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The Domino Effect of Challenging Behaviors

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### Abstract

Challenging behaviors in special education have been an issue in special education classroom settings. In recent years it has become more evident that there is a need for improvement, although schools around the country have worked diligently to implement behavioral support plans that could improve or eliminate challenging behaviors. Many teachers in special education are under or unprepared to tackle these issues. After conducting research and interviewing two special education teachers, it was determined that most classrooms were in need of extra personnel support, staff training, and/or more effective parental involvement. In order to implement one of these action options, a teacher agreed to implement behavioral reports cards to help build a stronger connection between home and school. As a result, communication between special education teachers and parents of students has increased, with a higher percent of parental collaboration.

### The Domino Effect of Challenging behaviors

During my four years working in general and special educational classrooms, I have realized that challenging behaviors are not just a problem for general education classrooms, but also for special education classes, where they tend to occur more frequently and at a more severe level. Typically a general education classroom might have one or two students who express challenging behavioral problems, which can often be fixed through interventions and implementation of behavioral plans with a higher possibility of success. On the other hand, disruptive behaviors in mild to moderate classrooms can take twice as much interventional efforts, and implementation of behavioral plans. The severity of these behaviors can make strategies almost unrealistic, and useless to the improvement of any individual's behaviors. During my time working in these classrooms I was able to witness the impact challenging behaviors can have on these students, teachers, and staff members learning and teaching environment.

One significant day that I recall was my first day working as a paraprofessional educator. As a new hire, I had no previous experience and little training. On my first day, I was placed in a mild to moderate classroom for kinder to second grade. There were three paraprofessional educators aids, including myself to assist the class. The classroom was composed of about 11 students. Unfortunately, they had started the year with a substitute teacher, as most special education classrooms do now. The first two weeks I observed as the teacher desperately tried to teach the students, who would often run around the class, throw things across the room, and sometimes run to the playground. Despite the interruptive behavior, the teacher who did clearly not understand the severity of their behavior, continued to try to teach the students. This

continued for at least two weeks until one day it was too much. I remembered it was a Monday; we had just started circle time as usual. When one of the students who often participated in disruptive behavior started to cuss out the staff and hit the walls. While this was happening two other students started to run out the door to the playground. One of the paras ran out to keep an eye on the other students, while I tried to intervene and deescalate the situation. During all of this time, the teacher stood there giving directions, and did not seem to be concerned with the other students safety. After seeing all this, I could not help but break out into tears. I felt powerless to see these students exposed to this type of environment. I realized that it was not the student's fault for behaving in this manner, and it was not the teacher's fault either. The teacher was thrown into this classroom without any type of training on how to handle these situations. We were all trying our best with the little support we had, but that was not enough. The sad part about all of this was that it continues to be an issue. Special education classrooms face this type of behaviors everyday, and yet nothing has been done. Teachers continue to be thrown into teaching without the right training on how to manage classrooms. Not to mention, the continues decline in special education teachers, that have forced school district to contract long term substitutes who are not fit for the job. On top of this, most classrooms lack the personal support needed to implement any type of strategies and parent-teacher relationships continues to be low. As a future educator I want to be prepared to face these obstacles and give students the best possible educational environment.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, challenging behaviors have been associated with students who have learning disabilities (LD). According to research, approximately 25% of all school age children identified with disabilities are labeled as having behavioral problems (Sugai et al., 2000). This

is often connected to the severity of their disabilities, which may range from one or more impairments that can limit their ability to effectively develop communication and social skills. Impairments such as poor mobility, visual impairments, autism, and sensory impairment are some examples that prevent students from effectively requesting what they need and expressing what they feel. Which can increase the likelihood of students acting in a aggressive manner through self injury or destruction of property. This may result in a negative impact between relationships with people around them, their schooling, and their health (What is Challenging Behaviour, 2018). Since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 was passed, students with disabilities are protected from being excluded from schools by providing a less restrictive environment when possible (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). Students, who qualify under this Act, have disabilities such as autism, emotional disturbance, physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities. In cases where students require full intervention due to the severity of their disabilities or behavioral problems, schools are required to provide special day classrooms such as emotional disturbance classrooms, autistic classrooms, and mild to moderate classrooms. These types of classrooms provide students with smaller class sizes, one on one support, adaptation to physical environment, instructional procedures, and assessment methods (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018).

