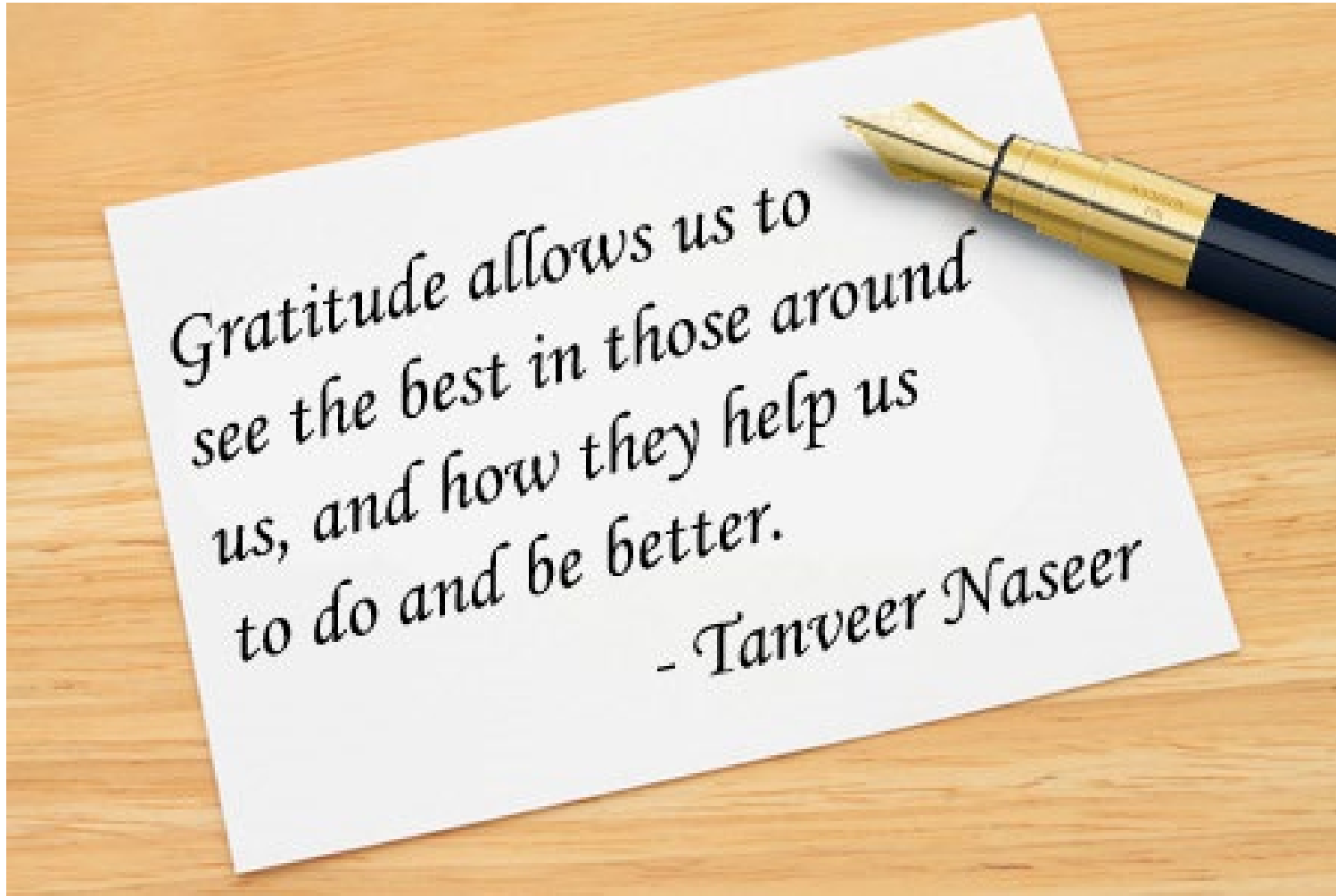


# Principals as Ambassadors of Wellness: Leading PBIS Implementation to Fidelity

<https://tinyurl.com/PaPBSPrincipalStudy>

Becky Millspaugh, Ed.D.  
Tina Lawson, Ed.D., BCBA  
APBS Conference  
Jacksonville, FL  
March 30, 2023

# Begin with Gratitude



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

Dr. Terrance Furin  
Dr. Byron McCook  
Dr. Tina Lawson  
Dr. Kathleen Lane  
Dr. Kathryn Poggi  
Dr. Chanda Telleen  
Dr. Nikole Hollins-Sims  
Dr. Lisa Thomas  
Dr. Aaron Lyon  
Dr. Mark Ehrhart

PBIS Facilitator Colleagues  
Principals  
Supervisors and Directors  
Richard & Ruthanne George  
Alicia & MJ Millspaugh  
Family & Friends

# Session Learning Intentions

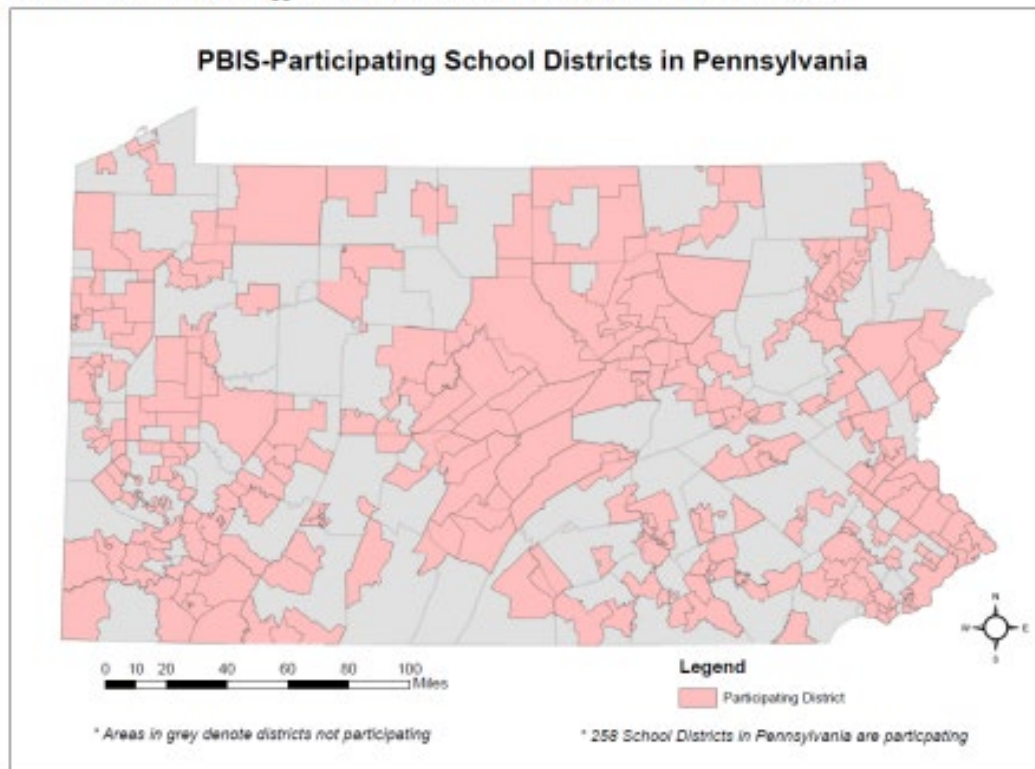
- Explore practical leadership behaviors and focus for improving implementation fidelity
- Provide strategies for leading, meeting, and maintaining fidelity to universal PBIS implementation





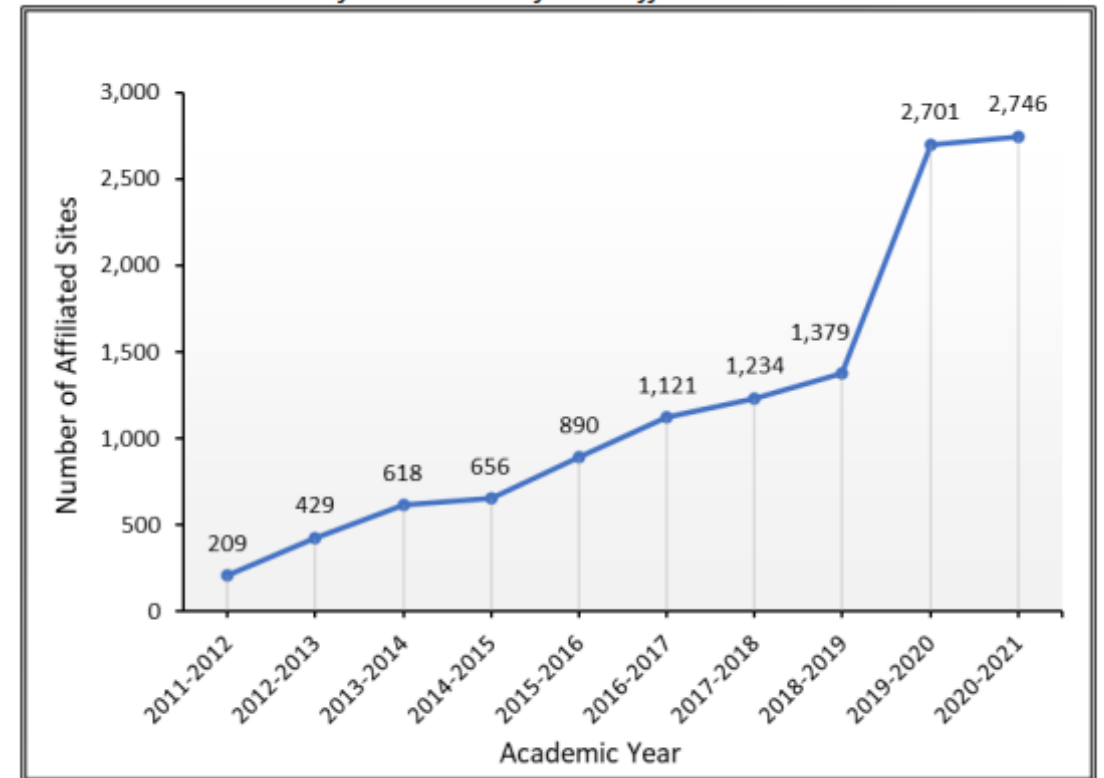
# Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PaPBS) Network

*PAPBS Network Affiliated School Districts in 2020-2021*



Note. PBIS = Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

*Cross-Sectional Review of the Number of Sites Affiliated with the PAPBS Network*



Note. PAPBS = Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support.

