused PBIS approach was used (Austin et al., 2024). Additionally, McIntosh et al. (2021) demonstrated that an equity-centered PBIS approach could reduce racial disparities in school discipline, highlighting the critical role teachers play in enacting fair and consistent behavioral interventions.

Still, the implementation process is not without its challenges. Terrell and Cho (2023) found that, despite improvements in school climate, many teachers reported feeling frustrated by the lack of professional development, limited time to implement PBIS strategies, and insufficient support and communication from school leadership. The study was conducted over the course of one year and utilized both surveys and interviews to examine special education teachers' and school psychologists' satisfaction with PBIS programs (Terrell and Cho, 2023). Their concerns suggest that for SWPBIS to be fully effective, schools must invest in training, allocate time for implementation, and ensure ongoing support for staff.

PBIS in Special Education

Teachers who work with students in special education often express a different perspective on the effectiveness of PBIS. While PBIS is designed as a school-wide support system, students in special education do not always engage with it in the same way as their general education peers. Shuster et al. (2016) found that between 33.1% and 56.8% of students receiving special education services were not fully participating in their schools' PBIS programs. The study noted that students with low-incidence disabilities faced additional barriers compared to students with high-incidence disabilities. These students often spend significant time outside the general education classroom, where behavior management is typically overseen by special

education teachers using alternative systems that may not align with PBIS (Hawken & O'Neill, 2006).

Although state-level PBIS coordinators recognize the importance of including students with disabilities, they have acknowledged that these students were not a central consideration during initial planning phases (Walker et al., 2018). Kurth and Enyart (2016) highlighted that school-wide PBIS frameworks often fall short in providing the necessary accommodations and support for students with disabilities to fully access behavioral and academic content. For example, students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems may lack the communication support required to participate meaningfully in PBIS activities.

Teacher Well-Being

Numerous studies have focused on the relationship between teacher well-being and student achievement. Teachers' perceptions of student misbehavior have been directly linked to increased emotional exhaustion, reduced job enthusiasm, and weakened teacher-student relationships (Aldrup et al., 2018). These stressors are a significant factor contributing to the growing number of educators leaving the profession. Continual behavioral challenges not only diminish teachers' capacity to deliver effective instruction but also lower their satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession.

According to He et al. (2025), teachers often engage in "surface acting", displaying emotions that differ from their true feelings, leading to burnout and emotional detachment from students. This is especially problematic because student-teacher relationships characterized by trust, warmth, and mutual respect are essential to student development. Such relationships are particularly important for students who exhibit behavioral challenges, as they are often the ones who benefit most from consistent, empathetic adult support.

When teachers are emotionally depleted, they struggle to invest in the kinds of connections that foster student engagement and achievement. Yet, research shows that students who feel respected, understood, and emotionally supported by their teachers tend to demonstrate higher levels of cognitive functioning and academic performance (Vandenbroucke et al., 2018; Roorda et al., 2011). Addressing teacher's well-being is not only essential for a healthy and motivated workforce, but it is also a key lever for improving student outcomes and fostering a positive school climate.

Teacher Burnout and Attrition

Emotional strain and physical safety are increasingly important aspects of teacher well-being within the school environment. Alarming data show that a significant number of teachers have experienced violence from students. In one study, nearly half of the teachers surveyed reported being subjected to physical aggression (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007). Exposure to violence is associated with higher levels of burnout, increased emotional exhaustion, and a decline in life satisfaction (Aloe et al., 2014; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007). These conditions create an environment that makes it challenging for teachers to maintain a sense of personal safety and emotional balance, both of which are essential for effective teaching.

Teacher burnout is increasingly recognized as a complex issue shaped by both individual and systemic factors. Recent studies indicate that many educators continue to experience high levels of stress, fatigue, and anxiety, with contributing factors including heavy workloads, disruptive student behavior, and inconsistent support from school administrators (Cavallari et al., 2024). Using structured focus groups, Cavallari et al. (2024) found that 76% of participants described impacts on physical health and health behaviors, 62% described psychological impacts, and 68% indicated impacts on relationships due to job demands.

Longitudinal reviews highlight that burnout is not simply a short-term response to stress, but is a persistent problem tied to classroom conditions, administrative support, and job demands (Mijakoski et al., 2022; Hernández-Cruz et al., 2024). Hernández-Cruz et al., (2024) reviewed five decades of research on teacher burnout, finding that studies have emphasized stress, self-efficacy, social support, and job satisfaction, but classroom environment, emotional intelligence, and work–family conflict were not explored.

Burnout is closely connected to reductions in mental and physical well-being, including symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and physical complaints (Agyapong et al., 2022). Teachers who face chronic behavioral challenges in the classroom, limited resources, or insufficient administrative backing are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and a sense of professional inefficacy (Collie, 2023).

Student behavior has been identified as a significant factor in teacher turnover. Ingersoll (2003) reported that one in four teachers left the profession due to challenges related to student discipline. This ongoing issue contributes to widespread staffing shortages as schools struggle to fill vacancies each year. In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics noted alarming trends, with 87% of schools reporting increased incidents of student misbehavior and classroom disruptions. Additionally, student absenteeism is on the rise, further raising the inconsistency in student instruction. Behavioral challenges in the classroom can interfere with the learning process and contribute to increased teacher stress and burnout, which, in turn, can complicate efforts to retain qualified educators.

Summary

Given the direct relationship between classroom environment, teacher well-being, and student success, it is essential to investigate the specific behavioral challenges teachers face, the

strategies available to assist them, and the supports they find most effective (Fisher, 2020).

Understanding the behavioral challenges that teachers face and identifying supports that foster positive teacher–student interactions can reduce teacher burnout and attrition while promoting students’ positive development (Granger et al., 2024).

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Overview

This chapter starts with a restatement of the study's purpose and research questions. It also provides an outline of the methodology, including methods, participants, study design, data collection, and analysis. Finally, the chapter describes how the research findings will be organized and presented in subsequent chapters.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the range of student behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. These behaviors can range from mild, such as interrupting during instruction, to more severe, such as causing injury to oneself or others. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes.

Grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers, this research aimed to identify recurring patterns in student behavior across educational levels, examine the strategies educators use to address these challenges, and assess what types of professional development or institutional support they perceive as most beneficial (Tie et al., 2019).

Ultimately, this work is intended to shape policies and practices in teacher training, school leadership, and classroom management strategies to create a more positive and productive learning environment.

Research Questions

1. What types of behavioral challenges are educators currently experiencing in their classrooms?
2. How do educators perceive the causes of these student behavioral issues?
3. How do behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and what supports would be or have been beneficial in managing these challenges?

Setting

The selected district for this study consisted of 663 professional employees (teachers, nurses, counselors, and psychologists) across eight elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and three alternative education programs, providing opportunities to gather perspectives from teachers at various instructional levels. The district was located in Central Pennsylvania, a semi-rural region characterized by its setting amid the Appalachian Mountains, with areas of larger populations similar to those found in major cities. It is adjacent to a large state university, which significantly contributes to the student enrollment size in the district population. According to Tracy (2024), rigorous qualitative research attends diverse participant perspectives, and contextual depth, to enhance the richness and credibility of findings.

Participants

This study used purposeful sampling to recruit participants who provided rich, relevant, and experience-based insights into emerging disruptive classroom behaviors. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to intentionally select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study (Tracy, 2024).

This study involved teachers currently employed in K–12 public schools in Central Pennsylvania, United States, who hold a teaching degree and are qualified to instruct students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Eligible participants had at least three years of teaching experience and have worked in educational settings where they engage with students in

classroom behavior management. A minimum of three years of teaching experience was required so that the study can examine emerging disruptive classroom behaviors.

Teachers with at least three years of teaching experience are likely to provide detailed observations of changes in student behavior over the course of their employment. Furthermore, the breadth of knowledge these teachers possess can help uncover the root causes of the questions being investigated and offer insights grounded in lived experiences and contextual understanding.

Participants were recruited from a school district in Central Pennsylvania and invited to participate via email invitations distributed by the superintendent using the district email database (see Appendix A). Follow-up emails or direct outreach were conducted by the researcher after one week. Individuals who do not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from participation. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Although the district includes 663 professional employees, the anticipated sample size for this qualitative study was between five and twenty teachers. A minimum of five participants is required to ensure sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives for meaningful qualitative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A maximum of approximately 20 participants is anticipated, at which point data saturation is expected to occur, meaning no new themes or insights are likely to emerge from additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Tracy, 2024).

Study Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of behavioral challenges in primary and secondary classrooms. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring lived experiences, as it enables researchers to

understand how people experience and respond to complex social issues in their everyday settings (Tracy, 2024).

Data were collected using multiple methods to provide both contextual and experiential depth. Participants first completed a demographic survey (see Appendix B) to provide information on their background, including years of teaching experience. They then completed a self-reported form (see Appendix C), which consisted of Likert-style questions, to document teachers' classroom experiences. Finally, participants took part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher to further explore their perspectives and experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or via Google Meet, allowing for flexibility for participants. As Tracy (2024) emphasizes, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in the questions asked, allowing "the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard" (p. 172), making them suitable for research involving personal experiences. Similarly, Ruslin et al. (2022) note that semi-structured interviews enable participants to explore not only what they think, but also why and how, through guided follow-up questions, providing deeper insight into the research questions.

Procedure

After IRB and district administrative approval (see Appendix D) were obtained, an email outlining the study was distributed by the superintendent to teachers within the school district, using the district email database (see Appendix A). Depending on the participants' preference and availability, interviews were conducted in person or via Google Meet. Teachers who meet the eligibility criteria and wished to participate replied to the email and received a response from the researcher via email containing the meeting date and time, Google Meet link, if applicable,

and included a brief description of the study and a link to a demographic survey (see Appendix B). To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded (Rutakumwa et al., 2019).

During the interview, participants joined using the given Google Meet link or in person. After introductions, participants received an email containing a link to complete the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix F), the Audio/Video Release Consent Form (see Appendix G), and the Self-Report Form (see Appendix C). After participants completed and submitted the forms, the interview began with verbal consent to record video, followed by ten open-ended questions (see Appendix H) exploring their experiences and perceptions of student behaviors and their current approaches to managing them. If participants did not consent to video recording, audio consent was obtained instead to ensure their participation could still be included while respecting their privacy, using Evernote. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify or deepen understanding. Interviews were recorded with the participant's consent for later transcription and analysis. The participant could stop the study at any time, if they did not wish to participate or consent.

All audio and video recordings collected during the research were stored on a secure, password-protected, and encrypted drive approved by Slippery Rock University. Only the researcher and dissertation supervisor had access to these files. Recordings were used solely for research purposes and were not shared outside the research team. Data were retained until the completion and final approval of the dissertation, after which all recordings will be permanently deleted.

Instrumentation

This study employed three researcher-developed instruments: a demographic survey, a self-report form, and a semi-structured interview protocol. All instruments align with the study's

research questions and elicit information relevant to teachers' experiences with student behavioral challenges in K–12 classrooms.