Certainly behavioral are unavoidable in some of these classrooms due to disabilities that contribute to these behaviors. However, in the mild to moderate classrooms challenging behaviors can be decreased or prevented because students in this classroom have intellectual disabilities rather than physical. They are more likely to learn the expected behaviors through intensive behavioral intervention. It is important that we focus on this issue since disruptive behavior in mild to moderate classrooms have the ability to decrease the academic progress of

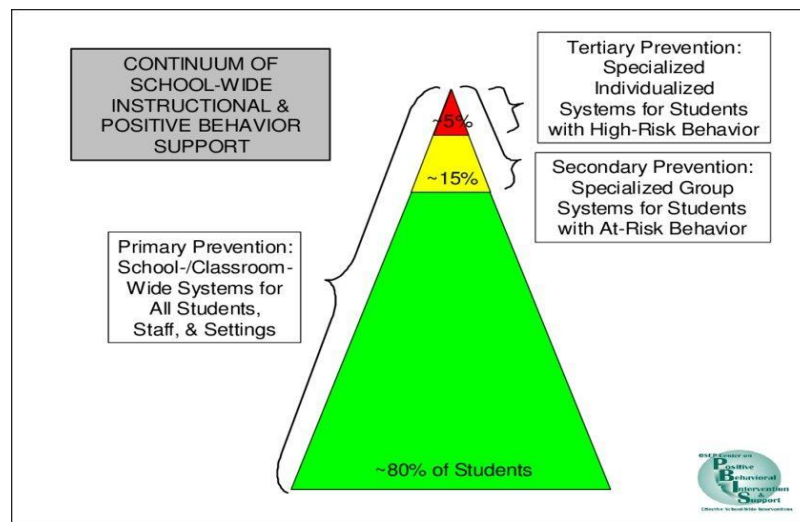
students, and most importantly decrease the chances of meeting their Individual Educational Plan (IEP), which is aimed at setting long and short term goals that will potentially help them integrate into general education classrooms.

### **Why is it an issue?**

Over the past 30 years schools have worked to create what is known as the School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), which has served as an intervention system to decrease challenging behaviors in schools ( Sugai et al., 2000). SWPBS was initially created for students with severe disabilities that engaged in extreme forms of self-injury and aggression, but in the recent years it has been implemented in all types of classrooms settings. SWPBS strategies have been influenced by research done on Social and Cognitive Theory, which demonstrates that children are able to change their mental process by engaging in vicarious learning, which involves imitating or observing others and by enactive learning. Social and Cognitive theory states that four conditions must be present for social learning to occur. The four conditions include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. This means that students must be able to pay attention, recall, and model the expected behavior. By doing so the teacher must value and reward the positive behavior (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). In the same way SWPBS strategies emphasizes that when staff actively teach expected behaviors, the amount of students with behavioral problems will be reduced and instructional time improved ( Sugai et al., 2000). Ideally, the implementation of these approaches should create a well-organized classroom, where students flourish under the expected behavior. Sadly, these strategies can often be an unrealistic approach. Educators in all levels, including special education classrooms, are expected to educate a diverse population of students who may not only have a learning disability, but other risk factors such as limited family support, significant learning and/or

behavioral problems, families who face financial barriers, and a great need for mental health and social welfare assistance( Sugai et al., 2000). Research has shown that although students that have disabilities are only 5% of the total school age population, they account for up to 50% of the behavioral incidents, and take significant amount of educators and administrators time (Sugai et al., 2000). The figure below illustrates the three three tiers of SWPBS, the bottom represents school wide support, second at risk students, and top individualize support.

