IMPROVING STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

THROUGH THE USE OF INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR CONTRACTS

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Research Project

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of prior research, articles and studies revealed that concerns exist regarding student behavior in the classroom, at both the national and local levels. The learning environment is severely impacted by off task behavior, as well as, lack of responsibility for daily routines and homework.

Multiple reasons have been suggested as to why this is such a problem in the educational field. Probable causes for the problem include, but are not limited to, home life, environment, socioeconomic status, and other risk factors.

A review of solution strategies suggested that positive reinforcement is an important or central element to developing student responsibility. The approach used in this study to improve student responsibility and behavior consisted of a positive reward system, and individual conferences.

This study describes a seventeen week program developed with the intent of improving student responsibility and behavior through a positive reward system. The participants included 89 third grade students, in four regular education classrooms, their parents, and prior second grade teachers. Surveys and checklists were used to collect data.

Post intervention data indicated a significant improvement in student responsibility and behavior. In addition, the researchers found a notable increase in available learning time, and the educational environment was enhanced.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The four groups involved in this project attend the same elementary school. All sites are regular third grade classrooms. Each classroom from this point on, will be referred to as, Site A, Site B, Site C, and Site D. The students of the targeted third grade classes exhibited irresponsible behavior that interfered with the learning environment. Evidence for the existence of the problem included teacher surveys, parent surveys, student surveys, and checklists that documented the following behaviors: not following the daily routine, not turning in homework on time, and being off-task.

Immediate Problem Context

The low-income rate at these sites is 14.8% with a state average of 40.0%. Students are categorized as low income when coming from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, supported in foster homes with public funds, or if they are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The attendance rate at this school is 95.1% with a chronic truancy rate of 0.1%. Chronic truancy is defined as absences from school without valid cause for 18 or more of the last 180 school days. There is a low mobility rate of 8.3% compared to the state average of 16.1%. The mobility rate is based on the number of times students enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Three percent of students come from a limited English proficient background and are eligible for transitional bilingual programs. This information was provided through the 2005 Illinois School Report Card, (refer to Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

School/State Student Profiles

	% of Low-Income Rate	% of Limited-English-Proficient Rate	% of Chronic Truancy Rate	% of Mobility Rate	% of Attendance Rate
School	14.8	3.0	0.1	8.3	95.1
State	40.0	6.6	2.2	16.1	93.9

This site is an elementary school consisting of first, second, and third grade students. The total enrollment is 2,325 children. Refer to Table 1.2 for the racial/ethnic background of the students attending this school.

Table 1.2

Student Racial/Ethnic Background

% of White	% of Black	% of Hispanic	% of Asian/Pacific Islander	% of Native American
66.1	6.6	16.1	11.1	0.2

In the district, the average class size is 21.8 students with a pupil to teacher ratio of 17.2. The targeted third grade teachers are responsible for teaching language arts, math, writing, social studies, science, and health. The students receive physical education instruction three times a week for 30 minutes each, music instruction two times a week for 30 minutes each, art instruction once a week for 45 minutes, and library once a week, averaging 20 minutes a week. The students also receive computer instruction once a week for 40 minutes. Parental contact at this site is 99.0%. This includes parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence.

The school was reconfigured three years ago to form the current school demographics. This elementary school is really two schools under one roof. Each has its own administration and playground, as well as a centrally located main office, library, and gymnasiums. The two schools share some services and the cafeteria. All test reports and data submitted to the state reflect information obtained from both schools, but are reported as one entity. The school continues to perform well above state standards in the areas of math and reading. The 2005 ISAT results indicate that in math, 94% of our students were in the "meets/exceeds" category (statewide: 75%), and in reading, 83% were in the "meets/exceeds" category (statewide: 62%). Students' success in these areas can be directly attributed to the combined efforts of the math and language arts specialists, and the classroom teachers.

Due to the size of the district and the rapid growth the community has experienced in the last 10 years, the school is divided into houses to provide continuity and familiarity for the students. Approximately 100 students per grade level are placed into a house which is designated by a color (purple, blue, gold or red). The students remain in their house throughout their educational career in the district. Splitting of the school building into the different houses helps to make this school seem smaller, and function more as a community.

The administrative staff consists of 2 principals, 4 assistant principals, 2 secretaries, and 6 office clerks per school. The school consists of 32 first grade classrooms, 32 second grade classrooms, 32 third grade classrooms, four instructional self-contained classroom teachers, and 4 bilingual classrooms. Additional school support include 8 physical education teachers, 6 music teachers, 2 computer teachers, 4 art teachers, 7 1/2 learning resource teachers, 7 English as a second language teachers, 2 librarians with 4 aides, 8 speech pathologists, 2 psychologist, and 4 social workers. The core curricular specialists include 6 math specialists, 6 reading specialists, 4 Bridges facilitators (who service slow learners during scheduled times throughout the day), and 2 computer technology advisors. Gifted programs are offered in the following subject areas: math, language arts and visual arts, with each program having 2 teachers. The school also staffs

20 teacher's aides, 2 lunchroom supervisors, 4 health clerks, 1 facility manager, and 8 custodial/maintenance workers. Information provided by the School Improvement Plan 2005-2008.

Students in third grade are given a state assessment each spring to measure individual student's attainment of the state learning standards. According to the 2005 state report card, 76.3% of the students met or exceeded state standards in reading, and 89.3% of third grade students met or exceeded state standards in mathematics. In addition, this is the school's second year of MAP testing given to second and third graders. The "Measures of Academic Progress," (MAP) test is administered in both fall and spring semesters to chart student growth. Achievement data from these tests are used by teachers to improve classroom instruction. MAP testing also drives the curriculum which is directly linked to the Illinois Learning Standards.

A variety of extracurricular activities are available to the students. Academic and athletic classes are offered as after school programs. The physical education teachers also provide different intramural activities throughout the year. In addition, the school has a before and after school care program.

The district serves students within 33 square mile area that was formed in 1948 through the consolidation of 7 country school districts. The consolidation encompassed several neighboring villages.

The district began with an enrollment of 2,669 students in the 1970-1971 school year and then gradually declined to 1,899 students in the 1984-1985 school year. A dramatic increase in population has occurred since 1985 and extensive residential and commercial building has developed from the growth in population. Enrollment in the district is currently over 7,000 students. Information provided by the District website.

The students in the district are housed in four buildings located on four campuses. The four campuses consist of a primary building (kindergarten), an elementary building, grades (1-3), an intermediate building, grades (4-5), and a middle school building, grades (6-8). The schools

are relatively close in proximity to one another. The elementary and intermediate buildings are split into an East and West campus. These campuses are mirror images of each other. Since the district is consolidated the buildings are located within the community, not the neighborhood. The population of the district is composed of the following: 67.2% White, 7.1% Black, 15.1% Hispanic, 10.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American.

The district employs 454 staff. The percentage of male employees in the district is 12.0%, and 88.0% of the district's employees are female. The average teaching experience within the district is 8.5% years, with a state average of 13.6% years. The percentage of teachers with a bachelor's degree is 55.7%, with a state average of 50.1%. The percentage of teachers who hold a master's degree or above is 44.3%, with a state average of 49.1%, (refer to table 1.4). The staff population consists of 94.9% White, .9% Black, 2.4% Hispanic, and 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.0% Native American, (refer to Table 1.3). The teacher's average salary in the district is $45,857 while the state's average salary is $55,558. Information provided by the Illinois 2005 state report card.