The demographic survey (see Appendix B) collected background information necessary to help understand participants' responses. Items included years of teaching experience, grade level(s) taught, and instructional setting. These questions were included to ensure participants met eligibility criteria and to allow for comparisons across instructional levels.

The self-report form (see Appendix C) consisted of Likert-style items designed to capture teachers' perceptions of classroom behavior trends, perceived causes of behavioral challenges, and the impact of these behaviors on their professional well-being. The form was developed based on existing research on classroom behavior management, as well as the district's student handbook, providing structured data that complements what is learned from the interviews.

The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix H) allowed participants to describe their experiences with student behavior in depth while maintaining consistency across interviews. Interview questions were aligned with the study's three overarching research questions and designed to encourage reflection on observed changes in student behavior, contributing factors, and perceived support. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it allows flexibility for follow-up questions while ensuring that key topics are consistently addressed across participants (Tracy, 2024; Ruslin et al., 2022).

Table 3

Alignment of Semi-Structured Interview Questions with Research Questions

Interview Questions	Research Question(s)
Please tell me a little about your teaching background, such as your grade level, subject area, and years of teaching experience?	<i>RQ1</i>

In your experience, what types of student behaviors have become more common or concerning in your classroom?	<i>RQ1</i>
What do you believe contributes to these behaviors?	<i>RQ2</i>
How have these behavioral challenges affected your ability to teach effectively?	<i>RQ1, RQ3</i>
In what ways, if any, have these behaviors impacted your emotional well-being or job satisfaction?	<i>RQ3</i>
How do you typically cope with or manage stress that arises from dealing with challenging student behaviors?	<i>RQ3</i>
Have you received any training or professional development related to managing disruptive behavior or supporting students' social-emotional needs?	<i>RQ3</i>
How do school or district discipline policies influence how you handle behavioral incidents in your classroom?	<i>RQ3</i>
How do you think student behavior and school climate could be improved in your school or district?	<i>RQ3</i>
Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with student behavior or support systems that we haven't discussed?	<i>RQ1, RQ2, RQ3</i>

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through a demographic survey, a self-report form, and semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions, which allowed for flexibility in the conversation while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews. The Self-Report Form

was approximately 10 minutes to complete, using Q-Methodology Software, and the interview was approximately 30 minutes and was conducted either in person or on Google Meet, depending on participant preference and availability.

All participants were asked the same core set of questions (see Appendix H), designed to explore their experiences with student behavior, perceived causes, the impact on their professional well-being, and the types of support they have received or would find helpful. Follow-up questions were asked based on participants' responses, to clarify points or explore ideas in greater depth.

Recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the participants' words, expressions, and intended meanings are accurately captured and represented. Upon completion of transcription, participants received a copy of their interview transcript as part of the member-checking process. Participants were invited to review, clarify, edit, or expand their responses to ensure accurate and authentic representation. This process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative findings by allowing participants to confirm that their perspectives have been accurately documented (Tracy, 2024).

After the member checking process was completed, the finalized transcripts were imported into Atlas.ti, a specialized qualitative data analysis software designed to support the organization and examination of complex textual data (Atlas.ti, n.d.). Within the Atlas.ti platform, accompanying fieldnotes recorded during or immediately after each interview, were integrated into the relevant transcript files. This integration allowed for a more holistic and contextually rich analysis by pairing verbal data with observational and reflective notes from the researcher (Tracy, 2024).

Data Analysis

This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore educators' experiences with behavioral challenges in primary and secondary classrooms. This approach allowed for understanding of patterns in these challenges while capturing the depth of educators' lived experiences. The Self-Report Form was analyzed using Q-Methodology software, focusing on teachers' perceptions. Lutfallah and Buchanan (2019) discuss the use of Q-methodology and illustrate that this online tool has been successfully used in various research contexts.

All transcripts and fieldnotes were consolidated within the Atlas.ti software where the researcher engaged in multiple close readings of the material to become deeply familiar with the data. An inductive coding process was employed, emphasizing an open and flexible interpretive approach that was "interpretive, reflexive, and changeable" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, as cited in Tracy, 2024, p. 230). During this initial or primary-cycle coding phase, key patterns and recurring ideas began to emerge from the data.

Following the initial analysis, preliminary codes were refined and synthesized through second-level coding by the researcher, during which themes were "explained, theorized, and synthesized" (Tracy, 2024, p. 239). This iterative approach ensured that the analysis remains grounded in participants' experiences while allowing for deeper theoretical insight. During this process, hierarchical codes are generated using the thematic categories created in the initial coding to form groups during analysis (Tracy, 2024). Once the data were collected, it was analyzed and presented using both visual and textual methods. Quantitative data from the self-reported surveys was summarized and illustrated using graphs to highlight trends and differences in responses. Qualitative data, including open-ended survey responses and interview comments, were analyzed thematically and described in paragraphs. The results section focuses on

presenting findings, incorporating both graphical representations and narrative explanations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data.

Presentation of Results

Following the completion of the study, the researcher offered to share the results with relevant stakeholders, including school administrators and participating teachers. This could include a summary of the report or a brief presentation to discuss the findings in person. District administrators may use the data to identify areas of need, inform professional development, and implement targeted support to help teachers improve classroom practices and student outcomes. The goal of this presentation is to inform stakeholders of the outcomes in a way that supports data-driven decision-making and contributes to ongoing efforts to improve educational practice within the school or district.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is its geographic focus, in a small region of Pennsylvania. Since participants all work in schools within this specific area, their experiences may not reflect those of educators in other parts of the country. Differences in school culture, available resources, and community demographics can influence both the types of behavioral challenges teachers face and the support systems in place. As a result, the generalizability of the study's findings to other regions or broader populations of teachers may be limited.

Additionally, self-reported scores rely on teacher perceptions, which may introduce bias as the research focusing only on observable behaviors reported by teachers and does not include student or parent perspectives. Scores are based on Likert-type scales, which may be interpreted differently by each participant and may not capture all nuances of student behaviors. Participants

may also provide responses they believe the researcher wants to hear due to the sensitive nature of the questions, which could introduce response bias.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in the study, including the research design, participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis plans. By combining survey data with in-depth interviews, the research aimed to explore both patterns in student behavior and the lived experiences of teachers. The following chapters will present the study's findings in detail.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study examining the range of student behavioral challenges teachers encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and how these behaviors affect instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. The study also explored the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these challenges.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on the analysis of data collected from teacher participants. The results highlight recurring patterns in student behavior, the strategies educators use to address these behaviors, and the types of professional development and institutional supports teachers perceive as most beneficial.

This chapter is organized according to the major themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is supported by participant responses and examples that illustrate teachers' lived experiences managing student behavioral challenges in the classroom.

Research Questions

1. What types of behavioral challenges are educators currently experiencing in their classrooms?
2. How do educators perceive the causes of these student behavioral issues?
3. How do behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and what supports would be or have been beneficial in managing these challenges?

Participant Overview

This study included seven participants who were recruited from a semi-rural area in Central Pennsylvania using purposive sampling. Of the initial email outreach, seven educators

expressed interest in participating in the study. One educator was excluded for not meeting the criterion of having more than three years of classroom teaching experience. The final sample size for analysis consisted of six participants. Demographic characteristics were collected to provide context for the findings, including age range, gender, education level, certifications, and years of experience. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 55 years or older. The sample consisted entirely of female participants ($n = 6$, 100%).

Participants were evenly divided by highest level of education, with three holding a bachelor's degree ($n = 3$, 50%) and three holding a master's degree ($n = 3$, 50%). The majority of participants had 3–5 years of experience ($n = 3$, 50%), while the remaining categories (6–10 years, 16–20 years, and more than 20 years) each represented 17% of the sample. Most participants taught at the primary/elementary level ($n = 4$, 67%), with the remaining 33% teaching at the secondary level.

Participants held diverse certifications, including Elementary (PK–4, K–6), English and Communications (7–12), Special Education (K–12), and K–12 French, with some also holding advanced degrees and a minor in Special Education.

Table 4

Participant Demographic Characteristics (n=6)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Under 25	0	0%
	25–34	2	33%
	35–44	1	17%
	45–54	2	33%
	55 or older	1	17%

Gender	Woman	6	100%
	Man	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	0	0%
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	3	50%
	Master's Degree	3	50%
	Doctorate	0	0%
	Other	0	0%
Years of Experience	3–5 years	3	50%
	6–10 years	1	17%
	11–15 years	0	0%
	16–20 years	1	17%
	More than 20 years	1	17%
Grade Level Taught	Kindergarten	0	0%
	Primary/Elementary	4	67%
	Middle School	1	17%
	High School	1	17%
	Other	0	0%
Subjects Taught	Language Arts/English	5	—
	Mathematics	3	—
	Science	3	—
	Social Studies	3	—
	Special Education	2	—
	Foreign Language	1	—

Data Collection

Data were collected using qualitative methods, with supplemental quantitative measures, including a self-report survey, interviews, and field notes. These methods were employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of educators' experiences with classroom behavioral challenges and how they affect their well-being and instructional practices. This multi-method approach strengthened the depth and trustworthiness of the study.

Self-Report Survey

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through an eight-question self-report survey (see Appendix C) focused on daily classroom behavioral incidents and professional development. Quantitative data included the frequency and types of negative or disruptive student behaviors, as well as the frequency with which teachers requested assistance. Participants answered questions using a range of numbers or a Likert scale with choices of Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3), or Always (4), each equal to numeric score. The qualitative data consisted of open-ended responses regarding professional development needs and the types of training teachers believe would better support them in managing disruptive behavior.

The survey was distributed during each interview to ensure participants fully completed the forms, with the opportunity to ask questions if needed. All six participants completed the form.

Interviews

Data were also collected through semi-structured interviews with all six participants, which included 10 questions. Each interview lasted approximately 20–40 minutes and was conducted via Google Meet. An interview script (see Appendix H) guided the discussions while

allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. Sample questions addressed commonly observed student behaviors and perceptions of how student behavior and school climate could be improved.

All interviews were one-on-one, video-recorded via Google Meet with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned identification codes based on the order of their interviews, and all identifying information, such as names, school names, or personal references, was removed from the transcripts. Member checking was used for participants to review transcripts for accuracy before analysis.

All recordings, digital files, and transcripts were securely stored on a password-protected device. The researcher was the only one with access to the device and files. All files will be deleted after the dissertation is completed and final approval is granted.

Field Notes

Field notes were recorded during interviews by the researcher to capture observations and reflections. The researcher focused on behavioral indicators, focusing on participants' tone, emphasis and nonverbal cues. Field notes were used to supplement interview data and support the interpretation of findings. The use of surveys, interviews, and field notes allowed for triangulation of data sources, strengthening the credibility and depth of the study.

Data Analysis Process

An inductive coding approach was used to analyze qualitative data from interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, and field notes. All data were uploaded into Atlas.ti, where the researcher conducted multiple close readings to become familiar with the content.

During the first coding cycle, open coding was used to identify initial patterns, key phrases, and recurring ideas in the data. Codes were generated directly from participant responses, allowing themes to emerge naturally. This process remained flexible and iterative, reflecting an interpretive and reflexive approach to qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, as cited in Tracy, 2024, p. 230).