Figure 1.1: School-wide continuum of instructional and positive behavior support



(Horner et al., 2005)

Although high- risk behavior is only 5%, it is most likely to be present in classrooms that serve students that have disabilities. As shown in the figure 1.1, the SWPBS strategies can easily be applied on the first two levels with a high possibility of being successful. But, in order to be effective in special education classrooms, there is a need for extra personnel support in the classroom, well-trained staff, and more parental involvement. As mentioned in the article, *Applying Positive Behavior Support and Functional Behavioral Assessments in Schools* (2000), “The issues in challenging behaviors are not a lack of behavioral intervention, but rather a lack in adopting and sustaining policies and practice that effectively meet the needs of all students.”



In order to effectively implement strategies that are already in place, we must advocate for extra support in the classroom, more classroom management trainings, and encourage parents to be involved in the process.

### **What should be done?**

In order to improve these issues we must address them in an individual level by first, providing more behavioral management trainings that can better prepare a new generation of educators who come with little or no experience on how to manage a classroom. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2014), most state credential programs spend less than a single class in foundational coursework to any classroom management strategies (Walsh, n.d). In most cases, these courses do not require teacher candidates to practice classroom management skills as they learn them, resulting in an unprepared educator running a classroom. Therefore, classroom management trainings should be a concentration in schools districts. School districts should offer newly hired teachers classroom management trainings that are research based, along with everyday experiences in the classroom. The implementation of these training in the actual job, will have a better chance at preparing teacher to manage their classrooms.

Secondly, a lack of staff support has contributed to the poor implementation of SWPBS or any type of intervention. Since the 1990's, personnel shortage in special education has been widely reported. This includes a shortage in teachers and paraprofessional educators, whose jobs are often characterized by high attrition, low pay, and a sense of low status. Research has found that more than 36% of teachers reported they planned to leave their field within a year due to these issues (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Without certified teachers in special education and the required aids per classroom ratio, classrooms can not function properly. It is crucial that

well qualified teachers are placed in these classrooms so that students with mild disabilities can have a better education. In order to correct this situation, districts could start by providing staff with higher paying wages that reflect the quality of work they provide, a healthy working environment where they are given extra time to work on all the mandatory paperwork, and enough training that can well prepare them to be successful at their jobs.

Finally, parental support is essential for the development of any child, especially those in special education who are in greater risk of failing. In fact, the IDEA requires schools to involve parents of students with disabilities in the educational decision making process. By including parent's knowledge of their child when creating plans and informing parents on changes in placements (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). Unfortunately, parental involvement in special education has shown to be low. A recent study on parental participation, reported that most teachers have little training on how to effectively use parents to facilitate the education of children and foster a more meaningful involvement (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Thus, resulting on low participation among parents, a lack of understanding on IEP goals, and poor communication among teacher and parents (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). Hence, it is crucial that parents are more involved and informed in the creation of IEPs. In order to increase parental involvement, schools should create informational meetings, or offer free online trainings where they can learn more about the IEP process and how they can contribute to the overall classroom environment. Also, schools could facilitate participation by accommodating to parent's work schedule, using their native language, and using vocabulary that can be easily understood by them. Research has shown that parental involvement in special education leads to positive outcomes. This includes, maintenance of treatment gains, continuity of intervention

programs, higher level of parent satisfaction, and more effective strategies for resolving problems (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Challenging behaviors in special education classrooms have become a major issue, which impacts not just an individual student, but also possibly an entire class. Despite the implementations of school wide behavioral support, special educational classes continue to be unprepared to address this issue. This is due to a shortage of personnel, lack of trainings, and parental involvement, which prevents teachers from carrying out these strategies. Until schools do something to fix these problems, schools will continue to face this issue.

### **Method**

All mild to moderate classrooms are mandated to provide students with disabilities equal educational opportunities but in most cases, classrooms continue to lack the necessary tools to accomplish this. As a result, most classrooms are not able to focus on academics due to the distraction of disruptive behaviors. While working in these classrooms, I got the opportunity to interview two teachers, who indicated that among all of the necessary factors, parental involvement was the most significant. Based on my previous experience working in special education classrooms, I proposed the implementation of behavioral reports as a way of communicating with parents and increasing parental collaboration. This approach helped create a connection between school and home behaviors, resulting in an intervention plan where parents and teacher work together to teach expected behaviors.