Table 1.3

Teacher Information

% of White	% of Black	% of Hispanic	% of Asian/Pacific Islander	% of Native American	% of Male	% of Female	Total Number
94.9	0.9	2.4	1.8	0.0	12.0	88.0	454

Table 1.4

Teacher Information (continued)

	Average Teaching Experience (Years)	% of Teachers with Bachelor's Degree	% of Teachers with Master's & Above
District	8.5	55.7	44.3
State	13.6	50.1	49.1

The district has one Superintendent of Schools, one Associate Superintendent, one Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability, and one Assistant Superintendent for Support Services. The district has additional administrative personnel, such as, Director of Operations and Facilities, Human Resources, Director of Continuous Improvement and Accountability, Director of Special Education, Director of Technology, and Public Information Specialist.   The average administrative salary in the district is $112,733. The state's average administrative salary is $97,051.

Surrounding Community

The district's community is located in a Northern suburb of Chicago. A community college is located within the community to provide the academic, career, social, economic, and cultural needs of the county. The community is also home to an outlet mall, an amusement park, restaurants, and a theatre. The district consists of 33 square miles.

The community is very supportive and a vital component of the district. In November of 1995, voters passed a referendum to build and new middle school. The referendum was passed to correspond with the rapid growth of the population within the surrounding area.

In October of 2003, the district went on strike for 13 school days for multiple reasons. The strike caused extensive turmoil and hardship for students, educators and parents.   It proved to be a troubling time for the community. Parents and businesses banded together and

volunteered food, and most of all, support for the employees of the district. Many parents were supportive throughout the 13 day strike, and some even joined forces with the teachers on the picket lines. Finally, after extensive negotiations, the strike was settled and a two year agreement was reached. The agreement consisted of a 9% increase in salaries the first year and a 7% increase the second year. In the end, the strike had both positive and negative consequences. The positive impact was that the various stakeholders banded together. The negative impact was that the students missed school days and part of their educational experiences. This information was provided by the District website.

Due to the fact that this district supports many communities, the following information was provided by the Lake County 2000 US Census found on the Lake County Illinois website. The median household income in Lake County is $66,973. The community is composed of mostly middle to upper class families. The population of Lake County is 644,356. This population is made up of 80.1% Caucasian, 6.9% Black, 14.4% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian, and 9.0% other, (refer to Table 1.5).

Table 1.5

Lake County Racial/Ethnic Background

% of Caucasian	% of Black	% of Hispanic	% of Asian	% of Other
80.1	6.9	14.4	3.9	9.0

National Context of the Problem

Teachers make 3,000 decisions each day (Danielson, 1996). Among these, classroom management is one of the biggest and most important. This battle for discipline in the classroom is not only pivotal for survival of both teacher and students, but it sets an everlasting tone for learning, good character, responsibility and reality. Author Emma Little states in an article from Educational Psychology, dated August 2005, "In the primary school setting, the behaviours [sic] that cause the most concern to teachers are frequently occurring but relatively minor behaviours [sic] such as calling out and interrupting the learning of others." (p. 369).

Children today are growing up in a time of conflict, both domestic and international. It has become the role of the school to arm students with the tools to make good choices. Teachers find themselves in the position of infusing these skills into academic areas. "Polls of teachers and parents typically rank unruly students first among school problems." (Christian Science Monitor, 1995, p.20). "It's hard to learn when someone east [in the classroom], is creating a ruckus, and monopolizing much of the teacher's time. Yet thousands of American school children have to put up with such circumstances" (Christian Science Monitor, 1995, p.20). This issue also affects communities across the country. In the article, A Framework of Principles and Best Practice for Managing Student Behavior in the Australian Education Context, author Terry De Jong says, "Public opinion over the past thirty years consistently rates lack of discipline in public schools in the USA to be the biggest problem communities have to contend with." (School Psychology International, August 2005, p. 353)

In a recent article in the "Irish Times," (March, 2005), a relationship is made between poor behavior in the classroom, and the breakdown in civility as a whole in society. "One thing is certain; if Irish teachers lose the fight for control in the classroom, Irish society will ultimately

lose the battle for control on the streets." (McGuinness, 2005, p.14) It is evident that this issue for educators is a worldwide condition.

How do we make students accountable for their actions in a positive way? How do we teach and support students in making "good choices"? This is not an easy task when one considers the obstacles of students' pre-existing behaviors.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The evidence to document the lack of responsibility was complied by teacher surveys, parent surveys, student surveys and checklists.

Due to the concern that students were not staying on task, not turning in assignments on time, and not following daily routines, the teacher researchers decided to explore these problems further. Sixteen second grade teachers were surveyed to gather information on this topic (Appendix A). The surveys included information for each child that was entering one of the four, regular, self-contained classrooms to be researched. Each survey consisted of three questions that identified each individual student's ability to, stay on task, turn in assignments on time, and follow daily routines. Results are illustrated in Figure 1.
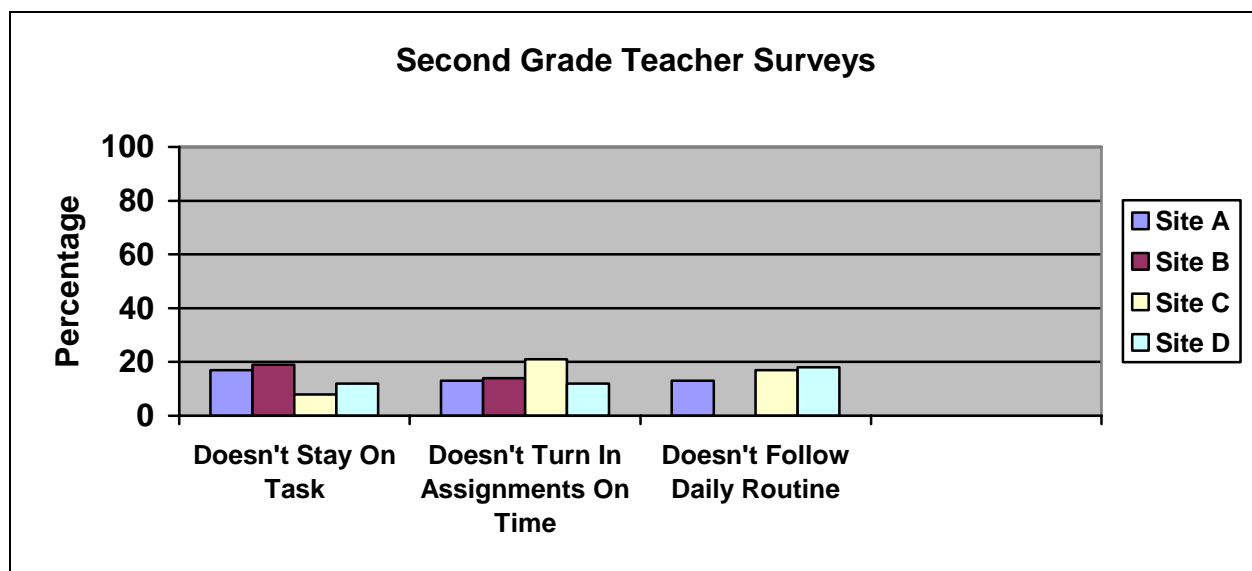

Figure 1. Second grade teacher survey.