In the second coding cycle, the initial codes were reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader categories. Similar codes were combined, and relationships between codes were examined to develop more meaningful and organized patterns (Tracy, 2024). Through this process, overarching themes and subthemes were identified, representing shared experiences and perspectives among participants.

Hierarchical coding structures were then developed, with major themes supported by related subthemes derived from the data. This systematic, iterative coding process ensured that findings remained grounded in participants' responses while allowing for deeper interpretation and analysis (Tracy, 2024).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study was established through credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of multiple data sources, including self-report surveys, semi-structured interviews, and field notes, as well as prolonged engagement with the data during the coding process. Dependability was ensured through clear, consistent documentation of data collection and analysis procedures.

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which explored educators' perceptions of behavioral challenges in their classrooms. Drawing on participants' lived experiences, the

analysis examined the types of behaviors observed in the classroom, the impact of these behaviors on teachers both inside and outside the classroom, and the professional development supports perceived as beneficial.

Qualitative findings are organized by themes that emerged from the data analysis and are supported by participant responses and quotes from interviews and survey data. Four major themes were identified from the analysis addressing aspects of the research questions.

Quantitative findings are organized by the frequency and type of student behaviors reported in the self-report surveys, as well as teacher ratings based on experience. Data were analyzed for each behavior category to highlight the most commonly occurring classroom challenges. This analysis complements the qualitative themes by providing a numeric view of how often specific behavioral challenges occur, allowing for a clearer understanding of trends across participants.

Together, the qualitative and quantitative findings offer a comprehensive view of the behavioral challenges teachers in this study faced, the factors contributing to these behaviors, and the impact on instructional practices and teacher well-being.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data were collected through participant interviews. Each participant responded to a set of 10 structured questions, with follow-up questions posed as needed to elicit further detail and clarification. All participants completed the full interview protocol and provided comprehensive responses, offering insight into their experiences with classroom behavioral challenges.

Theme 1: The Impact of Technology Use

Technology use was identified as a significant factor influencing student behavior in the classroom. Participants consistently described technology as both a source of distraction and a contributor to increased disengagement from academic tasks.

Several educators noted that students frequently preferred screen-based activities over instructional content. Participant 1 reported, “A lot of them say school is boring and they just want to be in front of the screen,” highlighting a shift in student motivation and engagement. Similarly, Participant 2 described the growing presence of “technology-based behaviors,” noting that they have become more noticeable over time.

Teachers also reported that even when technology was intended for educational purposes, it often led to off-task behavior. Participant 4 stated, “The temptation to do other things is just constantly there,” noting that students frequently accessed games or unrelated content instead of completing assignments. This ongoing distraction has made classroom management more challenging, with one teacher explaining that students often treat school-issued devices as personal property and use them inappropriately during instructional time.

In addition to distraction, participants described how technology impacts students’ cognitive engagement and social interactions. Participant 2 noted that technology allows students to remain disengaged while appearing occupied, explaining that it provides “a way to be engaged, without needing to think.” Others expressed concern about students’ declining interpersonal communication skills, suggesting that increased screen time may limit opportunities for meaningful social interaction.

More concerning behaviors related to technology were also reported, including inappropriate use of devices such as photographing peers without permission. Participant 2

emphasized the potential harm of these actions, noting that students often do not understand the consequences of such behavior.

Finally, participants highlighted the influence of technology use outside of school. Participant 6 described how excessive nighttime device use contributes to fatigue and behavioral challenges during the school day, stating that students are often “up all night on their phone” and arrive at school agitated and disengaged.

Summary of Theme 1. This theme addresses research question 1 by highlighting technology-related disruptions as a common behavioral challenge observed by educators. It also informs research question 2, as participants perceived increased access to and reliance on technology as a key factor contributing to student disengagement, distraction, and inappropriate classroom behaviors.

Overall, the findings suggest that technology plays a complex role in shaping student behavior, contributing to distraction, reduced engagement, and emerging behavioral challenges within the classroom.

Theme 2: Support Systems in School

Participants emphasized the importance of support systems within their school environments. Both administrative and collegial support were described as essential components that influenced their ability to manage challenges, particularly related to student behavior and classroom demands. Support not only impacted instructional effectiveness but also contributed significantly to teachers’ emotional well-being.

Subtheme 1: Administration Support. Administrative support was frequently described as a critical factor in participants’ navigation through difficult situations. Many participants

expressed confidence in their school leadership, particularly when administrators were responsive and actively involved in addressing student concerns.

Participant 1 shared:

“I feel comfortable reaching out to my principal or even putting in a referral and knowing that she is going to support the situation, like contacting parents and all that stuff.”

This sense of trust in leadership reduced uncertainty and stress when handling disciplinary issues. Similarly, Participant 6 highlighted the importance of visible and consistent administrative action:

“I thankfully have a very supportive principal... with a student last year that was really physical, she was right there like every incident that she could be... she followed through on the policies that the district had aligned.”

Participants contrasted these positive experiences with prior environments where administrative support was lacking. In such cases, the absence of support contributed to burnout and attrition:

“There were a lot of really good teachers who quit or retired early because of that lack of support with major discipline.”

Additionally, participants valued a collaborative, school-wide approach to problem-solving, demonstrated by Participant 5:

“If I don’t know the answer to something... I emailed you because I’m not quite sure how I’m supposed to handle it... it’s kind of like a whole village mentality which I find helpful.”

Overall, administrative support was associated with increased confidence, consistency in discipline, and a stronger sense of security in managing complex classroom situations.

Subtheme 2: Collegial Support. Collegial support emerged as equally important, particularly in fostering a sense of shared experience and emotional reassurance. Participants described relying on trusted colleagues for immediate, informal support throughout the school day.

Participant 5 explained:

I find my trusted colleague... right through the adjoining door into my room and I just walk in and I'm like, 'Okay, so here we go.'... it helps me to be able to talk about it and see that the other person is also experiencing that same difficulty... it makes me feel better to know I'm not alone.

This sense of shared understanding helped normalize challenges and reduce feelings of isolation. Similarly, Participant 4 emphasized the importance of established, trusting team relationships:

"The three of us have been teaching for a while... we have formed a relationship where we have a very safe space... I just think about people who don't have that team... having those supportive teams is so essential."

Collegial environments characterized by trust, openness, and mutual respect allowed participants to discuss concerns without fear of judgment. These interactions were not centered on negativity but rather on constructive dialogue and problem-solving.

The absence of such collegial networks, however, was perceived as a significant disadvantage, reinforcing the importance of collaborative team structures within schools.

Summary of Theme 2. Theme 2 most directly addresses research question 3, with participants clearly articulating the impact of support systems on their well-being and professional practice. These findings demonstrate that both emotional support and collaborative

problem-solving are essential in helping teachers cope with the demands of behavioral challenges.

It is important to note that the sample consisted entirely of women, which may have influenced the prominence and nature of the collegial support theme. Research in education indicates that collegial relationships play a critical role in teachers' emotional wellbeing and professional functioning, particularly through shared experiences and stress support (Kaihoi et al., 2022). Additionally, studies suggest that gender can shape how educators experience and engage in professional relationships, with women often emphasizing relational and emotionally supportive interactions in collaborative contexts (Graziano et al., 2024). As a result, the emphasis on open communication, shared understanding, and emotional reassurance observed in this study may reflect gendered patterns of collegial interaction. Future research including more diverse samples could help determine whether these findings are consistent across different groups.

Together, administrative and collegial support shaped participants' professional experiences. While administrative support provided structural backing and policy enforcement, collegial support offered day-to-day emotional reinforcement. The combination of both created a supportive environment that enabled participants to manage challenges and sustain their roles effectively.

Theme 3: Effects of Time Constraints

Another consistent theme across participant responses was the significant impact of time constraints on teachers' ability to effectively implement behavior management strategies. Teachers described a work environment in which a limited instructional time, and competing demands hinder their capacity to address student behavior in meaningful and proactive ways.

Several participants highlighted how the structure of the school day itself creates pressure. For example, Participant 6 highlighted how fixed scheduling limits flexibility, stating, “And the days are not the same length, so we have to cram a lot more in.” This reflects the broader challenge teachers face in attempting to balance academic instruction with behavioral support within rigid time frames.

Seasonal factors and curricular demands also contribute to time-related challenges. Participant 1 described an increase in student behavioral needs during certain months, explaining, “I feel like especially like November, December, January, February, March... every single year kids that you wouldn’t think would have behaviors get behaviors.” Despite recognizing the value of the district’s social-emotional learning resources, the participant expressed frustration with the lack of time to implement them effectively: “I love Character Strong... and we also don’t have enough time to teach that, let alone emotional regulation things like the reset process.” The participant added that such interventions require depth and consistency, adding, “I would love to be able to implement that... but it is like a lengthy process... you really have to explain it to them.”

Interruptions and classroom distractions further compound time limitations. Participant 4 explained that instructional tasks are frequently prolonged, stating, “everything just seems to take longer than it should because there is constantly something distracting someone... everything I try to do I feel like takes at least twice as long as it could.” This loss of time reduces opportunities for proactive strategies such as reteaching expectations. As the same participant noted, “it’s really hard to have those reteaching times because the time is just... and by the time I have time, I have forgotten.”

In addition to instructional constraints, administrative tasks associated with behavior management were identified as a major barrier. Participant 2 described the extensive time required for disciplinary documentation, “that would take probably 20 minutes’ worth of paperwork... I have to submit a detention form... reach out to the parent or guardian.” The participant characterized this process as “a huge deterrent.” They explained that even when behaviors technically warrant consequences, the time discourages follow-through. This results in inconsistent enforcement of expectations, as illustrated by the admission, “I do not have the brain power this year to do that.”

Finally, participants connected time constraints to overall teacher fatigue. Participant 2 raised a critical reflective question: “I think just one barrier in general is... why are teachers so tired.” This statement underscores how time pressure not only limits behavior management practices but also contributes to teacher burnout.

Subtheme 1: Inconsistent Consequences Due to Time Demands. A prominent subtheme that participants described was how limited time contributed to inconsistent enforcement of behavioral consequences. Teachers reported difficulty following through consistently and in a coordinated way even with clear expectations in place.

Participant 1 explained how this inconsistency can occur across classrooms, noting, “Maybe I gave them a warning, and then they go to their next class, and it’s never happened to them in that class, and now they get a warning there.” This highlights how, without timely communication, students may receive repeated warnings rather than face escalating consequences. The participant also pointed to “the lack of consistent consequences and the inability to be able to quickly and easily communicate” with other teachers as a key challenge.

Participant 4 expressed a similar concern, again emphasizing “the lack of consistent consequences and the inability to be able to quickly and easily communicate” student behavior across staff. These comments suggest that inconsistency is not only an individual issue but also a broader structural one, related to time and communication systems within the school.

Time demands also affected teachers’ decisions about whether to assign consequences at all.

Participant 2 acknowledged that repeated behaviors should result in disciplinary action, stating, “If someone is on their phone three times in class, technically that is enough for a detention.” However, they also admitted, “I do not have the brain power this year to do that,” pointing to fatigue and limited capacity.