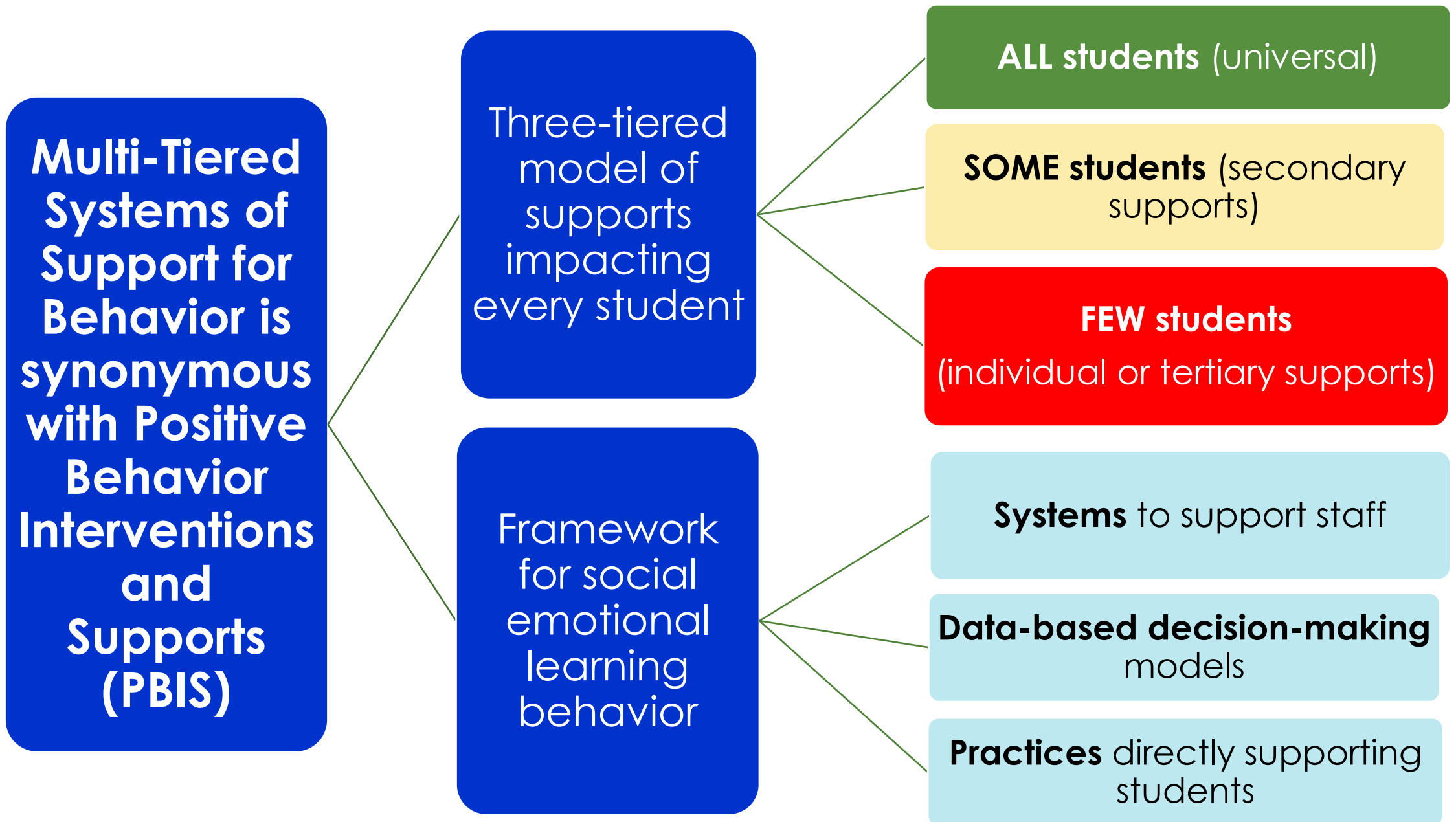
# Introduction

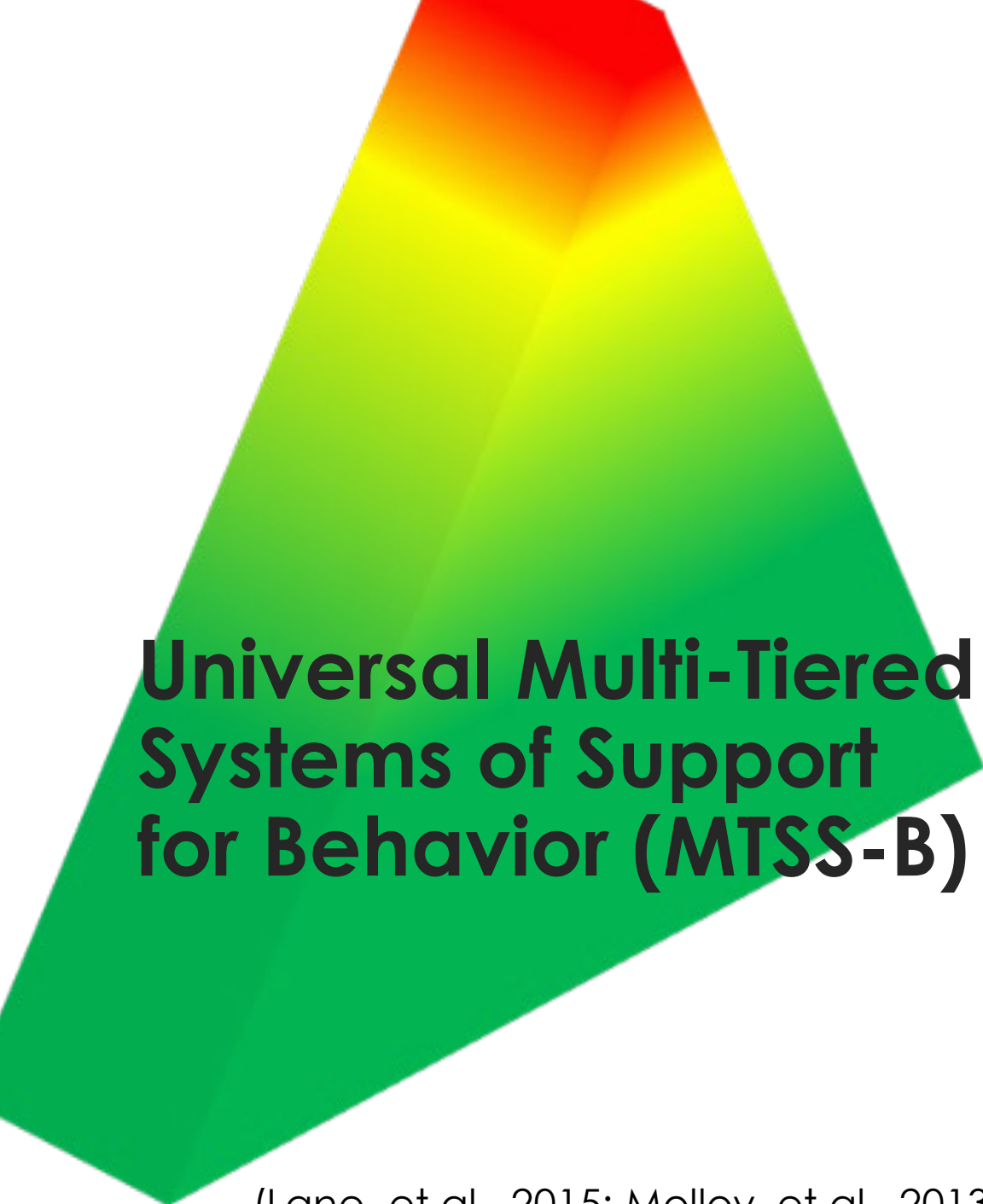


(University of Florida, 2021)