The researchers felt it would be beneficial to administer a parent survey to determine the thoughts of the parents in regard to their child's personal responsibility (Appendix B). There were a total of 85 surveys returned, 23 from Site A, 23 from Site B, 23 from Site C, and 16 from Site D. The survey consisted of 6 questions. These questions provided documentation that parents also felt there was a lack of student responsibility. Parents were asked to reflect on the statement, "My child shows accountability for his/her actions." Results are illustrated in Figure 2.
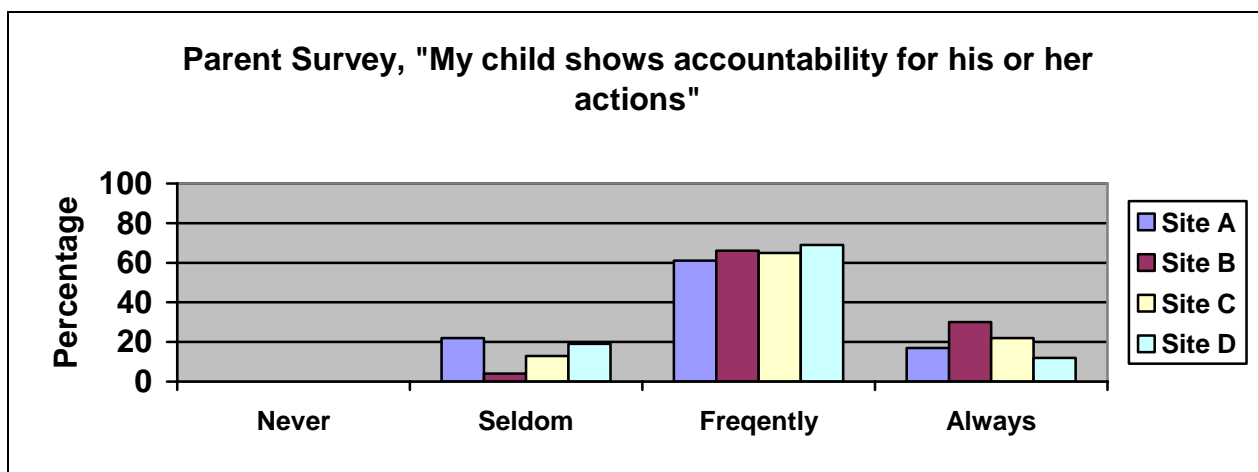

Figure 2. Percentage of students whose parents reported that, their child shows accountability for his or her actions.

A statement presented in the parent survey was, "My child completes routine tasks independently and consistently without repeated reminders." The results are shown in Figure 3.
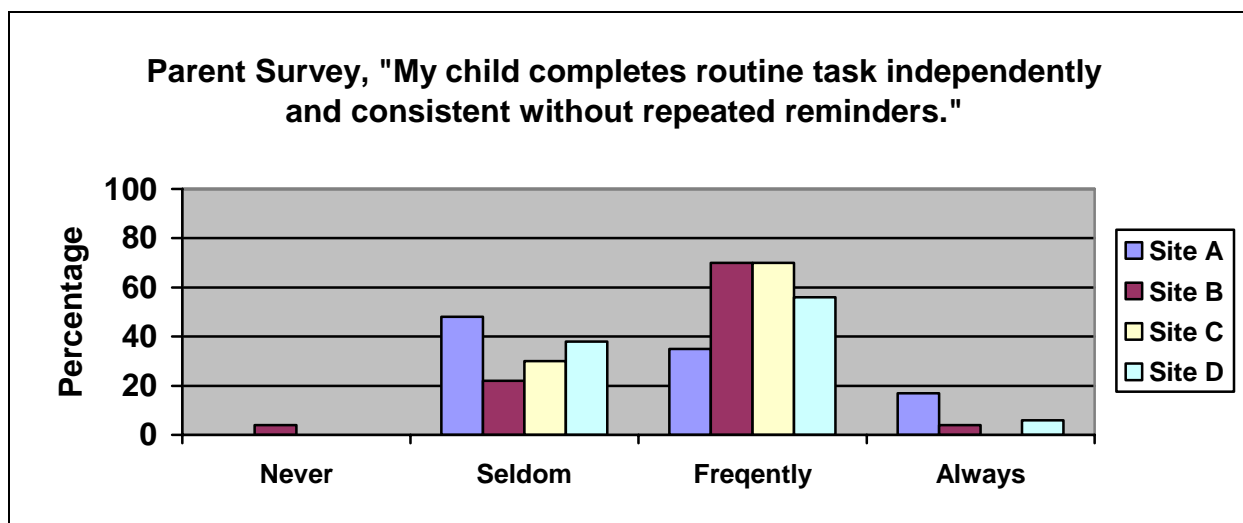

Figure 3. Percentage of students, whose parents reported that, their child completes routine tasks independently and consistently without repeated reminders.

A statement presented in the parent survey was, "My child listens attentively to others."

The results are shown in Figure 4.
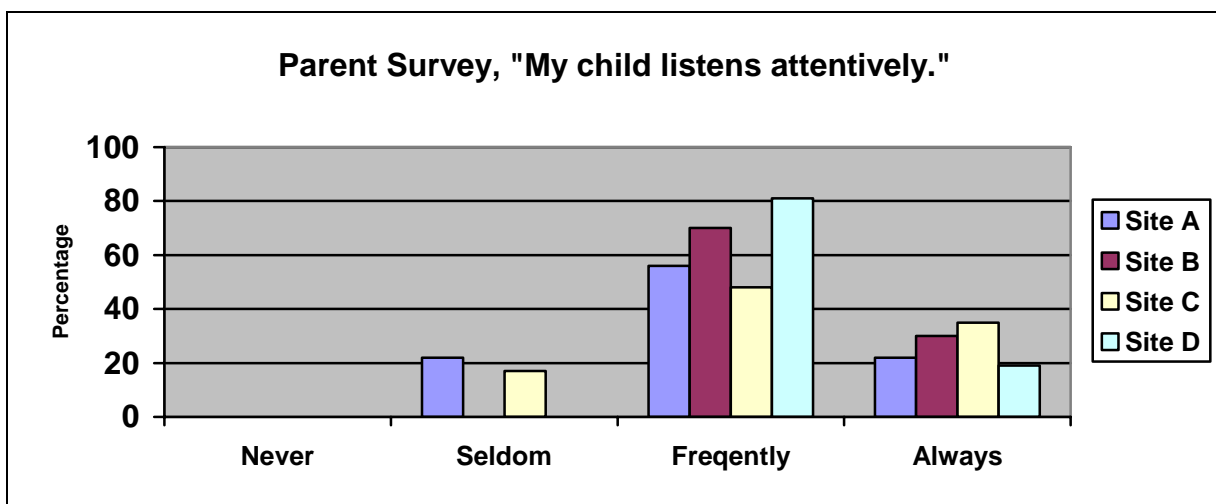
Figure 4. Percentage of students, whose parents reported that, their child listens attentively.

A statement presented in the parent survey was "My child turns in homework on time."

The results are shown in Figure 5.