### **Context**

Research took place in two different schools located in Gilroy California. Gilroy is located in the southernmost region of Santa Clara County. This region is best known for its

garlic fields and agricultural areas, which provides many opportunities for the community. It is home to a population of 52,576 people, the school population is composed of 69% Hispanic and 18% White (Gilroy, CA.,n.d.). Both schools are part of the Gilroy Unified School District, and are within 6 minutes from each other. Both schools serve students with special needs mainly in a mild to moderate setting. The first school, Maple Elementary<sup>1</sup> School, is located next to agricultural fields. In the year 2017- 2018, the school population was 576 students, with 78 of those students being in special education classes. The school offers two special education classrooms, for grades k-2nd, and 3rd-4th. The second school has a population of 638 students, with 98 students in special education. The school has a total of three grade level classrooms that serve only students with mild disabilities. All classrooms have accommodations for these students, and have the support of paraprofessional educators (<https://www.ed-data.org>).

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

I invited two special education teachers to participate in my proposition. Both teachers are male, and with at least 3 years of teaching experiences. These groups of prospective participants were invited to participate because they work around students who display challenging behaviors.

**Mr. Gonzalez-** A Hispanic, male special education teacher. Gonzalez was contracted three years ago under a emergency credential. He was previously a paraprofessional educator in a high school setting. Before working for the school district he was in the army, where he obtained his B.A. in Business Administration. This year will officially be three years working in special education, but he has considered letting go of his job, due to the lack of support from the school district.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the name of people, places, and organizations.

**Mr. Bennet-** A white male special education teacher. He has 12 years of experience working as a special education teacher. During his first year he worked as a special education teacher in Santa Clara County, and eventually got a job as a teacher in Gilroy Unified School District, where he has worked for the past 10 years. His ten years of experience have helped him to be successful at managing the behaviors of the class, but he continues to lack parent communication, due to his language barrier.

### **Researcher**

As a future educator and current aid in special education classrooms, I have learned that challenging behaviors have a considerable impact on student's academic and social development. I believe that it is necessary to address these factors that contribute to disruptive behaviors in the mild to moderate classrooms in order to offer students with disabilities a better learning environment. As mentioned in the literature review, the lack of support and collaboration has lead to an increase in the frequency of challenging behaviors in the classrooms. Therefore, I proposed to increase parental collaboration through the use of behaviors report cards. Since the implementation of behavior reports, ongoing communication with parents has increased, leading to parents being more aware of the classroom behaviors and strategies used to decrease unwanted behaviors in the classroom. Also, students have created a connection between school behaviors and home behaviors. Although my job demands that I provide students a safe and effective learning environment, my passion for working with student and their disabilities encourages me to do my best everyday. I hope that during my time working with them I can take into practice some of the skills I gain throughout my work experience and my education. Despite my experience working with these populations I still have personal bias, which can influence my research. My only contact with students with

disabilities is during my work time. I will never really understand what home life might be for them and their parents. I must take into consideration that students, no matter if they have a disability or not, continue to face life challenges that can emotionally impact and influence their behaviors.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. What do you see as the problem with challenging behavior in special education classrooms? or What are you concerned about when it comes to challenging behavior?
2. What is currently being done to improve the challenging behavior of students? - by whom? - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
3. What do you think should be done about challenging behavior in special ed. Classrooms?
4. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing the challenging behavior in the classrooms?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about challenging behavior and/or the improvement of this?

### **Procedure**

I invited to two teachers in special education to participate in this study. I had previously work alongside these two teachers and was familiar with their teaching approaches. Both teachers agreed to be interviewed face-to-face on regards of the issue of challenging behaviors in the classroom. Prior to the interviews, both teachers were emailed a set of questions to be able to organize their thoughts. After conducting both interviews, and analyzing the information, three actions emerged as ways to address the issues with challenging behaviors in the mild to moderate classrooms.