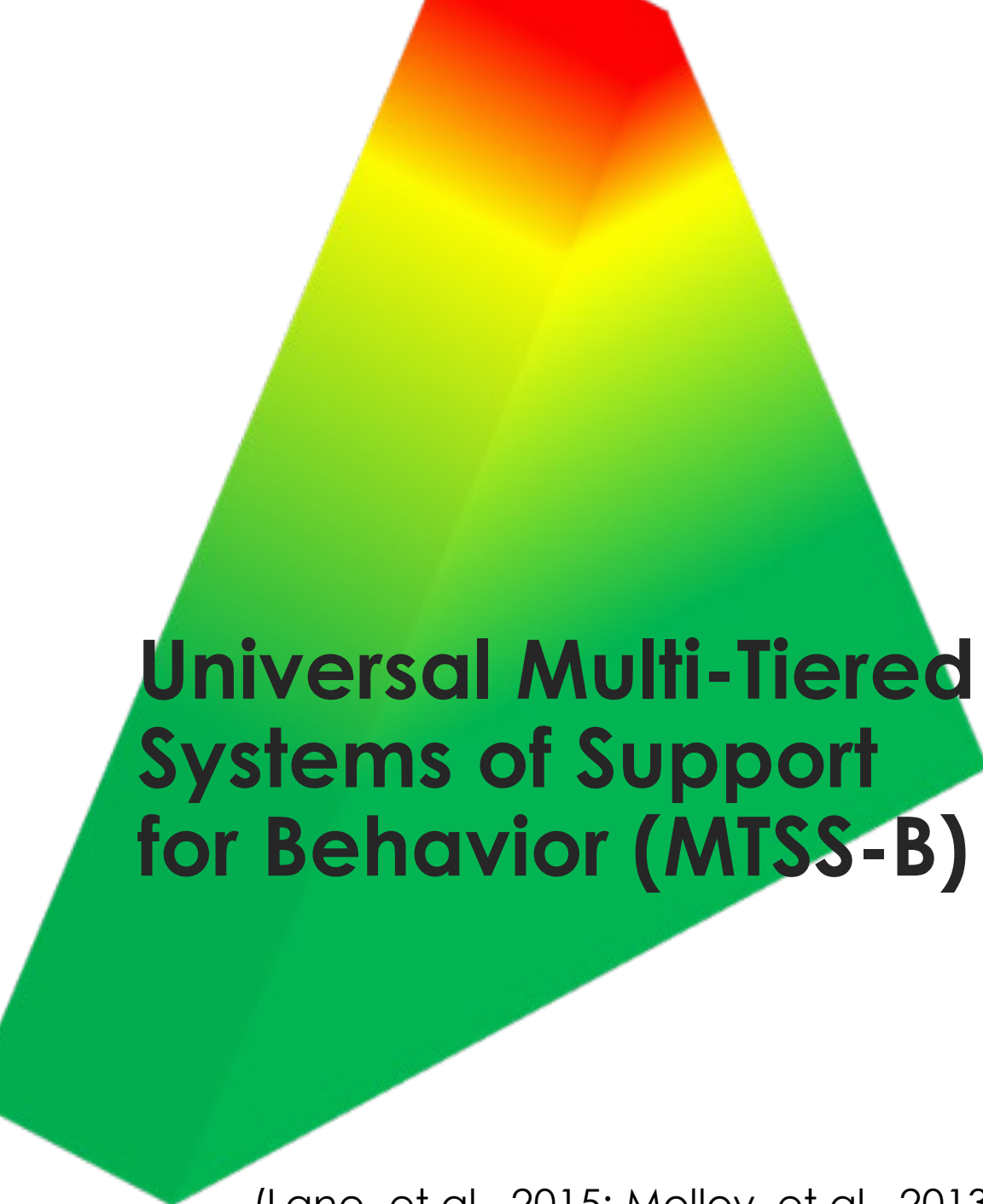
(Akyurt, 2021)





# Universal Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior (MTSS-B)

- Systems, data models, and practices that impact **every student** in the educational setting
- Often referred to as **Tier 1**
- At fidelity, provides sufficient support for 80% or more of the school population



# Universal Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior (MTSS-B)

- Tier 1, universal MTSS-B **evidence-based practices** include:
  - Common language
  - Differentiated instruction
  - Character education
  - Behavior specific praise and reinforcement
  - Instruction in social emotional learning
  - Responding to problematic behaviors



Principal's commitment critical to overall to the mental health of school for both students and staff

Principals serve in complex roles when addressing non-academic barriers to student learning

82% of administrators reported not receiving pre-service training in the systems of interconnection of mental health and academics

(Blackman et al., 2016; Iachini et al., 2016; Papa, 2018)

## Principal's Role as Leader in Social Emotional Learning

Educational leaders are **ambassadors of mental wellness** and require emotional intelligence to improve mental health outcomes in schools (Adams, 2019).

Teachers' implementation of interventions is more strongly related to principals' actions than to teachers' personal characteristics or capacity to implement.

When principals believed in the importance of an evidence-based practice, the fidelity of implementation to that practice was higher.

Even when implementation fidelity rates were high, the outcomes were lower in developing social emotional learning where principal support was low or absent.

(Debnam, et al., 2013; Kam et al., 2003; Rohrbach et al., 1993)

## **Principal's Role in Implementing Evidence Based Practices**

*Outcomes and fidelity are influenced by the belief of the principal.*

# Principal's Impact on PBIS Implementation Fidelity

## Combs & Martin 2011

- Shared decision making
- Building leadership of others
- Support of implementation practices
- Communication
- Develop leader's professional growth

## Andreou, et al. 2015

School administrator involvement and adaptation were categories implementers identified for reaching PBIS fidelity and sustainability

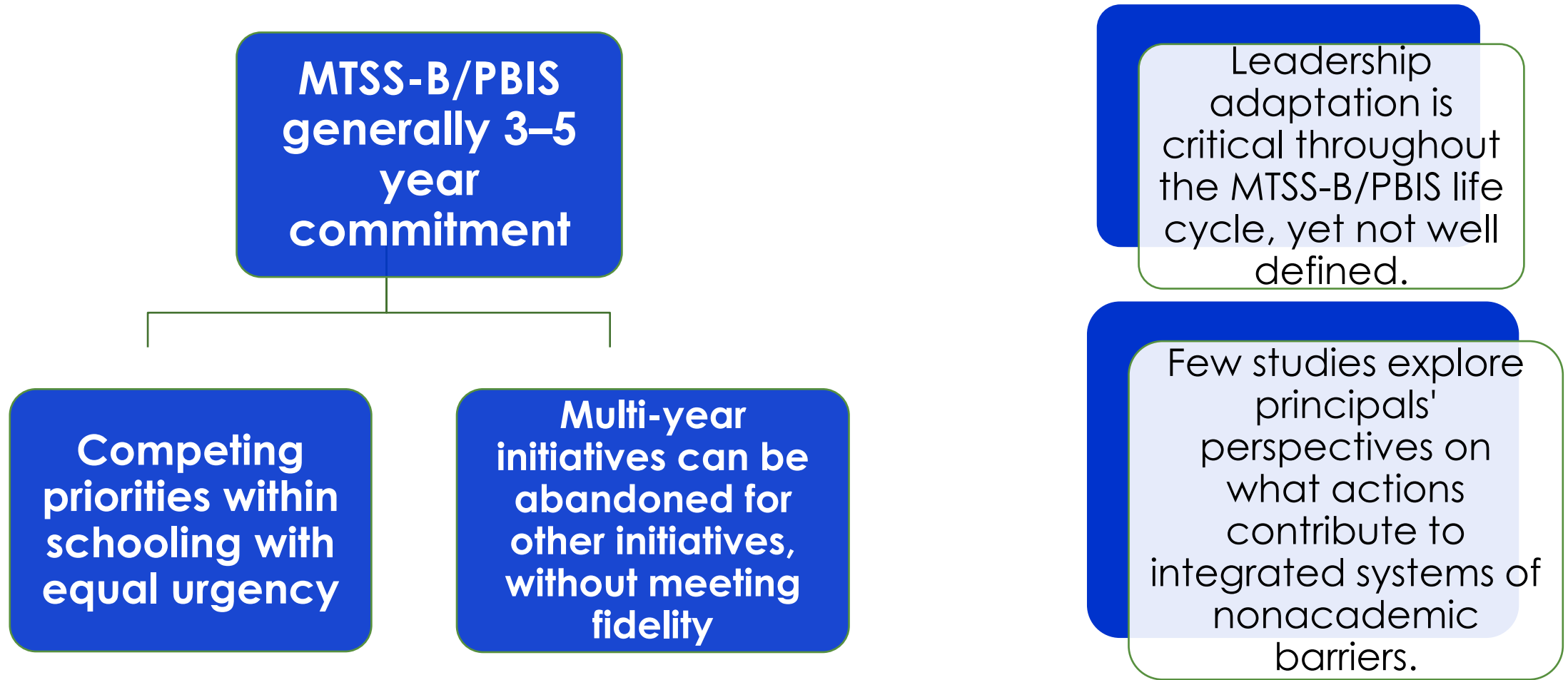
- Principals were equally transformational
- Principals in PBIS schools perceived to be better at behavior management

## 2012 Richter, et al.

- Administrators: allocating resources, removing barriers, providing data, and reinforcing priorities for PBIS
- Team members: administrator's distributive leadership approaches and providing training and professional development

## 2021 Scaletta & Hughes

# Background of Problem



(Iachini, et al., 2016; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Kittelman et al., 2020; Thiers, 2017)



## Purpose of the Study

- Investigate
- Describe
- Inform
- Guide

# Significance of Study

- **School-based validated tools** to support research into principal leadership action to meet social and behavioral needs of students
- **Focus on what leaders DO** versus what brand or program is used to improve effective educational practices

(Horner, et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2012)