Parent Survey, "My child turns in homework on time."
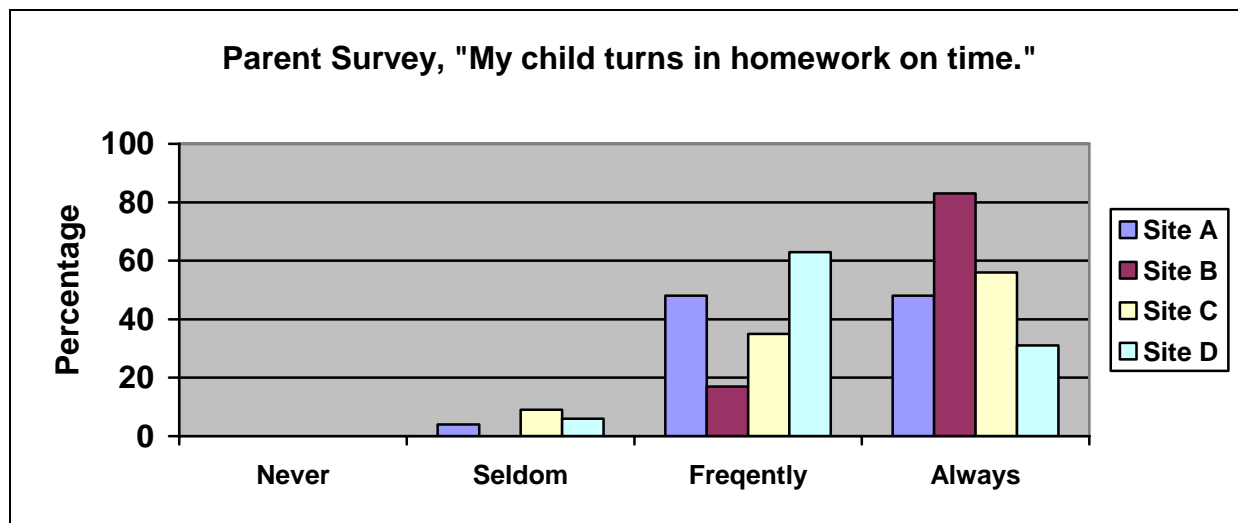
Figure 5. Percentage of students, whose parents reported that their child turned in homework
time.

A statement presented in the parent survey was "Improving student responsibility

increases student performance." The results are shown in Figure 6.

**Parent Survey, "Improving student responsibility increases
student performance."**

Figure 6. Percentage of students, whose parents reported that improving student responsibility
increases student performance.

To understand the parents' philosophy of where responsibility should be taught, the parents responded to the statement, "There is a need for teaching responsibility at . . ." The researchers provided three possible responses: home, school, both. The parents chose the option that best reflected their opinion. As shown in Figure 7, "Both" was the most popular response.
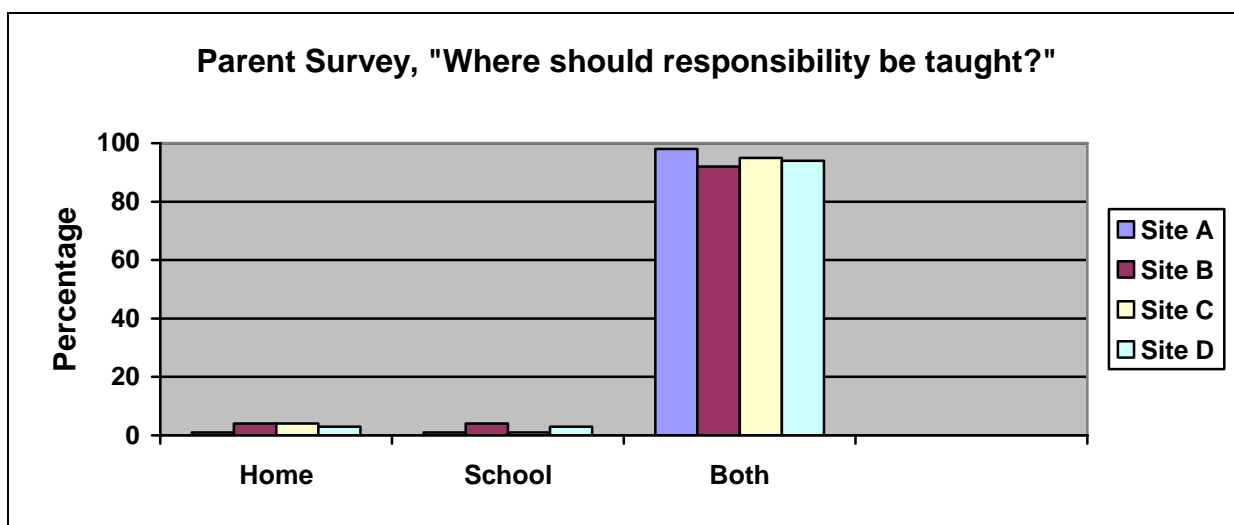
Figure 7. Parent response to where responsibility should be taught.

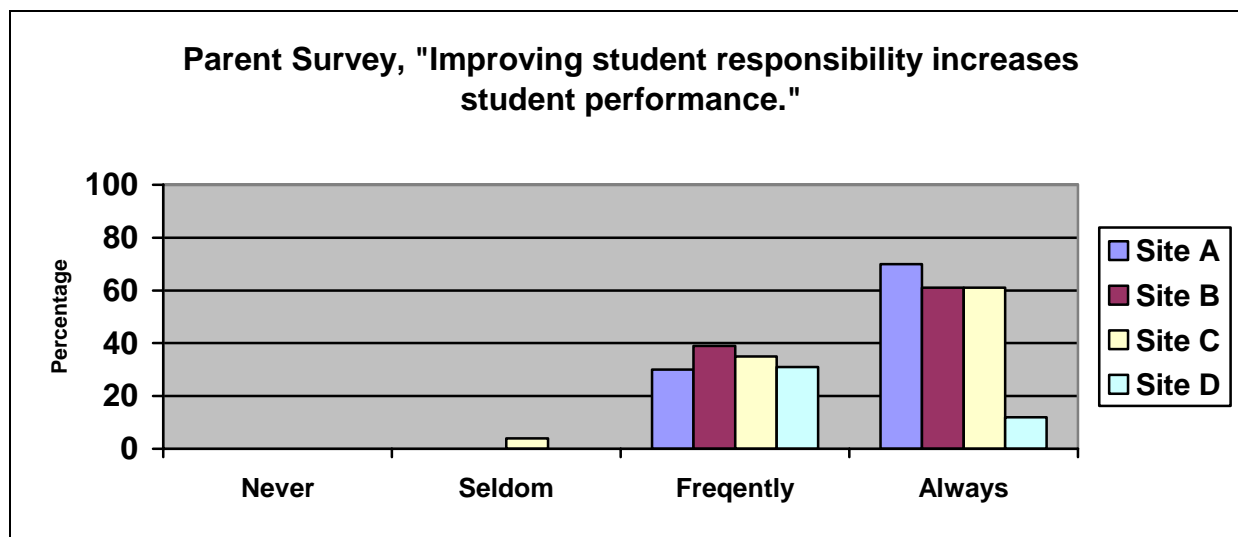The researchers administered a student survey to the students of Site A, Site B, Site C and Site D (Appendix C). The purpose of the student survey was to provide the researchers with insight into the students' perception of personal responsibility. There were a total of 88 students surveyed, 24 from Site A, 24 from Site B, 23 from Site C, and 17 from Site D. The survey consisted of 6 questions. The questions provided evidence that students needed to increase their level of responsibility. Students responded to the statement, "I'm responsible for my actions." Results are illustrated in Figure 8.