Overall, participants’ responses suggest that time constraints contribute to inconsistent enforcement of consequences, both within and across classrooms. This inconsistency may weaken behavior management efforts by reducing predictability and follow-through.

Summary of Theme 3. Theme 3 provides insight into research question 3, particularly regarding how behavioral challenges affect teachers’ well-being and instructional practices. Participants expressed their beliefs that time constraints limit instructional time, reducing teachers’ ability to respond to student behaviors effectively and to pre-teach behavior management strategies.

Additionally, the subtheme demonstrates how time constraints and workload can interfere with follow-through, which leads to frustration and reduced effectiveness in maintaining classroom expectations.

Theme 4: Need for Targeted Teacher Training

Participants consistently highlighted the need for more targeted and relevant training to effectively address student behavior in the classroom. While professional development was

available, many teachers felt that it did not adequately prepare them for the behavioral challenges they encountered. Training often focused on instructional practices, leaving gaps in areas such as behavior management, de-escalation, and student support. As a result, teachers described a disconnect between the training they received and the realities of their daily classroom experiences.

One major concern expressed by participants was the lack of training related to behavior intervention and crisis response. Participant 2 explained, “I received no training personally related to a safety plan, de-escalation techniques, or what to do in certain situations regarding safety.” Although such training may have been available within the district, it was not consistently or clearly provided to all teachers. This lack of preparation left some feeling uncertain in high-stress situations, as the same participant added, “If a student was having a physical crisis, I don't know how to respond... I would call for help.” These responses suggest that teachers may rely on external support rather than feeling confident in their own ability to manage serious behavioral incidents, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and accessible training.

In addition to gaps in behavior-specific training, participants also described a mismatch between professional development and their immediate classroom needs. Participant 7 noted that “our professional development in the district is all based on instructional pieces of the day,” but emphasized that “we can't even get to instruction a lot of times because we're managing behaviors.” The participant went on to describe required training sessions as a “complete waste of time” when they were not applicable to their role or classroom context. This highlights a broader issue in which district priorities may emphasize academic outcomes, while teachers feel

that behavioral support is a more immediate and pressing need. Without relevant training, teachers may feel that their time is not being used effectively.

Despite these challenges, participants also identified examples of meaningful and impactful training. Participant 5 described a positive experience with restorative practices, stating, “I really have enjoyed the restorative circles... I didn't know anything about it... and I really love the ownership piece.” These findings indicate that when teachers are provided with practical, applicable strategies, they are more likely to engage with and value the training. It also indicates that exposure to new approaches can positively influence classroom practice when those approaches align with teachers’ needs.

However, even when teachers feel confident in their skills, implementing behavior strategies can be difficult without broader support. Participant 4 noted, “it's really really difficult... to teach these kinds of things in isolation,” pointing out the challenge of addressing behavior without consistent school-wide practices.

Summary of Theme 4. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers benefit from targeted, behavior-focused training that is directly applicable to their own classroom environments. Participants emphasize the importance of practical strategies, preparation for crisis situations, and professional development that reflects the realities of student behavior.

This theme addresses research question 3 by highlighting the gaps in current training, the need for relevant and practical professional development. It also highlights how the lack of targeted training affects teachers’ confidence and effectiveness in managing behavior, which in turn influences their well-being and instructional time.

Quantitative Findings

All participants completed the self-report survey at the beginning of each interview and were recorded to ensure they completed the survey and that any questions could be answered and used during the interview. The survey data reveal clear patterns in the frequency of behavioral challenges reported by participants across experience levels. Overall, the majority of responses fell within the “Rarely (1)” and “Sometimes (2)” categories, indicating that while behavioral issues are present, many are not perceived as constant or severe daily.

Table 5 illustrates participants’ responses to the frequency of daily behavioral challenges focusing on years of experience. Participants with 0-10 years of experience reported a higher concentration of “Rarely” responses, with occasional “Sometimes” and fewer “Often” ratings. This suggests that less experienced teachers may either encounter fewer high-frequency behavioral challenges or may perceive and report them differently.

In contrast, participants with 11 or more years of experience reported a substantially higher frequency of “Often” and “always” responses across multiple categories. This indicates a greater perceived prevalence of behavioral challenges, which may be attributed to increased awareness, higher expectations for student behavior, or cumulative exposure over time.

Table 5

Percentage of Behavioral Challenge Ratings by Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
0–5 years	61%	22%	17%	0%
6–10 years	72%	17%	11%	0%
11–15 years	56%	19%	11%	14%
16–20 years	22%	22%	56%	0%

Table 6 presents the behavior frequency by type of student behavior. Percentage analysis of behavioral frequencies indicates that the most commonly occurring behaviors are low-level disruptions, particularly talking out of turn (83% often) and disrupting others (83% often or always). Technology-related behaviors, including non-educational use of electronics, were also reported at relatively high frequencies (66% often or always). In contrast, more severe behaviors such as physical aggression, threats, and safety violations were consistently reported as rarely occurring (100%). These findings suggest that while extreme behaviors are uncommon, frequent low-level disruptions present a persistent challenge for classroom management.

Table 6

Percentage of Reported Behavioral Frequencies by Behavior Type

Behavior	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
Talking out of turn	0%	17%	83%	0%
Disrupting others	0%	17%	67%	16%
Cell phone use (prohibited)	67%	17%	0%	16%
Inappropriate attire	83%	17%	0%	0%
Yelling / screaming	33%	50%	17%	0%
Throwing objects	50%	50%	0%	0%
Throwing food/liquids	83%	17%	0%	0%
Throwing furniture	83%	17%	0%	0%
Failure to meet expectations	17%	50%	33%	0%
Non-educational electronics	17%	17%	50%	16%
Ignoring/refusing directions	33%	33%	34%	0%
Refusing directions (general)	50%	50%	0%	0%

Vulgar/offensive language	67%	17%	16%	0%
Leaving without permission	83%	17%	0%	0%
School disturbance	83%	17%	0%	0%
Causing fear/disorder	83%	17%	0%	0%
Prank disturbance	83%	17%	0%	0%
Taking pictures/videos	67%	17%	16%	0%
Unauthorized access (admin)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Fighting	83%	17%	0%	0%
Serious physical contact	83%	17%	0%	0%
Inappropriate intimate behavior	83%	17%	0%	0%
Accessing staff belongings	83%	17%	0%	0%
Unauthorized entry	83%	17%	0%	0%
Gambling	100%	0%	0%	0%
Coercion/theft	100%	0%	0%	0%
Threats (reputation/property)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Fire setting	100%	0%	0%	0%
False alarms	100%	0%	0%	0%
Weapons possession	100%	0%	0%	0%
Threats of violence	100%	0%	0%	0%

Participants reported a range of negative student behaviors occurring in a typical school day, with responses ranging from 0–5 to 16–20 incidents, as seen in Figure 1. The most common range was 6–10 instances, reported by half of the participants, while the average across all

respondents was approximately 10 behaviors per day. The distribution of responses highlights variation in teachers' daily experiences, showing that while disruptive behaviors are a consistent feature of the school day, their frequency differs across classrooms. The concentration of responses in the 6–10 range suggests a typical level of disruption experienced by many participants, while the wider spread toward both lower and higher counts reflect differences in classroom contexts and demands.

These findings align with the qualitative themes identified in this study, particularly Theme 1: Impact of Technology, Theme 2: Support Systems in School, and Theme 3: Effects of Time Constraints, as teachers described frequent disruptions that interfere with instruction, require additional support, and are compounded by limited time to address behaviors.

Figure 1

Range of Negative Student Behaviors

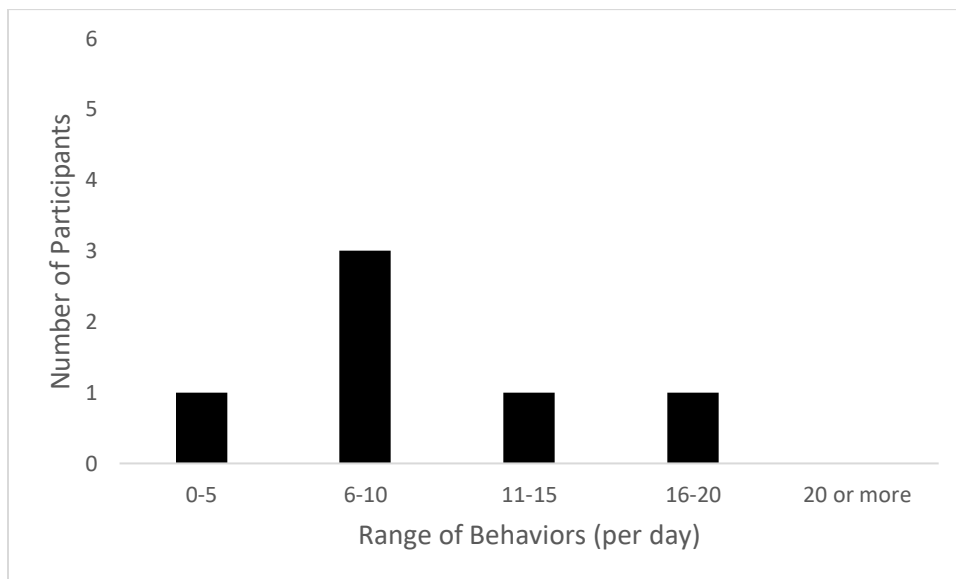


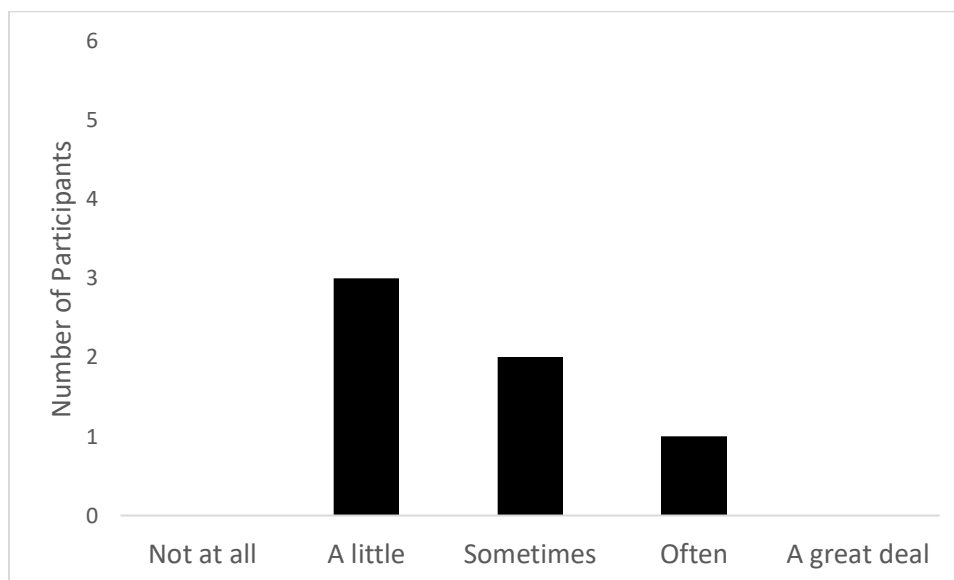
Figure 2 shows the impact of student behavioral challenges on participants' well-being. Of the six participants, 50% ($n = 3$) reported that behaviors affect their well-being “a little”,

suggesting a mild but present impact. Two participants (33%) indicated that behaviors affect them “sometimes”, while one participant (17%) reported that behaviors affect them “often”, indicating a more frequent and significant impact on their well-being. The distribution of responses indicates that all participants experience some level of impact from student behavioral challenges, though the intensity varies. The concentration of responses in the “a little” and “sometimes” categories suggest that, for most participants, the effect is generally mild to moderate rather than severe. However, the presence of one participant reporting an “often” impact highlights that a smaller proportion experience more frequent and pronounced effects on their well-being.