# Searching for a Validated Tool

## Public Health Sector



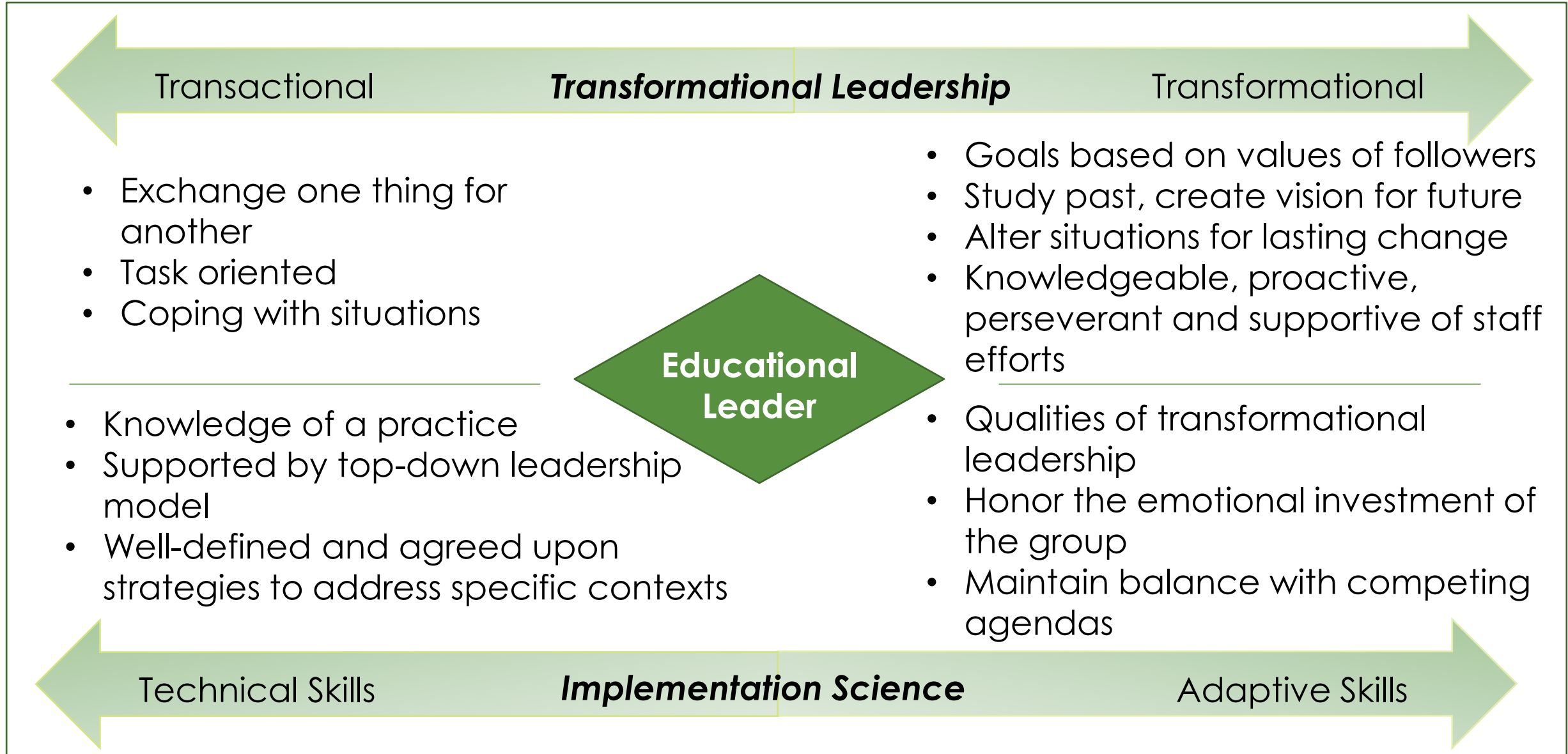
(Aarons et al., 2016)

## Education



(Fixsen et al., 2005; Horner & Sugai, 2006)

# Theoretical & Conceptual Framework for Leadership within MTSS





# School version Implementation Leadership Scale (S-ILS)

<https://www.implementationleadership.com/measures>

- **Proactive Leadership**
- **Knowledgeable Leadership**
- **Supportive Leadership**
- **Perseverant Leadership**
- **Communication\***
- **Vision/Mission\***
- **Availability\***

Permission was obtained by Drs. Ehrhart and Lyon to use this instrument as part of this study.

(Aarons, et al., 2014; Lyon, et al., 2018)

# Research Question #1 (Quantitative)

**Is there a difference in the mean scale scores of the school version Implementation Leadership Scale (S-ILS) between school staff and principals in**

- **proactive,**
- **knowledgeable,**
- **supportive,**
- **perseverant,**
- **communication,**
- **vision/mission,**
- **and availability leader behaviors?**

$H_0$ : There will be no difference in the mean scale scores of the S-ILS between school staff and principals.

(Lyon et al., 2018)



**70% or greater on the Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) OR Tier 1 Subscale of the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI)**

(Algozzine, et al., 2016; Creswell, 2013; Kincaid, et al., 2010)

# Sampling for this Case Study

## Target Population for S-ILS Survey

- Schools meeting fidelity to Tier 1 PBIS during SY 2019-2020 and 2020-2021
- Contacts from the Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PaPBS) Network for each school: staff and principal
  - 497 building principals and 934 staff members

## Purposive Sampling: Focus Groups

- Principals:
  - Invited as part of the target group who completed the S-ILS
  - Currently leading PBIS efforts

# S-ILS Research Participants N=152

90 staff members (10%)

62 principals (12%)

<b>Distribution of School Type for Network Schools Eligible to Participate &amp; S-ILS Participants</b>	<b>% of PaPBS Network Schools Levels meeting Tier 1 Fidelity 2019-2021</b>	<b>% of PaPBS Network School Levels Represented in S-ILS Participation</b>
Elementary School	64%	68%
Elementary – Middle School	7%	1%
Middle School	15%	10%
Middle-High School	2%	1%
High School	9%	12%
K-12	4%	5%

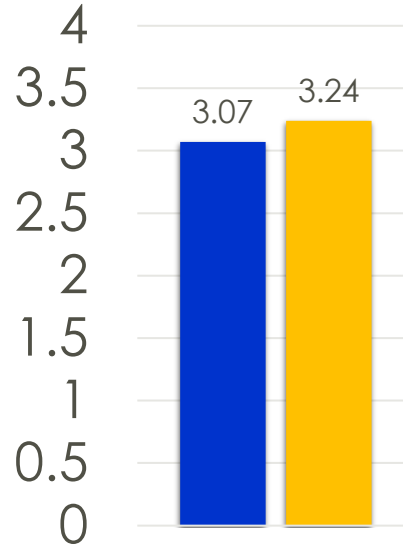
# Proactive Leadership





Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Scale 1: Proactive

Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: Great extent 3.07

Average for principals: Great extent 3.24

■ Staff mean ■ Principal mean

# Additional Significance Found: Title 1 Schools

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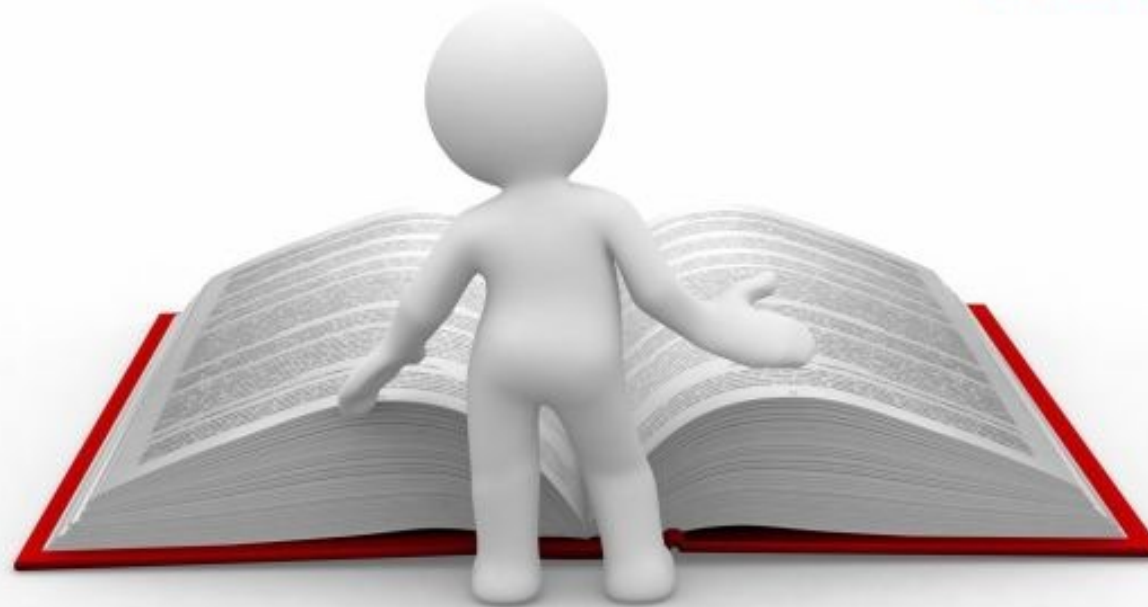
The **25 principals of non-Title 1 schools** ( $M=3.53$ ,  $SD=.51$ ) **rated their extent of their proactive behaviors significantly higher than 37 principals of Title 1 schools** who rated the extent of their proactive behaviors ( $M=3.04$ ,  $SD=.66$ ) in PBIS universal implementation,  $t(60) = 3.19$ ,  $p = .002$ ;  $d = .8$ . The effect size for this analysis ( $d = .8$ ) was found to be a **large effect using Cohen's *d*** (1988).



# Knowledgeable Leadership

*Be Eager to know.*

Col. (Retd.) RS Gill



# Knowledgeable Leadership....

To what extent do you as the leader or your leaders exhibit the following behaviors:

0                      1                      2                      3                      4  
Not at all            Slight extent            Moderate extent            Great extent            Very great extent

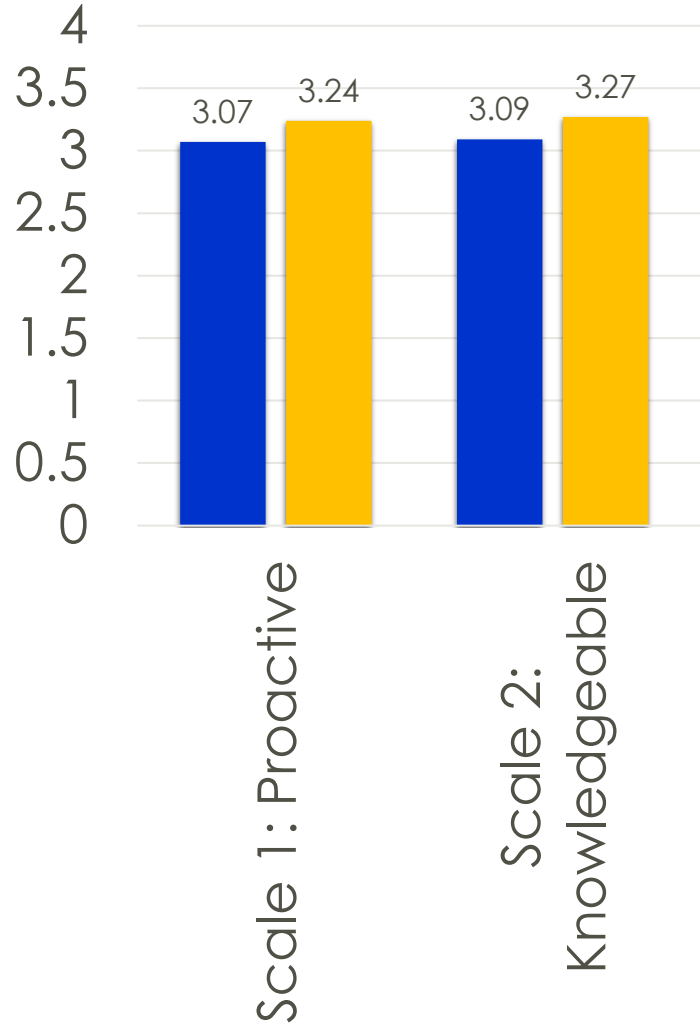
Knowledgeable Leadership	Score
Knows what he/she is talking about in Tier 1 PBIS implementation	
Is knowledgeable about universal Tier 1 PBIS	
Can answer staff questions about Tier 1 PBIS implementation	

**School version Implementation Leadership Scale (S-ILS)**

(Aarons, et al., 2014; Lyon, et al., 2018)

Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: Great extent 3.09

Average for principals: Great extent 3.27

■ Staff mean ■ Principal mean

# Supportive Leadership



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# Supportive Leadership....