Student Survey, "I take responsibility for my actions."
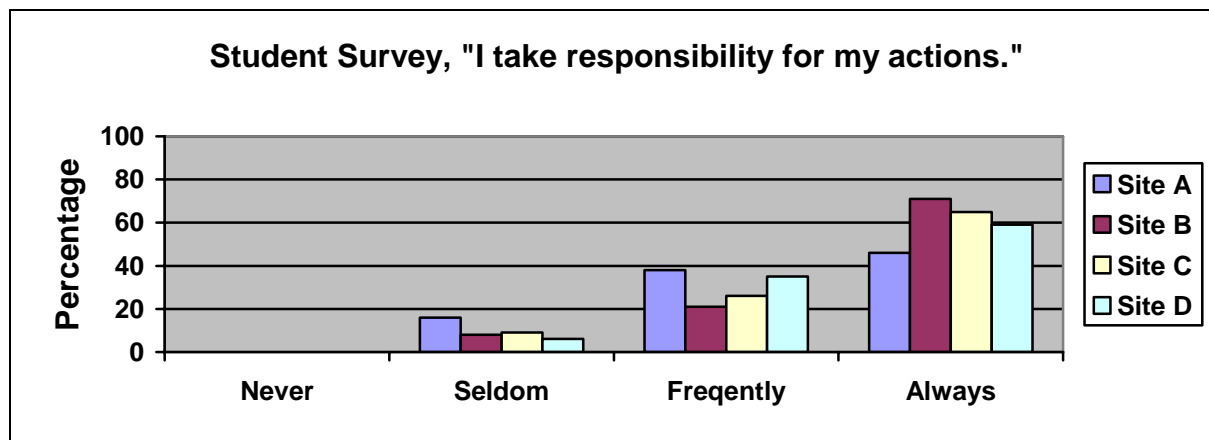
Figure 8. Percentage of students who reported taking responsibility for their actions.

A statement on the student survey was, "I follow directions."   Results are illustrated in

Figure 9.

Student Survey, "I follow directions."
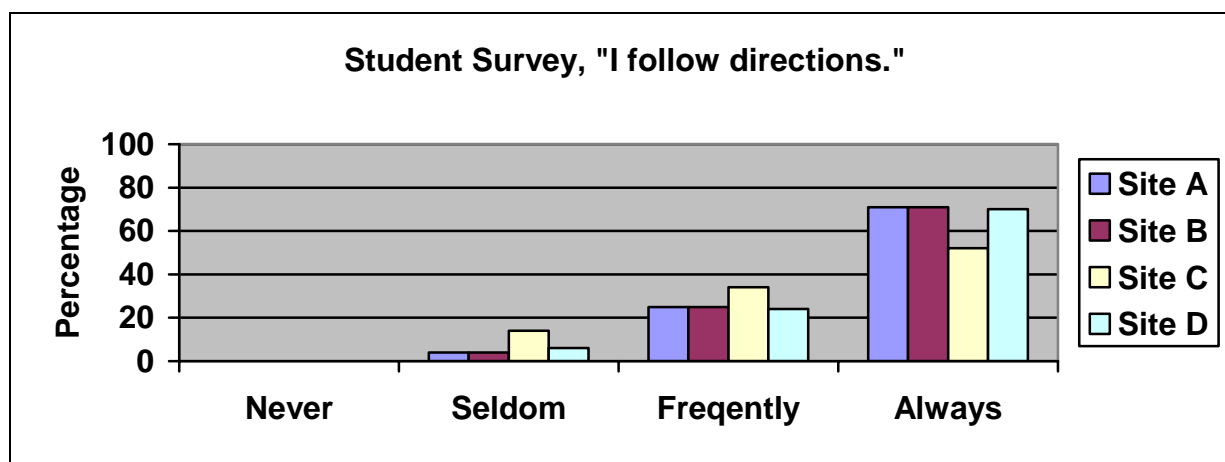
Figure 9. Percentage of students who reported following directions.

A statement that the students reported on was, "I listen well to others." The results are illustrated in Figure 10.

Student Survey, "I listen well to others."
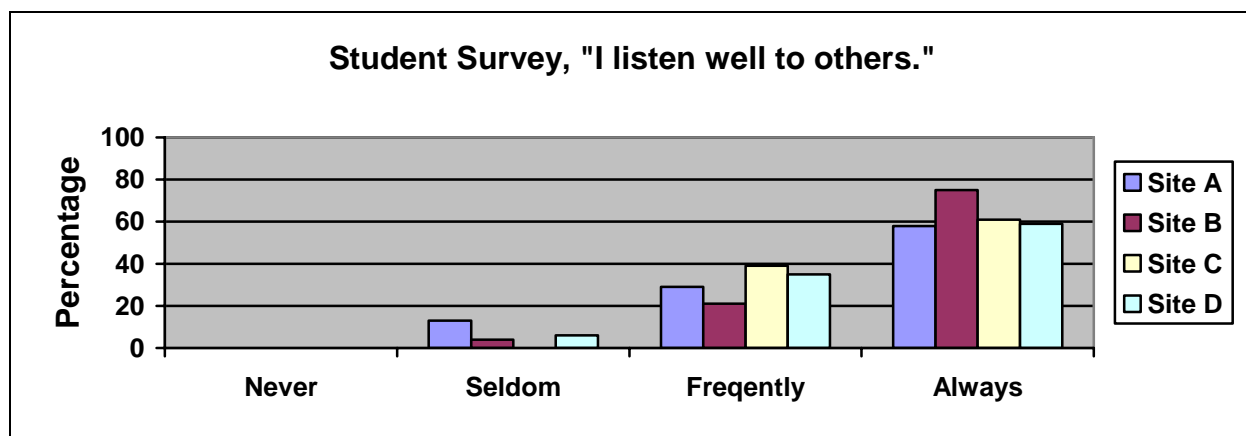
Figure 10. The percentage of students who reported listening well to others.

A statement that the students reported on was, "I turn in my assignments on time." The results are illustrated in Figure 11.

Student Survey, "I turn in assignments on time."
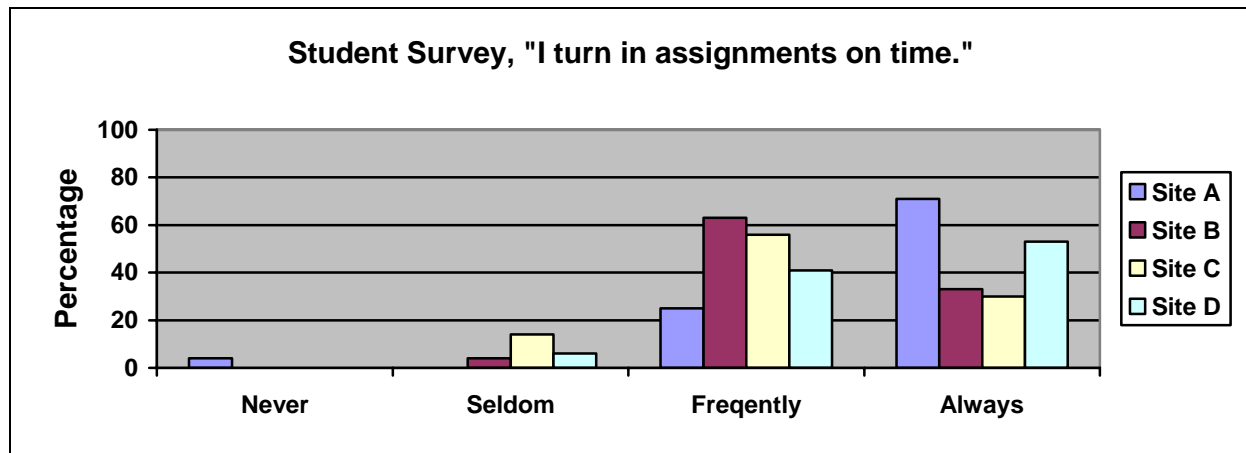
Figure 11. The percentage of students who reported turning in assignments on time.