These findings align with qualitative themes related to Theme 2: Support Systems in School, and Theme 3: Effects of Time Constraints, as they can contribute to fatigue, stress, and decreased capacity for effective classroom management.

Figure 2

Impact of Behavioral Challenges on Participants' Well-Being



Teachers consistently reported receiving professional development in classroom management, behavior support, and social-emotional learning (SEL), as seen in Table 7. This aligns with the qualitative findings, which highlighted teachers' need for support in managing everyday classroom behaviors effectively. However, gaps remain in critical areas such as de-escalation techniques, anti-bullying programs, special education behavior interventions, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). These gaps may contribute to teachers' perceptions of being underprepared for more complex or high-stress situations, including crisis events, and suggest the need for more targeted and practical professional development to support teacher readiness.

When asked what additional professional development they would like to receive, teachers identified training in behavior management, Safety Care, and the reset process as areas of interest.

Table 7

Professional Development Received by Teachers

Professional Development Area	Received PD (n)	Not Received PD (n)
Classroom Management Strategies	5	1
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	6	0
Conflict Resolution / Peer Mediation	6	0
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Training	6	0
Trauma-Informed Teaching	5	1
Special Education / Behavior Intervention Training	3	3
Safety Care	4	2
De-escalation Techniques	2	4

Anti-Bullying Programs	3	3
Cultural Competency / Diversity Training	6	0
Data-Driven Instruction	5	1
Progress Monitoring Training	4	2
Differentiated Instruction Training	4	2
Literacy Instructional Training	5	1
Math Instructional Training	4	2
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	2	4

Quantitative Data Summary

Overall, the findings illustrate a clear link between student behaviors, teacher well-being, and the effectiveness of professional development. Teachers benefit from PD that is directly relevant to managing daily classroom challenges, and gaps in training contribute to stress, inconsistent behavior management, and reduced instructional time. These results support the qualitative themes of time constraints, inconsistent consequences, the importance of targeted training, and the need for structured support systems to enhance classroom management and teacher effectiveness.

Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of educator interviews exploring behavioral challenges in the classroom. During analysis, four main themes appeared: Impact of Technology; Roles of Support; Time Constraints; and Targeted Training for Teachers. Participants emphasized that limited time and insufficient training reduce their capacity to manage behavior effectively, which leads to frustration and burnout. These results provide a foundation for the

following chapter's discussion on strategies to improve support for educators and enhance student outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the student behavioral challenges that teachers currently face in their classrooms and to examine how these challenges affect classroom management, instructional practices, and overall teacher well-being. By focusing on educators' perspectives, the study provides insight into which supports and strategies are perceived as effective, as well as those that teachers believe could enhance their classroom environments. Understanding teachers' lived experiences allows for a deeper exploration of the day-to-day realities of managing student behavior, including emotional factors that influence classroom dynamics.

Based on the grounded theory framework, this study emphasizes the importance of developing a theory that emerges directly from participants' experiences. The findings highlight the ways in which time constraints, inconsistent consequences, technology use, support systems, and professional development intersect to shape teachers' ability to maintain effective classroom environments. By examining these factors through the lens of educators' lived experiences, this study provides insights to inform the creation of policies, professional development programs, and school-wide practices that support teachers. Ultimately, the study sought to contribute to the development of strategies that promote safe, productive, and successful learning environments for both teachers and students.

Building on the findings presented in Chapter 4, the following discussion interprets these results in the context of existing literature and the study's research questions. Each theme is

examined to understand its implications for classroom management, teacher well-being, and student outcomes, revealing practical applications and areas for future research.

Research Questions

1. What types of behavioral challenges are educators currently experiencing in their classrooms?
2. How do educators perceive the causes of these student behavioral issues?
3. How do behavioral challenges impact teachers' well-being and instructional practices, and what supports would be or have been beneficial in managing these challenges?

Interpretation of Findings

The following section presents the interpretation of the findings from Chapter 4, organized by theme. These themes reflect the lived experiences of educators in a semi-rural district in Central Pennsylvania and offer deeper insight into the patterns identified in the data analysis. By examining each theme, this section connects the study's findings to the research questions and relevant literature, thereby highlighting implications for classroom practice, teacher well-being, and professional development.

Theme 1: Impact of Technology Use

The use of technology emerged as a significant behavioral challenge reported by many participants of the study. Educators consistently noted the negative impact of technology on student behavior and classroom environment; however, the extent of this impact varied by grade level. Secondary-level teachers reported more frequent incidents of students using technology inappropriately during class or throughout the school day, often distracting themselves and others from instruction. Supporting these observations, Glass and Kang (2019) conducted a study with 118 college students in two identical cognitive psychology courses. They found that while

in-class technology use did not drastically affect overall classroom performance, it resulted in a measurable decrease of approximately 0.5 grade points. Similarly, Rosen (2017) reported that students accessed their phones an average of 60 times per day, spending a cumulative total of 220 minutes on them; even just 10 minutes of social media use was associated with moderate levels of anxiety.

In contrast, elementary-level teachers reported that the behavioral impact of technology was often observed at school as a consequence of its use at home. Students exhibited fatigue, inattentiveness, and distractibility due to late-night device use or screen time-induced overstimulation. These findings align with previous studies that found that insufficient sleep resulting from evening technology use negatively affected both nocturnal sleep quality and daytime functioning when surveying 255 adolescents (Johnson et al., 2016). Similarly, Hale and Guan (2016), in a cross-national review spanning 12 countries, reported that 90% of studies identified a negative relationship between screen time and sleep quality, highlighting the widespread effects of technology on children's behavioral and cognitive readiness in school. These findings suggest that technology use, both in and out of school, contributes to student behavioral challenges, directly addressing Research Question 1 and Research Question 2.

In relation to Research Question 1, which examines the types of behavioral challenges teachers are currently experiencing, participants identified frequent distractions from personal devices at the secondary level, which reduce student attention and participation and highlight the need for clear guidelines and proactive classroom management strategies. In relation to Research Question 2, which explores the causes of these behaviors, participants noted that elementary students often exhibit fatigue and distractibility due to late-night technology use, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to address these underlying factors. Additionally, these findings

address Research Question 3 by illustrating how technology-related disruptions influence teachers' overall well-being, as increased off-task behavior requires more time spent on redirection, classroom management, and behavioral consequences.

Taken together, these findings highlight the complex role of technology in shaping student behavior, suggesting that educators must adopt developmentally appropriate approaches that foster engagement, focus, and a positive classroom environment.

Recommendation for Theme 1. Several recommendations can be made based on the findings related to technology use to better support teachers and improve student behavior and engagement.

First, districts should establish clear and consistent technology policies, that are grade appropriate, across grade levels. For example, establishing designated device-free instructional zones or scheduled technology-free periods within classrooms may help limit distractions and support reductions in off-task behavior by clearly defining expectations for appropriate technology use. Participants of the study detailed inconsistencies in how technology is managed within the schools, particularly at the secondary level. Additionally, creating a district-wide cell-phone policy would set clear expectations for students and teachers during class time.

Implementing school-wide expectations and consistent enforcement may reduce off-task behavior and improve the classroom environment.

Second, educators would benefit from professional development focused on technology management and implementation in their classrooms. Training could include practical approaches for educators to monitor students' devices, teach students appropriate technology use, and adopt preemptive strategies to address off-task behaviors. Providing teachers with tools may increase their confidence and reduce the time spent on redirection and ramifications.

Lastly, districts should explore limits on device use during instructional time, particularly at the secondary level. Establishing proactive expectations and specific designated technology time may help minimize distractions and additional time teachers spend on redirection and consequences.

These recommendations address both behavioral and instructional challenges related to technology use, ultimately supporting teacher well-being, student engagement, and effective classroom practices.

Theme 2: Role of Support Systems

The findings of this study suggest that administrative and collegial supports were not only beneficial but essential for teachers' well-being and management of student behavior. Participants' experiences show that both administrative and collegial support function as a protective factor that lessens stress associated with frequent behavioral disruptions.

Administrative support became evident as a critical component influencing teachers' sense of security and professional confidence. As documented in earlier studies, Paletta et al. (2017) found that schools with strong leadership created teachers who had greater job satisfaction, higher levels of self-efficacy, and higher educational climate. When administrators were responsive, consistent, and actively involved in addressing behavioral concerns, teachers reported feeling empowered to enforce expectations and follow through with consequences. This suggests that leadership practices influence the effectiveness of classroom management by reinforcing consistency, accountability, and staff support. Similarly, prior research has shown that administrators who provide emotional support, such as providing value and acceptance and assisting teachers to cope with stress, conflict, and difficulties, affect teachers' perceptions and job satisfaction (Bhanthumnavin, 2000; Ertürk, 2021). In contrast, the absence of administrative

support was linked to frustration, burnout, and even teacher attrition, indicating its role in teacher retention.

Collegial support, on the other hand, served as an important emotional and practical resource. Teachers relied on trusted colleagues to process challenges, share strategies, and validate their experiences. This shared understanding reduced feelings of isolation and contributed to a more positive school climate. Smala et al. (2025) found that professionals who are isolated and lack of social support can lead to a “sole-fighter” state of mind. The presence of strong networks reflects on the importance of collaborative cultures in schools, where problems can be discussed collectively rather than individualized.

These findings indicate that support systems are needed at both a structural and interpersonal level. Administrative support provides accountability and discipline, while collegial support offers informal reinforcement and emotional resilience. These two forms of support build a more comprehensive supportive network that allows teachers to manage behavioral challenges effectively.

When support systems are inconsistent or absent, teachers may struggle to implement behavior management strategies, leading to increased stress and reduced effectiveness. This directly connects to Research Question 3, as participants identified support as a key factor influencing their well-being and their ability to respond to student behaviors. Knowing that they are not alone in decision-making and have consistent support when issues arise contributes to increased confidence and reduced stress.

Recommendation for Theme 2. One recommendation to enhance support is to strengthen administrative support to improve teacher well-being. Many participants identified administration responsiveness and follow-through as important to their confidence, as well as

stress reduction. Schools should ensure that principals and administrators provide consistent, visible support in addressing behavioral issues. Providing access to immediate support during critical behavioral incidents allows teachers to feel as if they are not alone and can alleviate teacher stress and increase safety. This will empower teachers to manage challenges more effectively and reduce the feeling of isolation.