To what extent do you as the leader or your leaders exhibit the following behaviors:

0                                      1                                      2                                      3                                      4  
Not at all                      Slight extent                      Moderate extent                      Great extent                      Very great extent

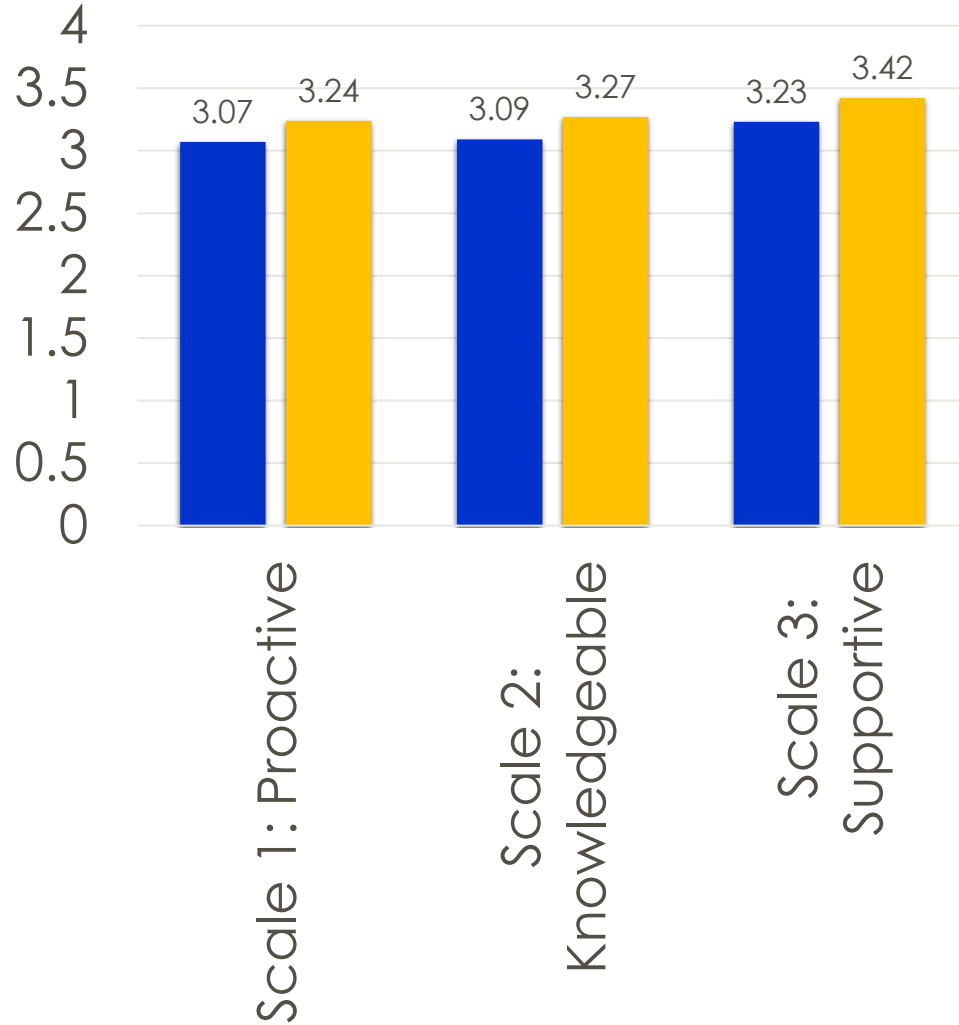
Supportive Leadership	Score
Supports employees' efforts in implementing Tier 1 PBIS	
Supports employees' efforts to learn more about implementing Tier 1 PBIS	
Recognizes and appreciates employee efforts in the implementation of Tier 1 PBIS	

## School version Implementation Leadership Scale (S-ILS)

(Aarons, et al., 2014; Lyon, et al., 2018)

Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: Great extent 3.25  
Average for principals: Great extent 3.42