A statement that the students reported on was, "I follow the daily routine in the classroom." The results are illustrated in figure 12.

Student Survey, "I follow daily routines in the classroom"

Figure 12. Percentage of students who reported following the daily routine in the classroom.

The last statement that the students responded to was, "I talk when I'm not supposed to." The results are illustrated in Figure 13.

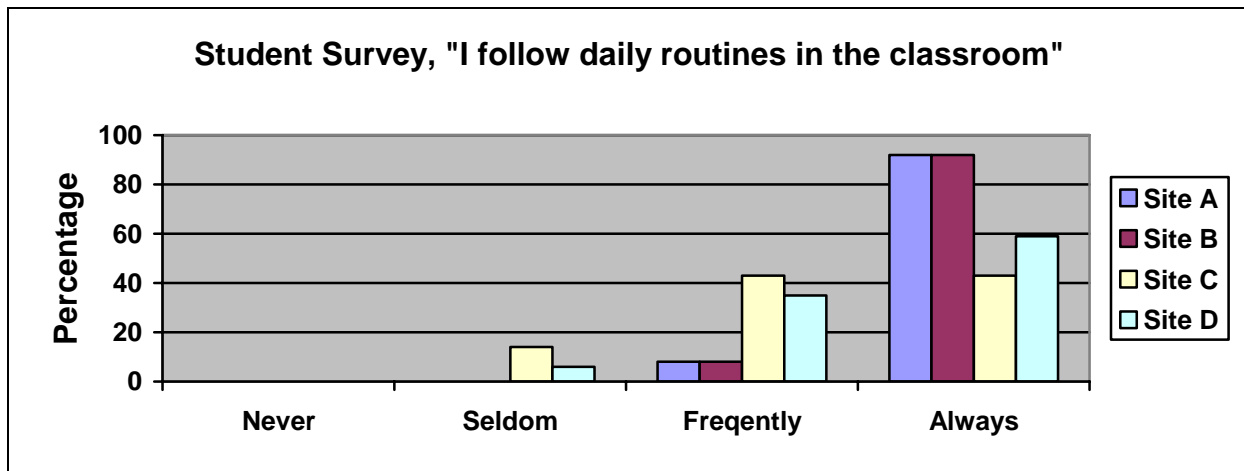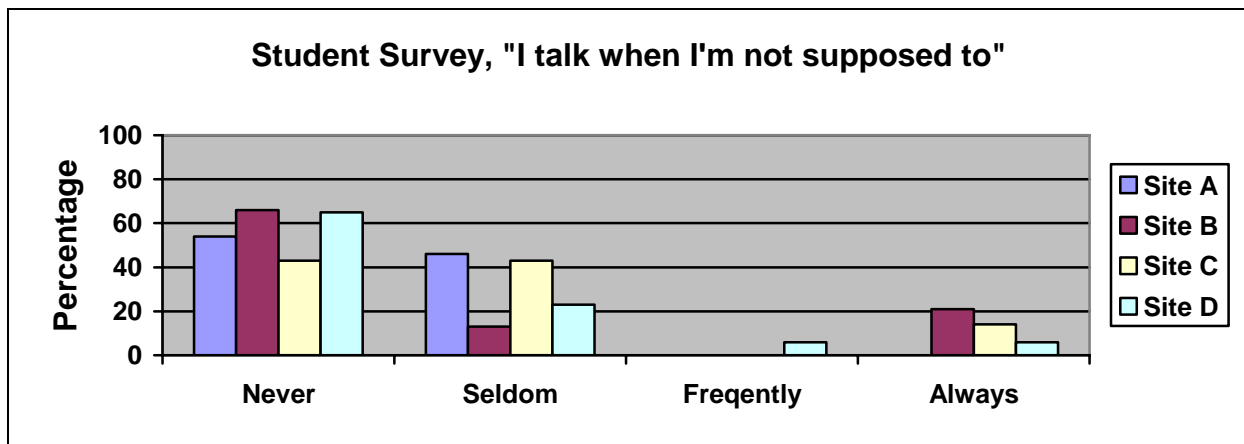**Student Survey, "I talk when I'm not supposed to"**

Figure 13. Percentage of students who reported talking when they are not supposed to.

Probable Causes

Schools do not exist as isolated institutions untouched by the social events surrounding them. Schools are both a mirror image of what transpires in their communities, and a force that attempts to convey and shape the values, beliefs, and attitudes of students. Being both a mirror image and a dynamic force, makes it essential that we understand how factors that occur both within and outside the boundaries of schools interact to create discipline problems. Once the context is understood, teachers can learn how to act upon those factors that are within their control, and how to live with those that are not (Curwin & Mendler, 1999).

Annual polls by teachers, consistently rate the lack of discipline at the top of the list of problems. Fred Jones researched this problem and found that "about 99% of the typically encountered discipline problems are made up of such behaviors as pupils talking without permission, daydreaming, wandering around the room, or otherwise not doing what they have been asked to do" (Allen, 1996, p. 2).

In addition to these school discipline issues, American classrooms are weighed down by behaviors that disrupt the flow of classroom activities, and interfere with learning. It is estimated that one-half of classroom learning time is lost due to behavior distractions (Cotton, 1990).

In an effort to address these behaviors in the classroom, it is important to identify the cause of these irresponsible actions, such as, not staying on task, not turning in assignments on time, and not following daily routines. There is increasing evidence that the majority of problem behaviors exhibited by school-aged children stem from behavior patterns that are established during early childhood (Hester, et al., 2004).

<u>Home-Life</u>

"Perhaps the largest single influence on children is the quality of their home life,"

(Curwin and Mendler, 1999, p. 3). In the article, "Parents Hold Keys to Promoting School

Readiness," from the National Center for Children in Poverty from Columbia University, it states

that, "More clearly than ever, research points to the importance of the family in shaping young

children's social and emotional well-being and readiness for school. And the family is the

primary influence on child development in the years before kindergarten." (October, 2002, p. 1).

"Over the past 35 years, the proportion of U.S. children being raised in two-parent homes has

dropped significantly . . . while the proportion of children living in single-parent homes has

nearly doubled." Children, who live in homes with their biological married parents, have the

lowest number of occurrences of misbehavior in the classroom (The Center for Marriage and

Families, November, 2005, p. 1).