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting the interviews and analyzing the literature reviews, I found a connection between the factors mentioned in the interviews, and the factors stated in the research. When compared, three-action options emerge as a way to improve the challenging behaviors. In order to measure the effectiveness of these options, three criteria’s were used.

**Results**

For this Capstone Project, teachers in special education were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve challenging behaviors in the mild to moderate classrooms. This is important because challenging behaviors have shown to decrease student’s academic and IEP progress. If teachers in special education classes are able to find a solution that can decrease or eliminate challenging behaviors, they can offer students a greater possibility of being successful in school. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: cost; willingness; and probability of impact. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified

Table 1 *Evaluation of Action Options*

Action Option	Cost	Willingness	Probability of impact
Monthly interventions with Behavioral Specialists	Low	Moderate	High
Improve teacher and aids’ job status	High	Low	Moderate

Take home behavior report	Low	High	High
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The table above represents the three options that emerged after interviewing two special education teachers, namely: monthly intervention of a certified behavioral specialist on behavioral management; Improvement of work statuses; Increase of parental involvement in special education classrooms through behavioral reports.

All three options will be evaluated based on cost, willingness, and probability of impact.

The cost of any of the three options has to be realistic to the school’s budget. Second, willingness to participate and implement any of the three options can often be a complication for parents and school personnel who have a busy schedule. Lastly, the probability of a high or low impact can help to determine which action if applied can be more successful.

**Monthly intervention with behavioral specialist**

Good classroom management can help prevent challenging behaviors from the beginning. In the interviews conducted both teachers argued that teachers are often left with the responsibility of teaching kids on how to properly behave. Mr. Bennet, stated, “It must be left up to the teacher to offer the needed support, accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of each student” (personal communication, October 10, 2018). According to Mr. Bennet, teachers in all settings feel the moral responsibility of providing students with the best possible education, but are often unprepared to do so. On the second interview, Mr. Gonzales, proposed ”Teachers should be provided with a portion of the day to teach behaviors in class. The school district



should bring in behavior specialists that can give us advice on how to teach good behaviors,” (personal communication, October 20, 2018). He went on explaining his previous attempts to contact the school district to provide him with extra support on behavioral management. He mentioned that often times the district takes months or years to reach most teachers regarding this issue. But, when they do receive the help, usually from a behavioral specialist, the intervention plan is always effective. He continued to explain that all of his students in special education have an educational plan (IEP), but not necessarily a behavioral plan, which are given to students with severe disruptive behavior only. Since creating a behavioral plan for all students would not be realistic, teachers in special education would benefit if a behavioral specialist could observe the class and give advice on how to decrease challenging behaviors. This type of training approach of observing, analyzing and suggesting has shown to be more effective for teacher’s preparedness. A study done by the National Council on Teacher Quality (20014), argues that the use of videotapes of real classrooms taught by real teachers in teacher preparation classes is helpful at counseling teachers on how to manage challenging behaviors. Through this type of intervention teachers use their real life situations in the classroom to be observe, analyze and be guided on how to handle disruptive behavior.

The cost for having monthly interventions would be low, all school district have a certain number of behavioral specialists, who are in charge of different school sites within the district. In the contraire, willingness to participate might be moderate; since most school only have two to three behavioral specialist it can be difficult to make time for in class observations. But if require

they can be mandate by the school district to create a schedule to observe the classrooms. Finally the probability of impact would be high, with the support of a behavioral specialist, teachers can learned new approaches and gain the skills needed to implement SWPBS strategies.

### **Take Home behavioral report**

Parents play a big role in influencing and shaping the behavior of students. It is crucial that parents are active participants in students' education. During the interviews, parental involvement was the number one concern of both interviewees. Mr. Gonzales stated, "The obstacles to challenging behavior is some students' living situation. They tend to regress the moment they get home. Often times students may not have the correct support system at home and will regress if behaviors are not corrected at home" (personal communication, October 20, 2018). He also mentioned that because more than half of his students dependent on the school bus as a means of transportation, IEP meetings were the only times he was able to communicate with parents. Mr. Bennet, said, "In my experience, one of the major obstacles are the parents and home life. Often parents unknowingly reinforce the bad behaviors by giving in or coddling students in their behaviors. I have also had language barriers get in the way of having open communication with parents" (personal communication, October 10, 2018). He explained that most of his students' parents were only Spanish speaking and this created a lack of communication between him and parents. Increasing parental involvement in the classroom can be difficult and most times impossible. The benefits of parental involvement has shown to have positive outcomes, which includes, maintenance of treatment gains, continuity of intervention