Another recommendation is developing a collaborative structure to foster collegial support and emotional reassurance. Participants consistently described collegial networks and their vitalization for emotional support and problem-solving during interviews. Creating these structures and time can strengthen teachers' social support, positively impacting their emotional well-being and capacity to respond to student behaviors.

In summary, strengthening both administrative and collegial support systems is essential to enhancing teacher well-being and effectiveness in managing student behavior, ultimately fostering a more positive and productive learning environment.

Theme 3: Effects of Time Constraints

The findings from the study indicate that time constraints significantly shape teachers' ability to implement effective behavior management strategies. Participants consistently described how limited instructional time, seasonal and curricula demands, and classroom interruptions create pressures that reduce opportunities for proactive behavioral support. These constraints force teachers to prioritize immediate instructional tasks over preventive or restorative practices, which may undermine consistent enforcement of classroom expectations.

The subtheme of inconsistent consequences highlights how time pressures directly affect teacher decision making. Teachers reported difficulty following through with disciplinary actions due to fatigue, workload, and competing priorities. This inconsistency can weaken classroom

management by reducing predictability, potentially reinforcing negative student behaviors, and creating a cycle of frustration for both students and educators. Moreover, the qualitative findings suggest that these time-related challenges not only affect instructional delivery but also contribute to teacher stress and burnout, as teachers expend significant effort managing behaviors without sufficient time or support. As documented in earlier studies, a 2024 report by the Pew Research Center, 84% of teachers reported that they do not have sufficient time to complete all required tasks during the workday, and 40% indicated that they lack adequate time for basic needs such as using the restroom or eating lunch (Flannery, 2024).

Quantitative data reinforce these interpretations, showing that frequent low-level disruptions, such as talking out of turn or use of non-educational technology, are common daily occurrences. These behaviors, coupled with time limitations, align with teachers' reports of the impact on well-being, as half of the participants indicated that student behaviors affected them "a little" and one participant reported being affected "often." This demonstrated that even when behaviors are not extreme, the cumulative effect of managing frequent disruptions within constrained time frames contributes to teacher fatigue.

Theme 3 connects to Research Question 3, demonstrating the interconnectedness of time, behavior management, and teacher well-being. Teachers' ability to respond effectively to behavioral challenges is not solely a matter of skill or knowledge but is fundamentally shaped by structural temporal constraints. These findings suggest that interventions aiming to improve classroom behavior and teacher well-being must address not only training and support but also the allocation of time and workload that enable consistent, proactive behavior management.

Recommendation for Theme 3. A recommendation for theme 3 is to allocate dedicated time for behavioral management and social-emotional learning instruction. Participants discussed

the lack of time to teach students coping strategies or reteach skills, unless it was in the moment, when the student was too dysregulated to understand the strategy. Creating a daily or weekly schedule for social-emotional learning, behavior instruction, and reteaching expectations would provide teachers time to implement proactive strategies rather than relying on reactive responses.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was identified by multiple participants as the primary school-wide behavior management framework; however, its implementation was described as inconsistent. Teachers reported that limited instructional time, competing demands, and workload constraints hinder their ability to implement PBIS with fidelity. As a result of implementation in a real-life setting, the program delivered may differ substantially from the original design (Fixsen et al., 2005). These modifications can be problematic when they reduce or omit core components that are essential to program effectiveness (Molloy et al., 2013). As a result, key components of the framework, such as consistent reinforcement, data tracking, and proactive interventions, are not applied uniformly, which may reduce its overall effectiveness in supporting student behavior and maintaining classroom consistency. These findings align with prior research indicating that effective training and technical assistance are essential for strengthening service delivery systems, though they require adequate time, financial investment, and sustained administrative support to be successfully implemented (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Another recommendation is to integrate technology to improve efficiency and increase teacher participation. Using a behavior tracking tool or classroom management app can help teachers document incidents and apply consequences more effectively, minimizing lost instructional time. It would also promote more consistent behavior monitoring, addressing

teachers' concerns about not being aware when a student displays inappropriate behaviors in other classes.

Theme 4: Need for Targeted Teacher Training

The findings from the study highlight a critical gap between the professional development teachers receive and the behavioral demands they face in their classrooms. While participants reported access to a range of training opportunities, the data suggest that these experiences are often not targeted toward address real-time behavioral challenges. This disconnect indicates that current professional development models may prioritize instructional strategies over practical behavior management skills, limiting teachers' preparedness for managing both routine disruptions and intense situations.

Qualitative data revealed that teachers feel underprepared in key areas such as de-escalation, crisis response, and behavior intervention. Participants described uncertainty in handling severe behavioral incidents and a reliance on external supports, which suggests a lack of confidence in independently managing these situations. This finding aligns with the quantitative data, which show that only a small number of participants reported receiving training in de-escalation techniques and specialized behavioral interventions. The absence of consistent and comprehensive training in these areas may contribute to delays in response, inconsistent practices, and increased stress among teachers.

Additionally, participants emphasized that much of the professional development provided is not aligned with their immediate classroom needs. Training sessions were often described as overly focused on instructional content, despite teachers reporting that frequent behavioral disruptions, particularly low-level behaviors such as talking out of turn and disrupting others, consume a significant portion of instructional time. Quantitative findings support this

perception, with high frequencies of these behaviors reported across participants. This disconnection suggests that without addressing behavior management as a foundational component of teaching, efforts to improve instructional outcomes may be undermined.

The data also indicates that experience level influences teachers' perceptions of behavioral challenges and potentially their training needs. More experienced teachers reported higher frequencies of behavioral issues, which may reflect increased awareness, cumulative exposure, or heightened expectations. This suggests that professional development should be differentiated, providing targeted support not only for novice teachers but also veteran educators who may face evolving classroom dynamics and burnout.

Despite these challenges, the findings demonstrate that when teachers receive relevant, practical, and engaging training, it can positively influence their practice. Participants who experienced training in a restorative approach reported increased confidence and a greater sense of their ability in managing student behavior. This suggests that effective professional development should be context-specific and directly applicable to classroom realities. Participants noted that behavior management cannot be addressed in isolation, reinforcing the importance of aligned systems and shared practices across the school.

Theme 4 affirms that targeted, behavior-focused professional development is essential for improving teacher confidence, consistency in behavior management, and overall classroom effectiveness. The findings suggest that enhancing the relevance and accessibility, especially in behavior intervention and crisis management, can help address both instructional and well-being challenges identified across the study.

This theme directly supports Research Question 3 by illustrating how gaps in training contribute to difficulties in managing behavior, increased stress, and reduced instructional time.

Participants consistently described feeling underprepared to address both routine disruptions and more serious behavioral incidents, which often led to hesitation or reliance on external support. As a result, insufficient or a lack of follow-up on professional development contributes to a cycle in which teachers struggle to manage behavior effectively within constrained timeframes, ultimately impacting both instructional quality and teacher well-being.

Recommendation for Theme 4. One recommendation for theme 4 is to prioritize behavior-focused trainings throughout the district, targeting classroom behavior management, including proactive strategies, de-escalation techniques, and crisis response. Training should consist of low-level disruptions reported by teachers while also preparing them for less frequent but high-intensity situations. It should be consistent with teachers' daily classroom experiences, and include practical, ready-to-use strategies, modeling, and opportunities for teachers to practice.

Professional development should be differentiated and grounded in practical application to meet the needs of teachers at varying stages of experience. For novice teachers, training should focus on foundational classroom management skills, including establishing routines, setting clear behavioral expectations, and responding consistently to common disruptions such as off-task behavior and noncompliance. This may be supported through structured induction programs, mentoring relationships, classroom observations of experienced educators, and guided practice through coaching. In contrast, veteran teachers may benefit from more advanced and specialized professional development opportunities, such as training in trauma-informed practices, restorative approaches, and strategies for managing complex or persistent behavioral challenges. Additionally, data-informed collaboration and instructional coaching can support experienced teachers in refining their practice and responding more effectively to evolving

student needs. By tailoring professional development in this way, districts can ensure that support is both relevant and responsive, strengthening classroom management across all levels of experience.

A second recommendation is to provide educators with ongoing, sustained training opportunities. Rather than a one-time workshop, professional development should be continuous and supported through coaching, follow-up sessions, and professional learning communities (PLCs). As documented in earlier studies, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of professional development that is sustained over time. This is also reflected in the work of Fixsen et al. (2010), which found that the need for continued availability of key implementation drivers, competency, organization, and leadership, was argued to be essential for sustaining implementation over time. Ongoing support increases the likelihood of consistent implementation. Professional development should be aligned with the existing school-wide system, such as PBIS, to ensure consistency across classrooms. Schools should also monitor and support implementation fidelity. To address time constraints that were identified in Theme 3, the school should provide dedicated time during the workday for training, collaboration, and implementation planning.

These recommendations emphasize that effective professional development must be practical, relevant, and sustained. By aligning training with classroom realities and providing ongoing support, schools can better equip teachers to manage behavior effectively, reduce stress, and maximize instructional time.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for education practice, policy, teacher preparation, and future research. Across all four themes, consistent patterns emerged: teachers'

ability to effectively manage student behavior is shaped by a combination of conditions, available supports, and the relevance of professional development.

Implications for Instructional Practices

The results suggest that classroom management is increasingly influenced by frequent, low-level disruptions, particularly those related to technology use and student engagement. These behaviors, while not severe, occur consistently and require ongoing teacher attention, reducing instructional time. This implies that effective classroom practice must prioritize proactive and efficient behavior management strategies that can be implemented within limited timeframes.

Additionally, teachers must be equipped with practical tools that address both prevention and intervention. Without such strategies, teachers may rely on reactive approaches, which can contribute to inconsistent consequences and reinforce negative behaviors.

Implications for Leadership

The findings highlight the critical role of support systems in shaping teachers' experiences. While some participants reported access to behavioral and administrative support, inconsistencies in availability and implementation limited their effectiveness. This suggests that schools must strengthen and standardize support structures to ensure that all teachers have access to timely and reliable assistance when addressing behavioral challenges.

Furthermore, alignment across classrooms is essential. School-wide frameworks, such as PBIS, have the potential to improve consistency; however, the findings indicate that inconsistent implementation reduces their effectiveness. This underscores the importance of fidelity, shared expectations, and ongoing support.

Time constraints emerged as a significant barrier to effective classroom management. Teachers reported that competing instructional demands, interruptions, and workload pressures limited their ability to implement proactive strategies and follow through with consequences. This has important implications for school scheduling, workload distribution, and instructional priorities.

The findings suggest that without adequate time, even well-trained teachers may struggle to manage behavior effectively. Therefore, schools must consider how time is allocated within the school day, including opportunities for planning, collaboration, and relationship-building with students. Addressing time as a structural resource is essential for improving both behavior management and instructional quality.

Implications for Professional Development

The study reveals a clear need for more targeted, behavior-focused professional development. Teachers reported that existing training often emphasizes instructional practices while overlooking practical strategies for managing misbehavior, de-escalation, and crisis response. This disconnect, limits teachers' preparedness and confidence, particularly in high-stress situations.