Due to a "throw-away" society, Christopher Lasch calls the "me generation," another

cause of behavior problems in our schools. Often, divorce is used as a quick solution from

unhappiness and depression that unfortunately leaves little time to parent their children. Statistics

show that between 35 and 50 percent of all school-age children will experience dramatic changes

in their family dynamics before they finish school. "Only 41 percent will reach their 18th

birthday in "traditional family units," (Curwin and Mendler, 1999, p. 3). Children from divorce

families tend to be more disobedient than children from traditional families. They become

distracted and difficult when overwhelmed at school (St. Clair, 2006).

Therefore it is understandable that many students come to school with more concerns

toward security needs, than for educational needs. The loss of security at home means that

children in the classroom need more emotional attention then classroom hours allow. Lasch

says, "Many students have adopted the "me-generation" attitude of, "Meet my needs first. I

do not intend to wait. I come first." It is clear that students' emotional needs are at the forefront

in their minds, more than learning their subtraction facts (Curwin and Mendler, 1999, p.3).

Environment

Today's societal changes greatly impact overall students' behaviors. "Children see more,

hear more, and know more than ever before. And yet they are no more mature than the children

before them. This is the first time in history that information goes directly to children, rather

than through the important authority figures that can censor the information, and censor them for

acting inappropriately on that information." (Comer, 1997, p.5). Children are left to interpret the

unhealthy morals and values that are presented to them.

One of the elements in society that affects children's' behavior is the violence that they

are exposed to. Violence is on television, radio, in video games, in musical lyrics and in many

other forms of media. In countless instances, television glorifies characters for acting

irresponsibly. "A recent study that reviews a decade of research concerning television and youth

concluded that children will have viewed approximately 18,000 acts of television violence by the

time they enter adolescence," (Curwin & Mendler, 1999, p. 3). "Children who witness violence

can display an array of emotional and behavioral disturbances, including low self-esteem,

withdrawal, nightmares, self-blame, and aggression against peers, family members, and

property" (Peled, Jaffe, and Edleson, 1995, p. 1). This negative exposure makes children

vulnerable to act irresponsibly in the classroom.

Socioeconomic

  While addressing probable causes of behavioral issues, and irresponsibility in school-aged children, we feel it necessary to explore the effects of economic conditions. The Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics states, "chronic poverty, neighborhood, maternal depression, and parenting practices have effects on child behavioral problems in white, black and Latino children, but the processes and mechanisms through which they exert their effects differ among the groups. The differences may be related to social stratification mechanisms, as well as, sociocultural differences in family and childrearing practices," (April, 2006, p. 1 and 2). With that being said, an article found in "Education World," reports that classes that have less than 10 percent minority students were more likely to behave more responsibly, compared to classes where 50 to 74 percent were minority (December, 2005). "Children living in poverty are significantly more likely to develop social-emotional problems compared with their peers who are not poor, and the magnitude of this risk may increase with longer exposure to impoverished conditions. "To date, empirical work estimating the association between family economic risk and child social-emotional development has been based largely on between-child comparisons. In other words, it is clear that children in families with less money are relatively more likely to have externalizing and internalizing problems than children in families with more money," (Dearing, McCartney and Taylor, 2005, p. 2).

Other Risk Factors

Pregnancy

Food and Diet

In the journal "Child Development," researchers report that if pregnant women experience high levels of stress and/or anxiety in the first half of the pregnancy, children have a higher risk of developing behavior problems. During this first half (weeks 12 through 22), the brain circuitry is developing, and stress during this time can set the stage for hyperactivity, depression, aggression, and Attention Deficit Disorder (Ham, August 2004, p. 1).

Another issue is the use of alcohol during pregnancy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is reported that each year between 1,300 and 8,000 babies in the United States are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Children born with FAS have poor coordination, short attention span, and exhibit behavioral problems. It is important to note, that there is no cure for FAS (March of Dimes, 2006).

According to Dr. Stephen Gislason, MD, author of the "Book of Children," "the wrong food choices, adverse food chemistry and food allergy contribute to learning and behavioral problems in children." The issues seen in children with deficient diets range from depression to ADD, to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The problems such as hyperactivity, impulsiveness, aggression, and the inability to stay focused, start in early childhood, and carry over into school. Dr. Gislason quotes Bobner, et al, who reviewed studies linking nutritional disorders with behavioral and learning problems in children, as saying, "billions of dollars are spent annually on special education programs for children whose severe behavior disorders prevent them from participating in the regular school setting . . . A growing body of research

indicates that some of these behavioral disorders are related to nutritional problems." It's important to note that many areas were considered in this study, included are nutrient deficiencies, food allergy and toxic heavy metals (2006, p. 1).

Based on research, there are many causes for irresponsible behaviors in students. One of the most important influences on children is the quality of their home life. A child's living environment is shown to have a huge impact on a child's behavior and attitude toward responsibility in the school setting. Today's changing society also contributes to the increase of irresponsible behavior. Children live in a non-censored society, and are frequently exposed to inappropriate messages. This makes it difficult for them to make suitable decisions. In addition, situations such as poverty and ethnic background contribute as well. Other aspects to keep in mind, like prenatal health and a child's diet can also play an important role. All of these factors make it challenging to educate students to be responsible members of our schools and society.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The national and state educational mind set expects teachers to make societal character traits a part of their curriculum. Responsibility and character are not random acts but habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. A goal of teaching responsibility and character is to help students know the good, desire the good, and ultimately do the good. Teachers must find ways to achieve an end that is authentic, meaningful, and relevant for our students (Edgington, 2002).

Individuals do not become responsible or ethical when they turn a certain age or reach a specific milestone in their lives. It must be learned in schools of America as well as in the homes. These are the places where basic principles of responsibility should be learned (Ellenburg, 2001).

While parents of students have the responsibility to teach their children how to be responsible adults, parents may not always know how or have the resources to do so. Students have to see responsible behaviors and its implications modeled by the people in their daily environment (Bulach, 2002). Individual teachers must act as caregiver, model, and mentor, treating students with love and respect, and setting a good example by supporting positive social behavior. Teachers should address and model the basic values of responsibility within the classroom (Jones, 2004). There is an importance balance between teacher actions that provide clear consequences for unacceptable behavior and teacher actions that recognize and reward acceptable behavior. Teachers can establish clear expectations for behavior in two ways: by establishing clear rules and procedures, and by providing consequences for student behavior

(Marzano and Marzano, 2003). Educators can give students real-life examples of how a sensitive and caring person acts and accepts responsibility in the classroom. Presenting children with examples of real-life role models shows them clear examples of responsible and desirable behaviors (deRuyter, 2002). Ethical values such as responsibility, respect, loyalty, and honesty cannot be taught directly. They can only be learned in concrete situations from people one respects. To aid in the development of responsible choices, students need to "live and work" in an environment which promotes responsibility. As reported by Parker, (as cited in Pryor, 2004), teachers are change agents and socializing agents, weaving the ideals of responsibility into the curriculum. These ideals provide students with necessary skills to survive in and adapt to diverse environments. We must encourage our schools to help teach responsibility to our kids by actively modeling good behavior and by insisting that educators work to exemplify the values which they hope to pass on (Grater, 2002). As faculty and staff model the behaviors associated with responsibility, and as their behavior is caught by the students, an improvement in the climate and culture of the school is likely to occur (Bulach, 2002).