programs, higher level of parent satisfaction, and more effective strategies for resolving problems (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). If teachers want students behaviors to improve they must find new ways to overcome the language barriers and the lack of in-person communication. After analyzing potential solution both teachers felt the written communication might be the best way to get some type of parental involvement. Behavioral reports have become very popular use in behavioral intervention plans. Therefore, filling up behavioral reports each week for students can help close the communication gap. Behavioral report cards can help point out to the students behaviors that they need to learn; provide a schedule of teacher attention/feedback for positive behaviors; motivate students through reinforcing positive behavior; and providing consequences for negative behaviors they want to decrease. Furthermore, behavioral report cards can be translated into the student's native language and include a comment section where parents can write their suggestions and concerns.

Implementation of behavioral reports would have a low impact in cost, teachers can easily print the behavioral reports templates, which already exist, send them out every week. behavior reports would have a high impact on willingness, the behavioral reports are one page long and are short day to day documentation of students behavior, it will not require too much time. Probability of impact will be high, since the behavior reports will be send on Fridays, parents will have two days to look over the paper and write down any concerns and suggestions they might have. Also giving the option of writing on their native language will increase the probability of participation.

**Improvement teacher and aids job statuses**

In recent years, a shortage in special education teachers and teacher aides has had negative impacts on the education of students with disabilities. Mr. Gonzales, explained that although he is half ways done obtaining his credential as a special education teacher, he has considered the idea of quitting after two years. He said that, “ The school district here does not give us the support we need. Although I am always on time with my paperwork when it comes to IEPs, I stress out when I have some of my paras call out “(personal communication, October 20, 2018). He explained that because the school district struggles to hire new staff, his class, which is made up of 12 students, only has one paraprofessional educator as support. In recent years the shortage of special education and paraprofessional educators in schools has been link to poor work statuses, that is often characterized as high attrition, low pay, and a sense of low status (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). An improvement in teachers’ and staffs’ work statuses could encourage more students to pursue teaching careers. Higher wages could create a competitive workforce and at the same time demand more highly qualified teachers.

Improvement in work statuses would have higher impact on cost. Currently, Teachers’ salaries in California average from \$51,292 to \$74,268 annually and teachers aides salaries is \$24,413 annually (<https://www1.salary.com/CA/Public-School-Teacher-salary.html> ). If schools increase the number of staff, they would be required to spend more money on their personnel. Willingness to implement this idea would be low; school budget resources come from local, state, and federal contributions. Who are in charge of approving school spending and justifying how

money is being spend. They would have to agree and approve the need for a pay increase or the need to hire more staff. The probability of impact would be moderate, hiring new staff and increasing paying wages does not guarantee that future staff will be properly prepared to handle challenging behaviors. However, this could raise the hiring standards in a district. Since the district is willing to pay higher wages, they could demand higher quality workers.

### **Conclusion**

After considering the above recommendations, I strongly believe that behavioral reports would be the best way to improve challenging behaviors in mild to moderate classrooms. This type of intervention helps to increase parental communication and parental collaboration. As mentioned in the literature review, parental involvement in special education can have a lot of benefits for students and parents. While it is true that monthly use of behavior reports can be effective, improving work quality, and implementing monthly intervention with a behavioral specialist are also important aspects of improving how teachers respond to challenging behaviors. Improvement of work statues can have a positive impact on the current issue on teacher shortages and lack of aides. With the adequate number of staff per class, teachers will have the needed support to enforce strategies used to prevent challenging behaviors. At the same time, implementing a monthly intervention with a behavioral specialist can help teachers learn strategies to improve their current situation. Despite the benefits of my recommendation, behavior reports can have some limitations. Some parents might not necessary know how to read and write at all, which can contradict the recommended option. Also, guaranteeing that all behavioral reports will return sign