■ Staff mean ■ Principal mean



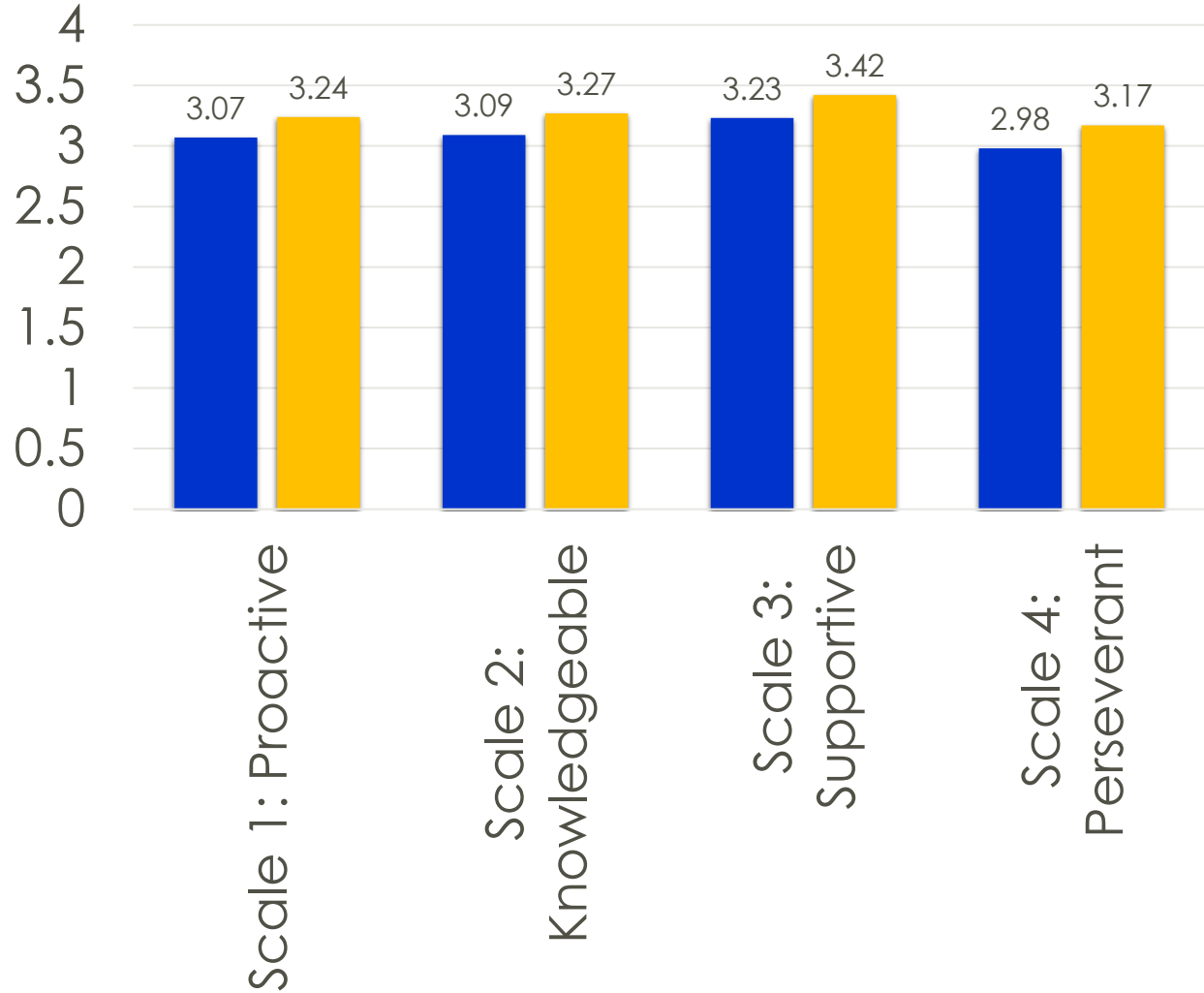
# Perseverant Leadership





Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: High Moderate Extent 2.98

Average for principals: Great extent 3.17

■ Staff mean ■ Principal mean

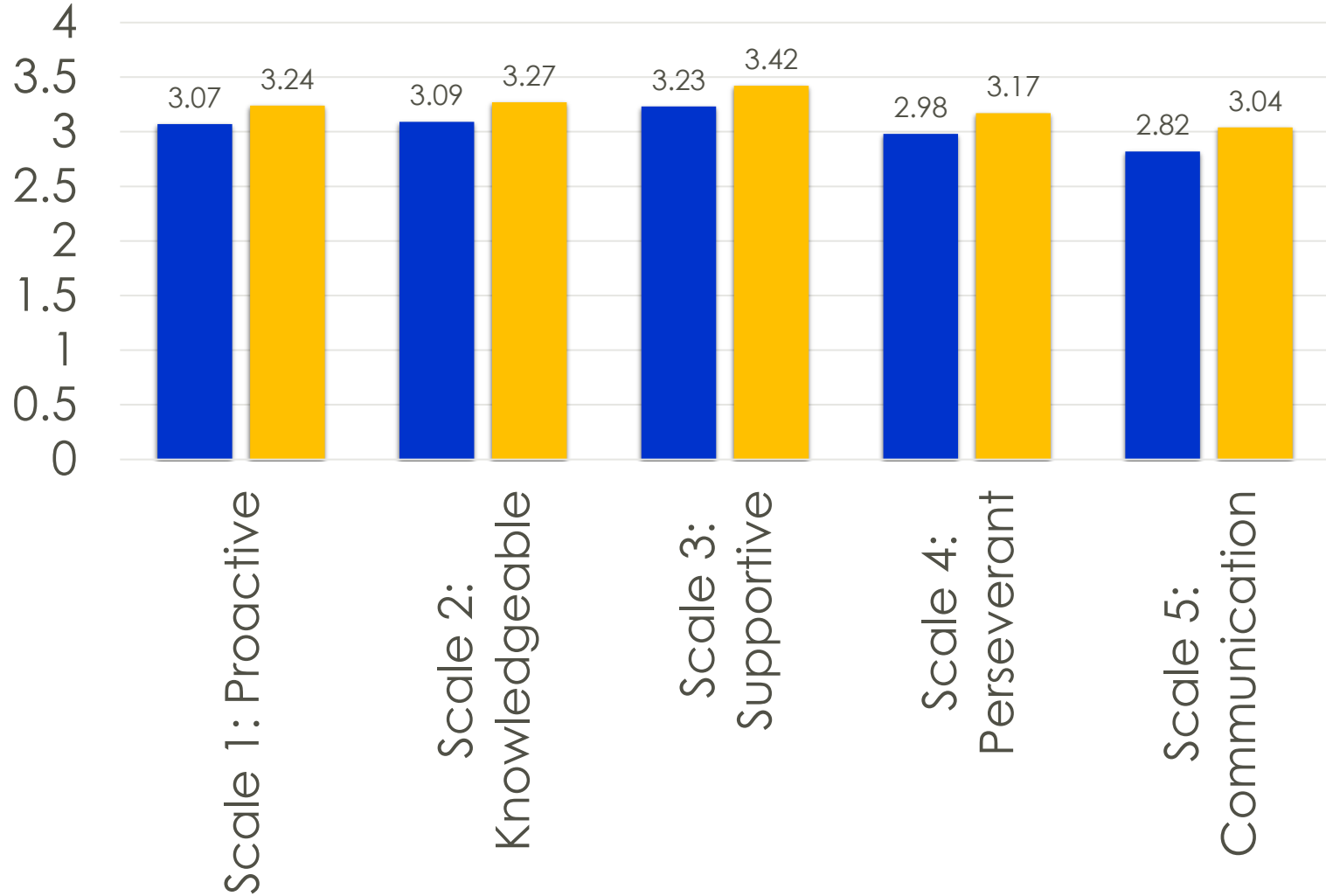
# Communication Leadership\*





Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: High Moderate extent 2.82

Average for principals: Great extent 3.04

■ Staff mean ■ Principal mean

A close-up photograph of a hand hovering just above a row of white letter blocks. The blocks are arranged to spell out the word 'MISSION'. The top row of blocks contains the letters M, I, and S. The bottom row contains the letters V, I, S, I, O, and N. The background is a soft-focus green and blue gradient. The text 'Vision/Mission in Leadership\*' is overlaid on the right side of the image in white.

**Vision/Mission  
in Leadership\***

**M I S  
V I S I O N**

# Vision/Mission Leadership...

To what extent do you as the leader or your leaders exhibit the following behaviors:

0                                      1                                      2                                      3                                      4  
Not at all                      Slight extent                      Moderate extent                      Great extent                      Very great extent

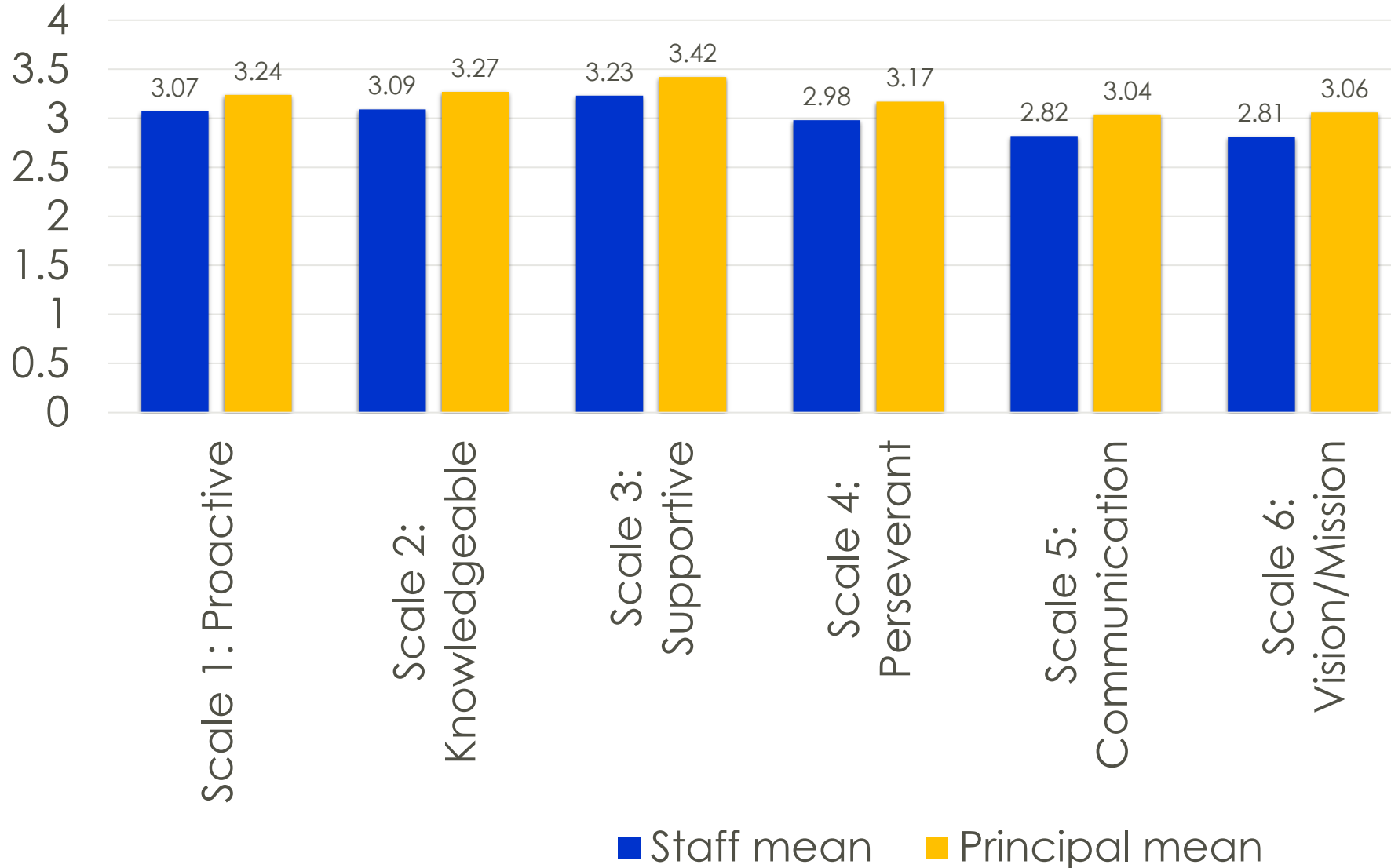
Vision/Mission Leadership	Score
Linking implementation of Tier 1 PBIS evidence-based practices to improved student outcomes	
Clear vision for the implementation of the Tier 1 PBIS evidence-based practices	
Connecting Tier 1 PBIS evidence-based practices to the broader mission of the school	

## School version Implementation Leadership Scale (S-ILS)

(Aarons, et al., 2014; Lyon, et al., 2018)

Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves, but there was no significance found between the difference.

Average for staff: High Moderate extent 2.81

Average for principals: Great extent 3.06

# Leadership Availability\*







Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores

4  
3.5  
3  
2.5  
2  
1.5  
1  
0.5  
0

Staff perceived their principals lower than the principals perceived themselves. Significance was found.

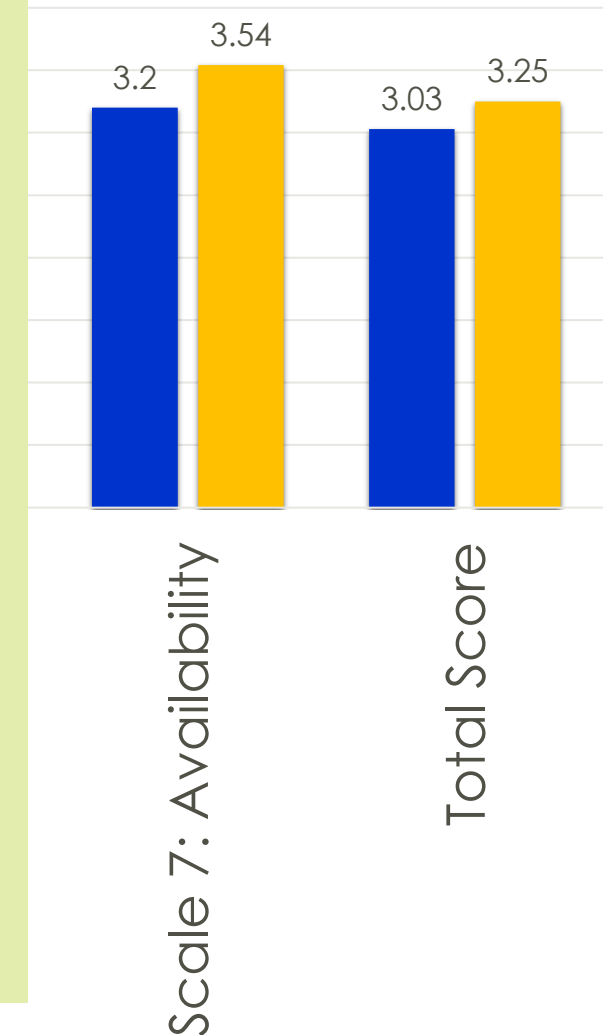
Average for staff: Great extent 3.20

Average for principals: Great extent 3.54

The **90 staff participants** who rated the extent of the availability of their principal in PBIS universal implementation (M = 480, SD = 34.5) **compared to the 62 principals** who rated their own availability in PBIS universal implementation (M = 425, SD = 31) **reported significantly lower scores in their perception of the principal's availability**,  $t(150) = -2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ ;  $d = .4$ .