Teachers in the study described managing a range of student misbehaviors, from low-level disruptions such as off-task behavior to more serious behaviors requiring immediate intervention. Additionally, participants noted a growing need for guidance on managing technology-related misbehaviors, including misuse of devices, distraction from digital tools, and challenges associated with monitoring student engagement. These findings highlight the importance of professional development that not only addresses behavior management across varying levels of intensity but also integrates practical strategies for leveraging and managing

technology effectively in the classroom. Providing targeted training in these areas can enhance teachers' confidence, improve classroom management, and support more productive learning environments.

These findings imply that professional development must be relevant, practical, and sustained over time. Training should align with teachers' daily experiences and provide opportunities for application and feedback. Based on participants' reports, professional development should explicitly address the full range of student misbehaviors, from low-level disruptions to more severe incidents. This allows teachers to differentiate their responses based on the situation confidently.

Additionally, teachers expressed a need for concrete, actionable strategies, such as de-escalation techniques, crisis response protocols, and consistent behavior management practices that can be implemented in real time. Given the increasing presence of technology in classrooms, professional development should also include guidance on managing technology-related misbehaviors, promoting appropriate device use, and maintaining student engagement in a digital learning environment.

Furthermore, preparation programs for pre-service teachers should place greater emphasis on classroom management and behavioral support to better prepare educators before they enter the profession.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study highlight the need for policy-level changes that address the structural and systemic factors influencing classroom behavior management. Current policies often emphasize academic accountability while placing less focus on the conditions necessary for effective behavior support. As a result, teachers may be expected to manage increasingly

complex classroom environments without sufficient time, training, or resources. The following implications outline key areas for policy improvement.

The study suggests that behavior management should be elevated as a central component of educational policy. Given the frequency of low-level disruptions and their impact on instructional time, policies must recognize behavior as a critical factor in academic success. This includes integrating behavior support frameworks into school improvement plans and accountability systems.

Policies should promote the development of comprehensive support systems within schools, including access to behavior specialists, counselors, and paraprofessionals. Clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities can ensure that teachers are not solely responsible for managing complex behavioral challenges.

Additionally, policies must address the greater presence of technology in classroom behavior management. Participants in the study noted challenges related to students' misuse of devices, distraction, and monitoring engagement with technology in the classroom. Therefore, policies should set clear expectations for appropriate technology use and provide guidelines to support teachers in managing digital behaviors. This includes tracking of daily referrals, digital monitoring supports, and training on integrating technology in ways that promote engagement while minimizing disruptions. By addressing technology at the policy level, schools can better support teachers in navigating both traditional and technology-related behavioral challenges.

Furthermore, policies should encourage consistent school-wide practices to reduce variability in behavior management across classrooms. Policies should support alignment with established frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), while

emphasizing the importance of implementation fidelity through monitoring and accountability measures.

Overall Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the interconnected factors that influence teachers' ability to manage student behavior effectively. Across the four themes: Impact of Technology Use, Role of Support Systems, Effects of Time Constraints, and Need for Targeted Teacher Training, it is evident that no single intervention will sufficiently address the challenges identified. Instead, a comprehensive and systemic approach is required to improve classroom management, teacher well-being, and student outcomes.

First, school districts should establish clear, consistent, and developmentally appropriate policies regarding student technology use. As the findings demonstrated, technology is a significant contributor to both direct and indirect behavioral challenges across grade levels. Implementing structured guidelines, along with professional development focused on effective technology integration and monitoring, can reduce off-task behaviors and improve student engagement.

Second, strengthening support systems at both the administrative and collegial levels is essential. Teachers in this study emphasized that consistent administrative support and collaborative peer networks serve as critical protective factors against stress and burnout. Schools should prioritize leadership practices that are responsive, visible, and consistent in addressing behavioral concerns, while also fostering structured opportunities for teacher collaboration and shared problem-solving.

Third, schools must address time as a critical structural resource. The findings indicate that time constraints significantly limit teachers' ability to implement proactive and consistent

behavior management strategies. Allocating dedicated time for social-emotional learning (SEL), behavior instruction, and collaboration can support more effective and preventative approaches. Additionally, improving efficiency through tools such as behavior tracking systems may help reduce the time burden associated with managing frequent disruptions.

Finally, professional development must be redesigned to better align with the behavioral realities of the classroom. Teachers require targeted, practical, and sustained training in areas such as classroom management, de-escalation, and crisis response. This training should be differentiated based on experience level and supported through ongoing coaching and collaboration. Furthermore, alignment with school-wide frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is essential to ensure consistency and effectiveness across classrooms.

Collectively, these recommendations emphasize the importance of addressing behavior management that integrates policy, practice, and support systems. By aligning technology policies, strengthening support networks, allocating time effectively, and providing meaningful professional development, schools can create environments that better support both teachers and students. Ultimately, these changes have the potential to improve instructional quality, enhance teacher well-being, and foster more positive and productive classroom experiences.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size of six participants, who all identified as women. Including a larger or more diverse group of participants could increase the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, all participants were from the same school district, which may limit the extent to which the results can be applied to other districts or educational settings. Another limitation is that the study focused solely on the

perspectives of teachers and did not include input from other key stakeholders, such as school administrators.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could further examine how administrators and/or paraprofessionals perceive their roles when working with students who exhibit severe behavioral challenges. Comparing their perspectives with those of teachers may reveal important similarities or differences in their lived experiences. Understanding these perspectives could help identify ways to improve support systems for both educators and students.

Future studies could employ a dyadic design in which classroom teachers and their direct supervisors are interviewed regarding the same specific behavioral incidents. This approach would allow for a direct comparison of perceptions related to incident severity, appropriate interventions, and adequacy of administrative support at the time of the event. Identifying these perception gaps could provide more nuanced insight into misalignments in communication and decision-making processes, informing more consistent and collaborative behavioral response systems within schools.

Additionally, future studies could explore the effectiveness of focused professional development programs focused on behavior management and strategies for supporting students with significant behavioral needs. Research that examines how ongoing training and collaboration among teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators impact classroom environments and student outcomes could provide valuable insights for school districts.

Finally, future research could include participants from multiple school districts and a broader range of educational settings to increase the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the number of participants would allow researchers to better understand how behavioral

challenges are addressed across different schools and what types of supports are most effective in promoting positive outcomes for both students and educators.

Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of student behavioral challenges within a semi-rural district in Pennsylvania, with a focus on identifying the types of behaviors experienced, the factors contributing to these behaviors, and their impact on teacher well-being and instructional practices. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, four key themes emerged: the Impact of Technology Use, the Role of Support Systems, the Effects of Time Constraints, and the Need for Targeted Teacher Training. Together, these findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges teachers face in managing student behavior.

The results of this study indicate that while severe behavioral incidents are relatively rare, frequent low-level disruptions significantly affect classroom environments and instructional time. Technology-related distractions, inconsistent support systems, limited time, and insufficiently targeted professional development collectively contribute to the complexity of classroom management. These factors not only influence teachers' ability to respond effectively to student behavior but also impact their overall well-being, contributing to stress and fatigue. Importantly, the findings demonstrate that these challenges are interconnected. Teachers' ability to implement effective behavior management strategies is shaped not only by their individual skills but also by systemic factors such as time allocation, access to support, and the relevance of training. As a result, addressing behavioral challenges in the classroom requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond isolated interventions.

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by highlighting the importance of aligning professional development with classroom realities, strengthening school-wide support

systems, and recognizing time as a critical resource in education. Additionally, the findings stress the need for consistent implementation of frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to ensure equitable and effective behavior management practices across classrooms.

The findings of this study reinforce the critical need to view classroom behavior management as a shared, systemic responsibility rather than an individual teacher burden. By addressing the interconnected influences of technology, support systems, time constraints, and targeted professional development, educational stakeholders can create more effective and sustainable learning environments. Supporting teachers through intentional policy, practice, and professional learning not only enhances their well-being but also promotes positive student behavior and academic success. Continued attention to these factors will be essential in ensuring that schools are equipped to meet the evolving needs of both educators and students.

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APPENDIX A: Prospective Teacher Email



Slippery Rock University
 Doctoral Program in Special Education
 Jessica Stover
 Jas1114@sru.edu

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Behavior Challenges in Primary and Secondary Classrooms: The Educators' Experiences

Jessica Stover, Jas1114@sru.edu

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years or older, have 3 years of teaching experience, teach in the State College Area School District and be able to communicate in English. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Important Information about the Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to investigate the range of student behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. Additionally, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, a Self-Reporting form, answer Interview questions and check over your typed transcript, during one meeting either in person or via zoom. This will take approximately 55 minutes to complete.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include mild or moderate psychological discomfort when discussing previous behavioral experiences that may have been stressful, embarrassing or emotionally charged.
- The study will potentially contribute to a better understanding of how disruptive student behavior affects teachers and classrooms.
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the Study About and Why are We Doing it?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the range of behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. Additionally, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes.

This research aims to identify recurring patterns in student behavior across educational levels, examine the strategies educators use to address these challenges and assess what types of professional development or institutional support they perceive as most beneficial.

Ultimately, this work intends to shape policy and practices in teacher training, school leadership, and

classroom management strategies to create a more positive and productive learning environment.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to Complete a Demographic Survey to provide basic information via email; a Self-Report Form to provide information about behaviors and supports you observe, via email; a Semi-Structured Interview with open-ended questions and possible follow-up questions via in person interview or Google Meet; and Member checking transcripts, where you will review verbatim transcripts of the interviews, via email. We expect this to take about 55 minutes. Information collected will not be linked to other data.

How Could You Benefit From This Study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because the study may contribute to a better understanding of how disruptive student behavior affects teacher well-being. Data from the study may also inform future revisions of school or district discipline policies, including increased use of restorative practices and PBIS.

What Risks Might Result From Being in This Study?

You might experience some risks from being in this study. They are mild to moderate psychological discomfort when discussing previous behavioral incidents or recalling past experiences that may have been stressful, embarrassing, or emotionally charged. Participants may have mild concerns about privacy or confidentiality, particularly that their demographic information could be connected to their responses, even though no identifying information is collected.

How Will We Protect Your Information?

We plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, we will not include information that could directly identify you.

We will protect the confidentiality of your research records by data being coded using unique identifiers, and your name will be stored separately from interview data in a secure, password-protected location.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

We will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data as part of the project.

What Other Choices do I Have if I Don't Take Part in this Study?

If you choose not to participate, there are no alternatives.

Your Participation in this Research is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not

have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, all data will be deleted, and you will not experience any penalty to which you are otherwise entitled.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research, you may contact **Dr. Jesse Smith, Jesse.Smith@sru.edu, 724-738-2461.**

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 302
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by signing the Consent to Participate Form.