or with any comments might not be accurate. Although in younger grades parents are more likely to be involved in their child schoolwork. Some parents might not bother to look through their children's backpack, leading to the report not being read, and resulting in inconsistent communication. Furthermore, the recommended action can also have some negative outcomes. Communication about student's behavior is important, but some parents might not feel comfortable on sharing their home routine or their disciplinary methods. As a result, some parents might see this type of communication negatively and feel less willing to communicate. Also, some parents might be in denial of their children's behavior and feel outraged by this intervention. However, these negative outcomes are not necessarily applicable to the majority of parents and might not be present in most cases. But it is important to be aware of them to prevent further confusion. Despite the limitations and negative outcomes, I believe this is the best option to improve the challenging behaviors in mild to moderate classrooms. No one knows a child more than a parent that is why it is necessary that teachers are able to communicate the behavioral problem with parents. Through the use of these reports, schools can facilitate communication barriers by providing parents with weekly reports and open communication to exchange information, suggestion, and concerns. This will help parents and teachers be on the same page when it come to student's progress and at the same time eliminate language barriers.

### **Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection**

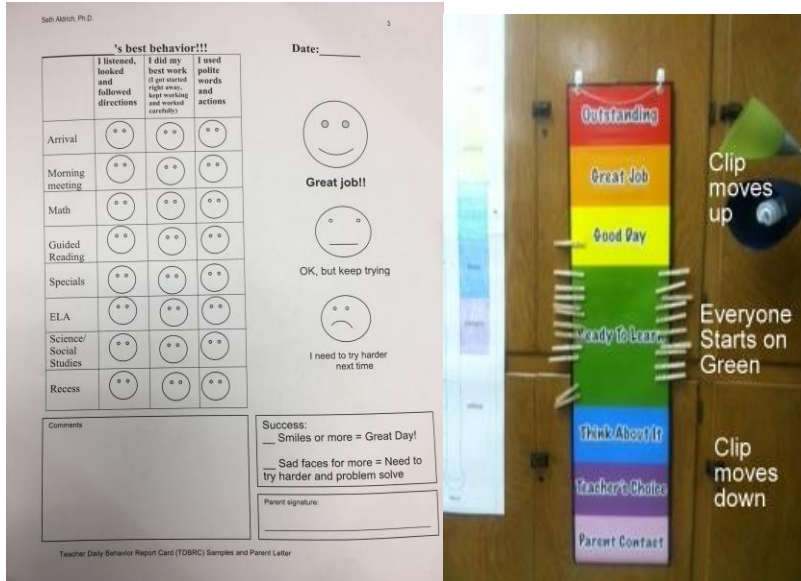
Unlike general education classroom, challenging behaviors in special education has shown to have a greater impact in the learning environment of students. Despite the implementation of positive behavioral plans, schools continue to be unsuccessful at addressing

this issue. This is due to lack on personnel support, training, and parental collaboration. Without these factors schools are left with no help to implement the strategies that are already exist. In order to improve challenging behaviors in special education it is crucial that schools focus on addressing these issues. In an attempt to find a solution, I collected testimonies of special education teacher, who helped me to better understand the issue and come up with a way to potentially improve challenging behaviors in the classroom. Through my research three option actions emerge, the first option suggested is a monthly intervention with a behavioral specialist that can offer teacher strategies to handle challenging behaviors. The second, action option suggested is an improvement in teacher work statues in order to address teacher shortages and lack of personnel support. Lastly, the third action option suggested the implementation of behavioral report cards as a way to increase parental collaboration. Due to the complexity of some of the action options, I had to narrow down my action options and focus on a local level rather than statewide. The implementation of behavioral report cards seems more promising when implemented. Through the use of behavioral report cards students were given behavioral goals, which were recorder in a daily basis. The reports were then send home as a way of communicating and collaborating with parents. By implementing this, students were able to create a connection between home behaviors and school behaviors, resulting in decrease of challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Prior to implementing this action option, parents were informed during their IEP meeting about the process of behavioral report cards. Although most parents reported that it was difficult to implement any type of behavioral structures at home, they were encouraged to collaborate by implementing the reward system at home in hope of creating a connection between expected behaviors at school and home. The behavioral reports consisted of a one page record system,