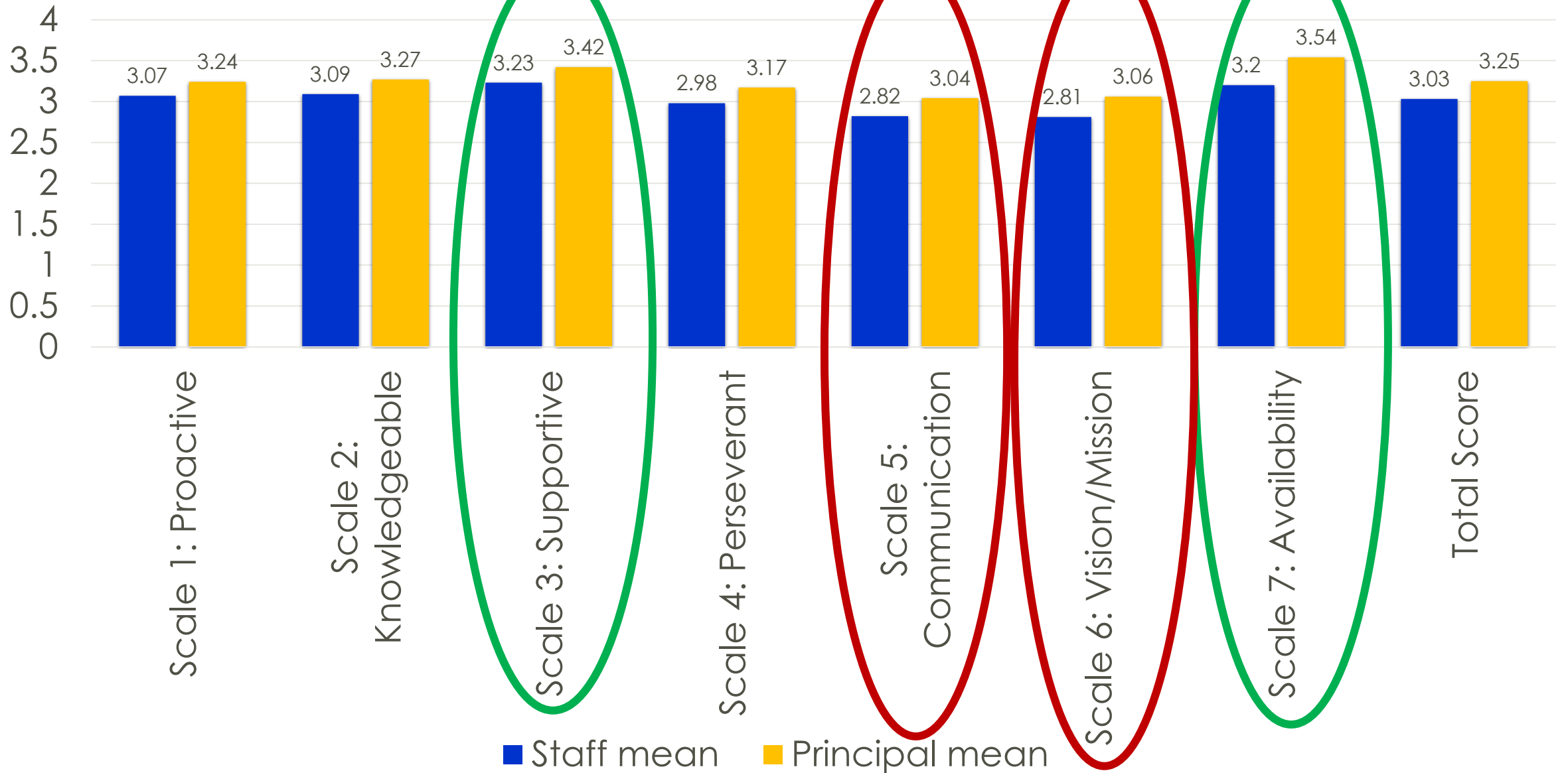
The effect size for this analysis ( $d = .4$ ) was found to be a **medium effect size** using *Cohen's d* (1988).

■ Staff mean  
■ Principal mean



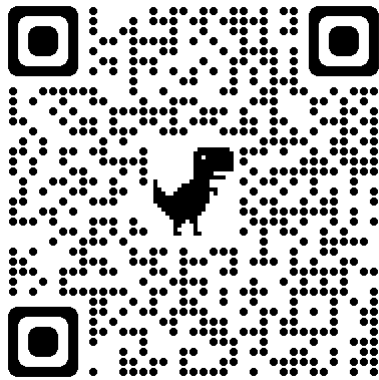
Key: 0 = Not at all 1= Slight extent 2=Moderate extent 3=Great extent 4=Very great extent

## S-ILS Mean Scale Extent Scores



## Research Question #2 (Qualitative)

*According to principals,  
what leadership actions do  
principals take to install and  
implement universal Tier 1  
PBIS with fidelity?*



Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code **1275 4447**

## Reflect....

1. What were the important leadership actions (i.e., specific behaviors you exhibited, examples, or self-reflective observations) that helped you implement universal Tier 1 PBIS to fidelity at your school?
2. If you had a colleague friend who was beginning to embark on the journey to implementing PBIS/MTSS-B, what leadership actions would you advise that principal to take at the onset?

## Research Question #2

### Theme #1: Focus on Relationships

# incidents: 33

# of groups: 6 (100%)

# of contributing principals: 13 (93%)

#### Focus on Relationships, defined:

- Listen to positive and negative feedback
- Invite others to make change
- Build trust
- Celebrate with staff

*So, if you have resistant staff, don't count them out as invaluable. Really listen to what they're saying because there's some really good validity. You know there's a reason there's a saying called **Devil's advocate** - you need somebody who is going to help you be reflective and question that thinking and not to see it as a negative thing but use it to help shape and form your program and even invite them to be on the team because the team needs to hear the authenticity of what's actually happening within the building and what the concerns are as well as the victories.*

**Principal K – F,PR,Y5,E5,P, ES,T,S6**

## Research Question #2

### Theme #2: Prepare Staff to Implement

# incidents: 59

# of groups: 6 (100%)

# of contributing principals: 12 (86%)

#### **Prepare Staff to Implement, defined:**

- Build knowledge of leaders and staff
- Provide time for exploration
- Create the vision for PBIS
- Define the need for PBIS
- Generate staff interest

*“I think you have to backward plan - begin with your end in mind and what do you want to accomplish? What do you want your school building to look like? To feel like for your students, for your faculty and staff? And let that be your driving force. I had someone tell me once and I'll never forget it. **If you don't know where you're going any road will get you there.**”*

## Research Question #2

### Theme #3: Support the Leadership Team

# incidents: 57

# of groups: 6 (100%)

# of contributing principals: 13 (93%)

#### Support the Leadership Team

- Empower team members
- Share leadership decisions
- Create a representative leadership team
- Support the completion of team tasks

*I think being supportive, I think there are times that some ideas have been floated my way for approval that maybe **I didn't see the same value or significance, as the team did, but trying to empower them I allowed them to roll with it and go with it. And I'm very thankful that I did because they've turned out to be successful** where we're getting very positive feedback... it's easy to get into a position where you're taking on the reins and the responsibility all by yourself, and you're not as collaborative as maybe you should be or want to be. So, I think that you [need to be] collaborative. It's a team effort and find a good coach who can help lead the charge as well.*

## Research Question #2

### Theme #4: Promote the PBIS Process

# incidents: 57

# of groups: 6 (100%)

# of contributing principals: 14 (100%)

#### **Promote the PBIS process**

- Actively model PBIS practices
- Persist consistently through the process
- Leverage resources to support staff and students
- Integrate PBIS with existing initiatives
- Communicate the importance of PBIS to all stakeholders

***I had to be the face of it. I know people that have tried to do it in other buildings where the principal wasn't involved. If the principal isn't leading it [won't get the same results] and I mean I led a lot of it. I was the talk. I spoke a lot. I studied a lot. I really tried to know and try to understand as much as I could, and really spearheaded it in even in light of people who did not want this to happen.***

**Principal B – M,PR, Y16,E16,P,E,T,S3**



## Research Question #2

### Theme #5: Sustain Fidelity

# incidents: 32

# of groups: 6 (100%)

# of contributing principals: 13 (93%)

### Sustain Fidelity

- Analyze data to improve practices
- Focus on fidelity of practice during installation
- Ensure quality implementation

They weren't implementing with fidelity, and so there were some things that **we needed to go back and look at and kind of like just revamp it all.** We had quite a few staff that left and so we had new staff that came on and so of course we needed to do initial trainings and all of those things to help get **everyone up to speed and really to come share what the expectations were for staff because it wasn't a negotiable.** This was something that we're going to do, but we wanted to implement again with fidelity.