APPENDIX B: Demographic Survey

1. Age?
 Under 25 25–34 35–44 45–54 55 or older
2. Gender?
 Male Female Prefer not to say
3. Highest Level of Education Completed?
 Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate (Ph.D./Ed.D.) Other:
4. Total Years of Teaching Experience?
 3–5 years 6–10 years 11–15 years 16–20 year
 More than 20 years
5. Current Grade Level
 Kindergarten Primary / Elementary Middle School
 High School Other: _____
6. Subjects Taught
 Language Arts / English Mathematics Science Social Studies
 Arts Physical Education Special Education STEM
 Library Music Title 1 English Language Learners
 Family Consumer Science Foreign language Interventionist ESL
 Learning Enrichment/Gifted Technology Education Other:
7. Certifications held?

APPENDIX C: Self-Report Form

1. On average, how many instances of negative student behaviors do you observe in a typical school day?

- 0–5 6–10 11–15 16–20 More than 20

2. Which of the following disruptive behaviors and frequency do you observe in your classroom?

(Select all that apply)

- Talking out of turn / interrupting the teacher

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Disrupting or distracting others

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Use of cell phone or smart device in school when prohibited by school personnel

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Inappropriate attire (drug, alcohol, illegal activities advertised or promoted, symbols of hate)

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Yelling, screaming

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Throwing objects (snowballs, paper, objects, etc.)

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Throwing food/liquids

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Throwing furniture or heavy objects

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Continued failure to demonstrate school-wide expected behaviors

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Using electronics for non-educational purposes

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Ignoring, arguing with, and/or refusing to follow directions

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Refusing to follow directions in classroom, cafeteria, and/or other school spaces

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Using or demonstrating vulgar, perverse, harassing, and/or offensive language or gestures

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Leaving the classroom without teacher's permission

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- School disturbance

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Any act placing others in unwanted fear or disorder

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Participating in or initiating a school disturbance of prank

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Taking of unsolicited pictures or videos

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

- Accessing administrative privileges without authorization

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Fighting or physical retaliation

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Actions involving serious physical contact where injury may occur

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Inappropriate or intimate behaviors on campus or at school-related events

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Accessing staff offices, desks, or belongings

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Entering any door other than the main entrances, after the school day starts

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Gambling activity

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Obtaining something through force or threats

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Threatening someone through violence, property damage, or harm to reputation

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Setting/igniting a fire by match, lighter, fireworks or other methods

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Activating a fire alarm or armed intruder whistle

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Possession of and/or use of weapons or look-a-likes on school property

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Threats to commit any offense involving violence

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Refusing to follow instructions

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Always

Other _____

3. On a weekly basis, I need to call for assistance for my class

0–5 6–10 11–15 16–20 More than 20

4. Which of the following training or professional development sessions have you received related to managing negative or disruptive student behaviors? (*Select all that apply*)

Classroom management strategies

I am not familiar with this

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

I am not familiar with this

Conflict resolution/peer mediation

I am not familiar with this

Social-emotional learning (SEL) training

I am not familiar with this

Trauma-informed teaching

I am not familiar with this

Special education/behavior intervention training

I am not familiar with this

Safety Care

I am not familiar with this

De-escalation techniques

I am not familiar with this

Anti-bullying programs

I am not familiar with this

Cultural competency/diversity training

I am not familiar with this

Data-driven instruction

I am not familiar with this

Progress monitoring training

I am not familiar with this

Differentiated instruction training

I am not familiar with this

Literacy instructional training

I am not familiar with this

Math instructional training

I am not familiar with this

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

I am not familiar with this

Other: _____

5. Which of the following training or professional development sessions have you found beneficial related to managing negative or disruptive student behaviors? *(Select all that apply)*

- Classroom management strategies
- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Conflict resolution/peer mediation
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) training
- Trauma-informed teaching
- Special education/behavior intervention training
- Safety Care
- De-escalation techniques
- Anti-bullying programs
- Cultural competency/diversity training
- Data-driven instruction
- Progress monitoring training
- Differentiated instruction training
- Literacy instructional training
- Math instructional training
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Other: _____

6. What additional Professional development training would you like to receive?

7. How much do the disruptive behaviors you observe in your classroom affect your well-being as a teacher?

Not at all

A little

Sometimes

Often

A great deal

APPENDIX D: Approval letter from School District

STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Office of the Assistant Superintendent
240 VILLA CREST DRIVE • STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA • 16801
Phone: 814-231-1042 Fax: 814-466-6068

December 11, 2025

Slippery Rock University
1 Morrow Way
Slippery Rock, PA 16057

To whom it may concern:

We are writing to inform you that the State College Area School District has reviewed your research proposal and has granted approval for your research to be conducted within our school district. Please accept this letter as our intent to work with Jessica Stover as a site for your dissertation study titled *Behavior Challenges in Primary and Secondary Classrooms: The Educators' Experiences* for the 2025-2026 school year. We understand that she is completing this study as a part of her dissertation.

If you need any further information, please contact me at dcy12@scasd.org.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Danielle Yoder".

Danielle Yoder
Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education
State College Area School District

APPENDIX E: Letter to Assistant Superintendent

Jessica Stover

Slippery Rock University

Jas1114@sru.edu

November 17, 2025

Danielle Yoder

State College Area School District

240 Villa Crest Dr.

State College, PA 16801

Dear Mrs. Danielle Yoder,

I am requesting permission to contact teachers within your district to invite them to participate in my dissertation research study, which is being conducted as part of my graduate work at Slippery Rock University. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of behavioral challenges in the classroom. If granted permission, I will send a recruitment email to teachers using their school-provided email addresses. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and all data collected will remain confidential and used solely for academic research purposes. No school or individual names will be included in the final report. Your approval will allow me to proceed with contacting teachers and conducting the study in accordance with institutional and ethical guidelines.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Jessica Stover

Doctoral Program in Special Education

Slippery Rock University

APPENDIX F: Informed Consent Form



Slippery Rock University
 Doctoral Program in Special Education
 Jessica Stover
 Jas1114@sru.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Behavior Challenges in Primary and Secondary Classrooms: The Educators' Experiences

Jessica Stover, jas1114@sru.edu

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years or older, have 3 years of teaching experience, teach in the State College Area School District and be able to communicate in English. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Important Information about the Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to investigate the range of student behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. Additionally, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, a Self-Reporting form, answer Interview questions and check over your typed transcript, during one meeting either in person or via zoom. This will take approximately 55 minutes to complete.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include mild or moderate psychological discomfort when discussing previous behavioral experiences that may have been stressful, embarrassing or emotionally charged.
- The study will potentially contribute to a better understanding of how disruptive student behavior affects teachers and classrooms.
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the Study About and Why are We Doing it?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the range of behavioral challenges that teachers commonly encounter in primary and secondary classrooms and to explore how these challenges impact instructional practices, student learning, teacher well-being, and the overall classroom environment. Additionally, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and resources available to educators in managing these issues and promoting positive outcomes. This research aims to identify recurring patterns in student behavior across educational levels, examine the strategies educators use to address these challenges and assess what types of professional development or institutional support they perceive as most beneficial.

Initials: _____

Ultimately, this work intends to shape policy and practices in teacher training, school leadership, and classroom management strategies to create a more positive and productive learning environment.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to Complete a Demographic Survey to provide basic information via email; a Self-Report Form to provide information about behaviors and supports you observe, via email; a Semi-Structured Interview with open-ended questions and possible follow-up questions via in person interview or Google Meet; and Member checking transcripts, where you will review verbatim transcripts of the interviews, via email. We expect this to take about 55 minutes. Information collected will not be linked to other data.

Demographic Survey- 5 minutes to complete.

Self-Report Form- up to 10 minutes to complete.

Semi-Structured Interviews- 30 minutes to complete.

Member-checking transcripts-10 minutes to complete.

How Could You Benefit From This Study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because the study may contribute to a better understanding of how disruptive student behavior affects teacher well-being. Data from the study may also inform future revisions of school or district discipline policies, including increased use of restorative practices and PBIS.

What Risks Might Result From Being in This Study?

You might experience some risks from being in this study. They are mild to moderate psychological discomfort when discussing previous behavioral incidents or recalling past experiences that may have been stressful, embarrassing, or emotionally charged. Participants may have mild concerns about privacy or confidentiality, particularly that their demographic information could be connected to their responses, even though no identifying information is collected.

If you experience psychological discomfort during or after participation, the following supports are available:

- You may take a break or discontinue the study at any time.
- You may contact the research team to discuss your concerns at jas1114@sruc.edu or jesse.smith@sruc.edu.
- If you would like to speak with a licensed mental health professional, you may contact:
 - Centre Helps at (814) 237-5855
 - If you are in immediate distress, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
 - You may also contact the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988 (U.S.).

How Will We Protect Your Information?

Initials: _____

We plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, we will not include information that could directly identify you.

We will protect the confidentiality of your research records by data being coded using unique identifiers, and your name will be stored separately from interview data in a secure, password-protected location.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

We will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data as part of the project.

What Other Choices do I Have if I Don't Take Part in this Study?

If you choose not to participate, there are no alternatives.

Your Participation in this Research is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, all data will be deleted, and you will not experience any penalty to which you are otherwise entitled.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research, you may contact **Dr. Jesse Smith, Jesse.Smith@sru.edu, 724-738-2461**.

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 302
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Initials: _____

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Consent Form has been given to me.

Printed Participant Name Signature of Participant Date

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and to the best of my knowledge understands the details contained in this document and have been given a copy.

Printed Name of Investigator Signature of Investigator Date

Initials: _____

APPENDIX G: Audio/Video Release Consent Form



Slippery Rock University
Doctoral Program in Special Education
Jessica Stover
Jas1114@sru.edu

Photo/Videotape/Audiotape Release Form

Behavior Challenges in Primary and Secondary Classrooms: The Educators' Experiences

Jessica Stover, Jas1114@sru.edu

We request the use of Videotape/audiotape materials of you as a part of our study. We specifically ask your consent to use this material as we deem proper, specifically, for news releases, professional publications, websites, and pictorial exhibits related to our study. We also emphasize that the appearance of these materials on certain media (websites, professional publications, news releases) may require the transfer of copyright of the images. This means that your image may be used by other individuals. Regarding the use of your likeness in videotape/audiotape, please check one of the following boxes below:

- I consent to videotape
- I consent to audiotape
- I do not consent

Give unconditional permission for the investigators to utilize videotapes/audiotapes (*specify which is used*) of me.

Participant Signature

Print Name

Date

PLEASE NOTE: Even should you choose not to allow your image or voice to be used, we can still benefit from your inclusion as a research study participant.

APPENDIX H: Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about your teaching background, such as your grade level, subject area, and years of teaching experience?
2. In your experience, what types of student behaviors have become more common or concerning in your classroom?
3. What do you believe contributes to these behaviors?
4. How have these behavioral challenges affected your ability to teach effectively?
5. In what ways, if any, have these behaviors impacted your emotional well-being or job satisfaction?
6. How do you typically cope with or manage stress that arises from dealing with challenging student behaviors?
7. Have you received any training or professional development related to managing disruptive behavior or supporting students' social-emotional needs?

If yes: What aspects were most/least useful?

If no: What kinds of training or resources would be most helpful?
8. How do school or district discipline policies influence how you handle behavioral incidents in your classroom?
9. How do you think student behavior and school climate could be improved in your school or district?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with student behavior or support systems that we haven't discussed?