where the teachers recorded the behaviors of the students throughout the day. Usually most behavioral reports contain simple images, daily schedules, and three categories of expected behaviors. The simplicity of the report cards works great with parents, all parents are able to read the report just by looking at the images, but in cases of language barriers report cards could be translated in Spanish or other language. As a way to keep consistency with the report cards, the classroom behavior were monitored and recorded with the use of class behavior chart, which includes all of the student's names. Depending on their behaviors throughout the day students name might move up or down. This helps summarize the student's behaviors and make the approach fast and easy to be recorder. At the end of the day students are given points and comments depending on their behavior, report cards are sent home and sign by parents. As a way to rewards students at school, the teacher created a reward system, where students can earn free time, a classroom party, or a specific toy or game. The goal of the behavioral report cards is to slowly transition students to learn the expected classroom behaviors. Eventually the report cards will be eliminated and the class would learn the expected behaviors at school and possible at home. Typically this type of action option works best in younger grades, which are the best stage to address challenging behaviors.





*Behavioral report card:*  
Example of the behavioral report cards implemented in the classroom

*Class Behavioral Chart:*  
Chart use to monitor the students behavior throughout the day

**Critical Reflection**

While, working on this project I learned that big problems come with small solutions, it just takes one of us to take the first step and take action. From the beginning of my research I struggled to narrow down the solution to a local level, it seemed as if all the problems were rooted in along historical timeline that was impossible to be reverse. However, when I finally was able to find a solution, I was surprised to know how simple it can be to a make a difference. While I worried about statewide issues, the solution was right in front of me. I recalled my previous work experiences, working in a special education classroom, where the teacher used very simple behavioral reports as a mean of communication with parents. When I suggested action option, both teacher were interested and agreed to implement this option. Although the results are still in progress, I was surprised to see the enthusiasm and collaboration of the teacher and parents in the first weeks. Furthermore, this project has given me a better understanding on

the obstacles I will be facing as a special education teacher and how I can advocate or create a change in the classroom.

While considering my Major Learning Outcome (MLO) 1: Developing Educator, I believe through out my course at CSUMB I have gained the required knowledge, skills and responsibilities of a California public education. Throughout my learning serves classroom I was able to have hands on experience working with students by implement lesson plans and learning important roles through projects based learning. Also, MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, has influenced my career choice and it has been extensively emphasize through the class of LS 394S Multicultural Literature Child & Young Adult and LS 380 Teaching for Social Change, where have been exposed to multicultural literature, international education, and diverse education approaches. Thanks to this exposure, I learned that multicultural education is not just a teaching approach but also a social justice issue that has to be implemented in all classrooms. I also feel better prepare to teach students who come from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, MLO 3: Innovative Technology Practitioner has influenced my professional development by increasing my knowledge in regards of technology use. Throughout my courses I have learned how to use basic and complex computer programs. Thanks to this I feel better prepare to implement technology in the classroom. Lastly, MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator has had the greater influenced in my professional development. Throughout my course I have learned the significance of social justice in education through my leaning services and literature reviews. As a future educator I believe that the responsibility of advocating for a better education system falls in the hands of us. I hope that through my education and life experiences I can serve as social justice collaborator and create a change in the education of children.

As I come closer to graduation, I am determined to become the professional that I envision being. I plan to continue each step of the way with the same passion and determination that have influenced my career choice. Although, I am aware of the obstacles I will face as a teacher, I will continue to work alongside professionals in the special education field, with hope of gaining skills and experience needed to be successful in this career path. After completing this project I have learned that it is important to advocate for the education of student, especially those in special education, who are in greater need of services. What we do today will impact their lives forever. For this reason, I hope I can make a difference in their educational experiences and grow as person myself.

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