# Research Question #3 (Qualitative)

*According to principals, what important leadership actions do principals take to persevere through challenges that threaten universal Tier 1 PBIS fidelity?*

# Reflect....

Challenges or barriers to implementation can happen inside or outside of the school.

1. What were the important events (i.e., specific behaviors, examples, or observations) that challenged implementation fidelity to universal Tier 1 PBIS?
2. What leadership actions did you take to limit, mitigate, or overcome these challenges?

## Research Question #3

### Challenge #1: Leadership Team Implementation Challenges

# incidents: 14

# of groups: 5 (83%)

# of contributing principals: 9 (64%)

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Leader Behaviors in Response to Challenge</b>	<b>RQ #2: Leader Behaviors to Implement to Fidelity</b>
<b>Challenges of Administrator Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focused on fidelity of implementation</li><li>• Reached out to external supports</li></ul>	<p>⇒ Sustain Fidelity</p> <p>⇒ Prepare Staff</p>
<b>Inconsistent staff implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modeled how to use acknowledgement system</li><li>• Made processes simpler for teachers</li><li>• Provided time to ask questions about implementation</li></ul>	<p>⇒ Promote PBIS Process</p> <p>⇒ Promote PBIS Process</p> <p>⇒ Prepare Staff</p>
<b>Challenges with expanding the work of the team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Created mentorships for new staff</li><li>• Adjusted team member responsibilities</li><li>• Provided ongoing training</li></ul>	<p>⇒ Promote PBIS Process</p> <p>⇒ Support Leadership Team</p> <p>⇒ Prepare Staff</p>

## Research Question #3

### Challenge #2: Consequences Attributed to Covid-19

# incidents: 8

# of groups: 2 (33%)

# of contributing principals: 5 (36%)

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Leader Behaviors in Response to Challenge</b>	<b>RQ #2: Leader Behaviors to Implement to Fidelity</b>
<b>Covid PBIS System Adaptation Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up back-ups to the back-ups for team members</li><li>• Displayed a willingness to do things differently</li><li>• Used data to make revisions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>⇒ Support Leadership Team</li><li>⇒ Support Leadership Team</li><li>⇒ Sustain Fidelity</li></ul>
<b>Teachers Experiencing High Levels of Stress and Negative Morale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Removed some activities from teachers' plates</li><li>• Used extra pay duty for extra responsibilities</li><li>• Focused on staff wellness and social engagement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>⇒ Support Leadership Team</li><li>⇒ Promote the PBIS Process</li><li>⇒ Focus on Relationships</li></ul>

## Research Question #3

### Challenge #3: Stakeholder Resistance

# incidents: 7

# of groups: 4 (68%)

# of contributing principals: 6 (43%)

Definition	Leader Behaviors in Response to Challenge	RQ #2: Leader Behaviors to Implement to Fidelity
<p><b>External Stakeholder Resistance (Family / Community)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held communication roundtables and focus groups</li> <li>• Shared school's vision for PBIS</li> <li>• Called families with positive recognition of their child</li> <li>• Created clarity through a family handbook</li> <li>• Responded to dissention - "face" of PBIS at onset (internal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Focus on Relationships</li> <li>⇒ Promote PBIS process</li> <li>⇒ Promote PBIS process</li> <li>⇒ Promote PBIS process</li> <li>⇒ Promote PBIS process</li> </ul>
<p><b>Internal Stakeholder Resistance (Staff)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared data to show a need</li> <li>• Created a shared vision</li> <li>• Communicated with empathy</li> <li>• Modeled unconditional caring for students</li> <li>• Established simple changes to improve outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Prepare Staff to Implement</li> <li>⇒ Prepare Staff to Implement</li> <li>⇒ Focus on Relationships</li> <li>⇒ Focus on Relationships</li> <li>⇒ Promote PBIS process</li> </ul>

## Research Question #3

### Challenge #4: Resource Scarcity

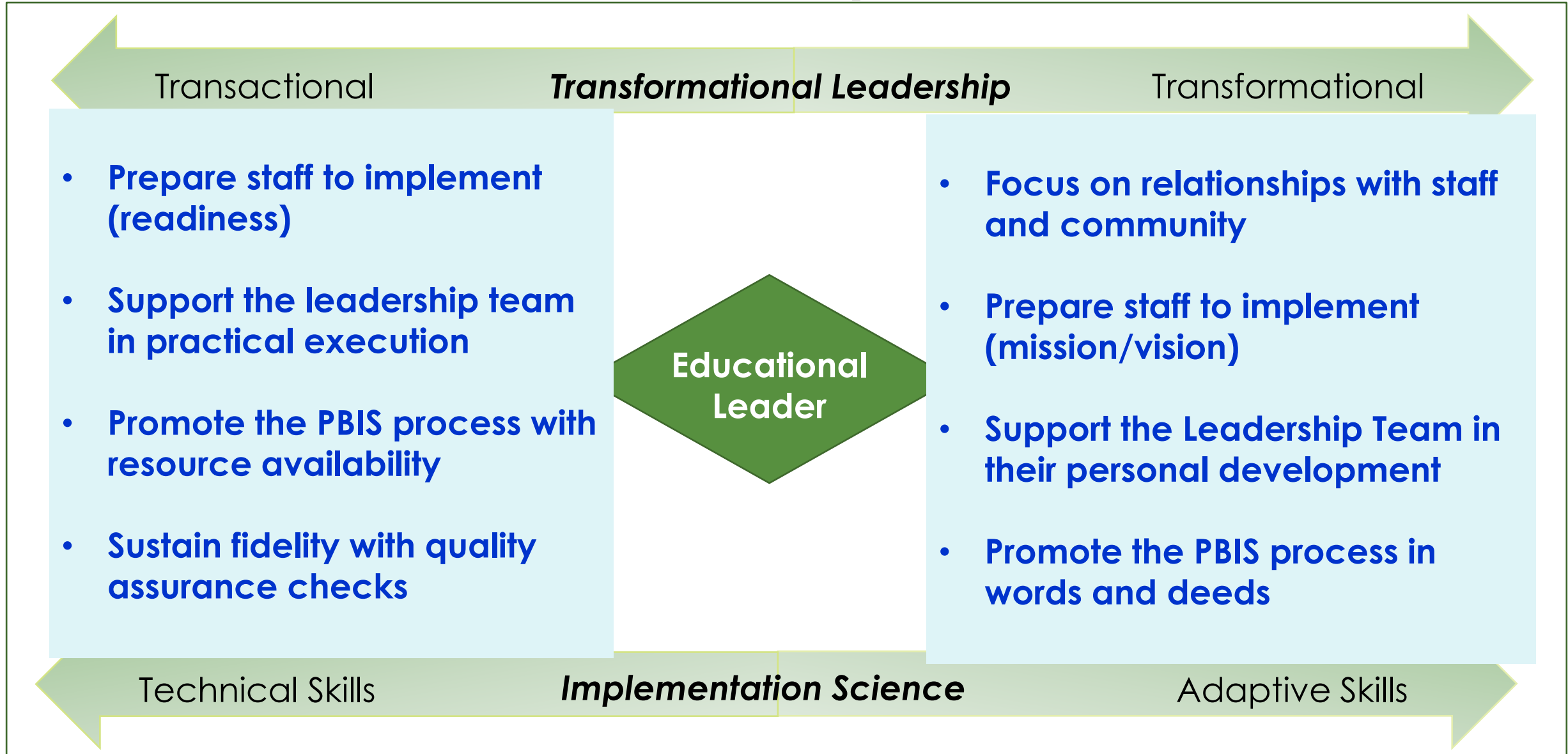
# incidents: 6

# of groups: 3 (50%)

# of contributing principals: 5 (36%)

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Leader Behaviors in Response to Challenge</b>	<b>RQ #2: Leader Behaviors to Implement to Fidelity</b>
<b>Lack of Capital Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organized non-tangible rewards for students</li><li>• Used expertise of team to capture data on existing tools</li><li>• Provided a line-item budget for PBIS</li></ul>	⇒ Sustain fidelity ⇒ Support Leadership Team ⇒ Support Leadership Team
<b>Lack of Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provided additional pay for internal coaches</li><li>• Shifted focus towards building a stronger staff leadership team</li></ul>	⇒ Promote PBIS ⇒ Support Leadership Team

# Theoretical & Conceptual Framework



# Impacts on Practice

**Mission & Vision  
Renewal**

**Leadership of  
Principal/PBIS  
Leader in the  
Development of  
Others**

**Leadership  
Development from  
Statewide Supports**

**Early Family  
Engagement**

**Principal/PBIS  
Leader  
Collaboration**



**Study was smaller in scope and not able to be generalized to larger groups**

**Study was conducted during Covid 19 pandemic**

**Over-representation of suburban schools with limited racial/ethnic representation of Pennsylvania educators**

## **Limitations**



# Suggestions for Future Research

## Repeat

**Replicate this study** outside of the Covid 19 pandemic context

## Investigate

Investigate experiences of **principals at Title 1 schools**

## Expand

Expand S-ILS studies with evidence-based practices as part of **the entire MTSS framework**, inclusive of academic evidence-based practices

## Measure

Measure the extent to which **district level leadership supports** are crucial to MTSS-B fidelity



# Conclusion: Hero to Hero-Maker

A renewed and expanded focus on adaptive leadership skills pragmatically **transforms the role of the principal as hero to the role of principal as hero maker**, promoting MTSS-B/PBIS to fidelity, and positively impacting each member of the learning community.



Let's Connect!

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# For More Information & Details Regarding this study:

[Millspaugh, R. \(2022\). \*Implementing universal multi-tiered systems of support for behavior with fidelity: What principals do that makes a difference.\* \(Publication No. 29260048\)](#) [Doctoral dissertation, Saint Joseph's University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection.



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