Encouraging students to make choices, helping students to discover alternatives when they are faced with choices, providing opportunities for the students to affirm their choices to others, and encouraging students to act and live according to their choices, while providing opportunities for students to clarify their personal values. For young people to behave responsibly, they must possess the appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes and the opportunity to exercise their capacity (Duke & Jones, 2001). The classroom can be one place to reinforce, model, and practice positive responsible traits on a daily basis. Many studies focusing on self-management techniques have shown the effectiveness of self-management procedures in behavior change and academic productivity. These studies included students from many

different populations, ranging from average achievers to students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities. Teachers have found many advantages in using self-monitoring procedures: these procedures improve target behavior, stress the student's role in behavior change, allow generalization to non-school environments, free teachers for other tasks, and teach students responsibility and self-determination (Frith and Armstrong, 1986).

Giving students opportunities to exercise responsibility through classroom rules and procedures, as well as, consequences, allows students to evaluate their own behavior. This opportunity increases student investment in and responsibility for examining and changing their own behavior, and reduces the time and energy teachers must commit to a behavior change program.

Children are allowed a chance to take ownership for their actions by involving them in the process of understanding and questioning rules, guidelines, limits, and consequences (Classroom organization, 2004).

Researchers have found that children between the ages of 5 and 7 undergo developmental transformation that lead to major changes in personal responsibility, independence, and social roles in a healthy social environment (Frey & Doyle, 2001). The critical years between 9 and 15 are an ideal and essential time to teach those students to accept responsibility for the consequences of their own behavior, to recognize that mistakes can become opportunities for learning, and to help them learn how to formulate, and live with classroom and community rules that promote responsibility, respect, and self-discipline (Curwin, 2003). Learning is most effective when we have a sense of ownership over it. We are all problem solvers and are responsible for our own behavior (Curran, 2003). The challenge is to educate all students to be responsible members of a democratic society (Slater, 2004).

Project Objectives and Processes

Objective:

As a result of behavior contracts, during the period of September 2006 to January 2007, the targeted third grade students will show an increase in personal responsibility, as measured by prior second grade teachers' surveys, parent and student surveys, behavior contracts (Appendix D), checklists (Appendix E), and student/teacher conferences.

The research indicates that students of the targeted third grade classes exhibited irresponsible behaviors, such as not following the daily routine, not turning homework and being off task, which interfered with the learning environment. Through literature review, the researchers concluded that encouraging responsible behavior is a critical component of the learning experience. The researchers reviewed several methods for improving student responsibility. They decided to target the third grade students they were going to be teaching during the 2006-2007 school years, for an action research project that would attempt to increase student responsibility. To increase student responsibility, investigators decided to use surveys, checklists, behavior contracts, student/teacher conferences, and reward tickets. Students can use their reward tickets to purchase items from the "Goodie Store" (Appendix F). The "Goodie Store" consists of candy, novelties, and school supplies, such as pencil sharpeners, notepads, erasers, etc.

<u>Processes:</u>

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following strategies were necessary:

1. A survey is given to the targeted students' previous second grade teachers

    regarding student responsibility.

2. Parents complete a survey rating their child on specific targeted

    behaviors focusing on responsibility.

3. Students sign a behavior contract agreeing to its terms.

4. Students complete a self reflective survey administered by the

    classroom teachers prior to the intervention.

5. Checklists will be recorded by the classroom teachers documenting irresponsible

    behavior.

6. Student/teacher conferences will be held three times within the research period.

Project Action Plan

September 2006- January 2007

<u>Week One</u>

- Second grade teachers complete a survey regarding the targeted students' prior behavior

    patterns.

- Review returned parent surveys.

- Explain targeted behaviors to students and discuss the terms of the contract.

- Students complete a survey and sign a contract.

- Begin monitoring responsible behaviors using checklists, and reward targeted behaviors with "Goodie Store" tickets.

Weeks Two through Seventeen

- Continue monitoring responsible behaviors using checklists, and reward targeted behaviors with "Goodie Store" tickets.

- Continue reviewing and reinforcing procedures and goals.

- Teacher will facilitate individual conferences with students to assess progress and encourage responsible choices at least three times during the course of the intervention.

Methods of Assessment

The following assessments will be used to measure the effectiveness of behavior contracts on student responsibility.

- Teacher surveys

- Parent surveys

- Student surveys

- Checklists

- Conferences

The assessments related to the project will take place during regular instructional delivery. A survey will be given to second grade teachers regarding their prior targeted students' behaviors. These targeted behaviors include: following the daily routine, turning in homeowork,

and staying on task. The parents will complete a survey rating their child on specific targeted

behaviors focusing on responsibility. Targeted behaviors include: showing accountability,

completing routine tasks independently, listening attentively, turning in completed homework on

time, etc. Students will complete a self-reflective survey administered by the classroom teachers.

The self-reflective survey includes "I" statements such as, responsible for actions, follow

directions, listen well to others, turn in assignments on time, follow the daily routine, etc.

Student/teacher conferences will be held at least three times during the seventeen week

period. Data collected from the checklists will be used during the conferences to help students

assess their progress and encourage responsible choices.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The purpose of this action research project was to improve student responsibility and promote positive outcomes for students and their learning environment. This was accomplished through a positive reward system made up of tickets received when goals were met, along with the opportunity to use tickets to purchase items at the "Goodie Store." The project was conducted between the time periods of September, 2006 through January, 2007. The researchers administered a pre-survey to the students regarding personal responsibility. The parents completed a pre-survey, rating their child on specific targeted behaviors focusing on responsibility. A survey was also given to second grade teachers regarding how the students behaved, as related to the project goals, the previous year.

Researchers kept confidential anecdotal records and checklists on the project's targeted behaviors. The researchers created various materials to be used throughout the study. Surveys for teachers, parents, and students were developed. The parent pre-survey included an explanation, and consent form. Other materials developed for the preparation of the study included a weekly behavior checklist, a list of goals posted in the classroom, a student contract and a "Goodie Store."

At the end of the prior school year, second grade teachers were given surveys to record students' behavior, as they related to the project's goals. During the initial week of the project, third grade students completed a survey on their own personal behaviors relating to responsibility. At the same time, the parents rated their child on specific targeted behaviors,

which focused on responsibility. The results of these surveys are presented in Chapter 2.

In all four sites, a checklist was used to document each incident of irresponsible behavior. The targeted behaviors included, "not following the daily routine," "not turning in homework," and "off task behavior." Prior to the intervention, a baseline was collected on the targeted behaviors through the use of checklists without the students' knowledge. Expectations and procedures were established and the intervention implemented. The core of the intervention centered on students earning reward tickets to use at the "Goodie Store."

Each day researchers kept track of the targeted behaviors through the use of daily checklists. At the end of the day, students received a ticket for each targeted goal met, with a maximum of three. This procedure repeated each day for one week enabling students to accumulate tickets to use at the "Goodie Store," at the end of each week.

During the course of the seventeen week intervention, researchers conferred with each student from their site, on a rotating basis, at least three times during the entire study. Conferences were held to praise students for goals achieved, and/or create an action plan for those goals not met.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The researchers continued collecting data for a seventeen week period, in order to see if responsibility had improved in response to the intervention. To assess the impact of a positive reward system, various types of documentation were designed. The researchers began the 2006-2007 school year with 89 students involved in the study. A checklist documenting the targeted behaviors was completed over a seventeen week period. Student growth was determined by comparing the baseline data with the final week of intervention.

**Baseline Data Prior to Intervention
Compared with Final Week of Intervention**
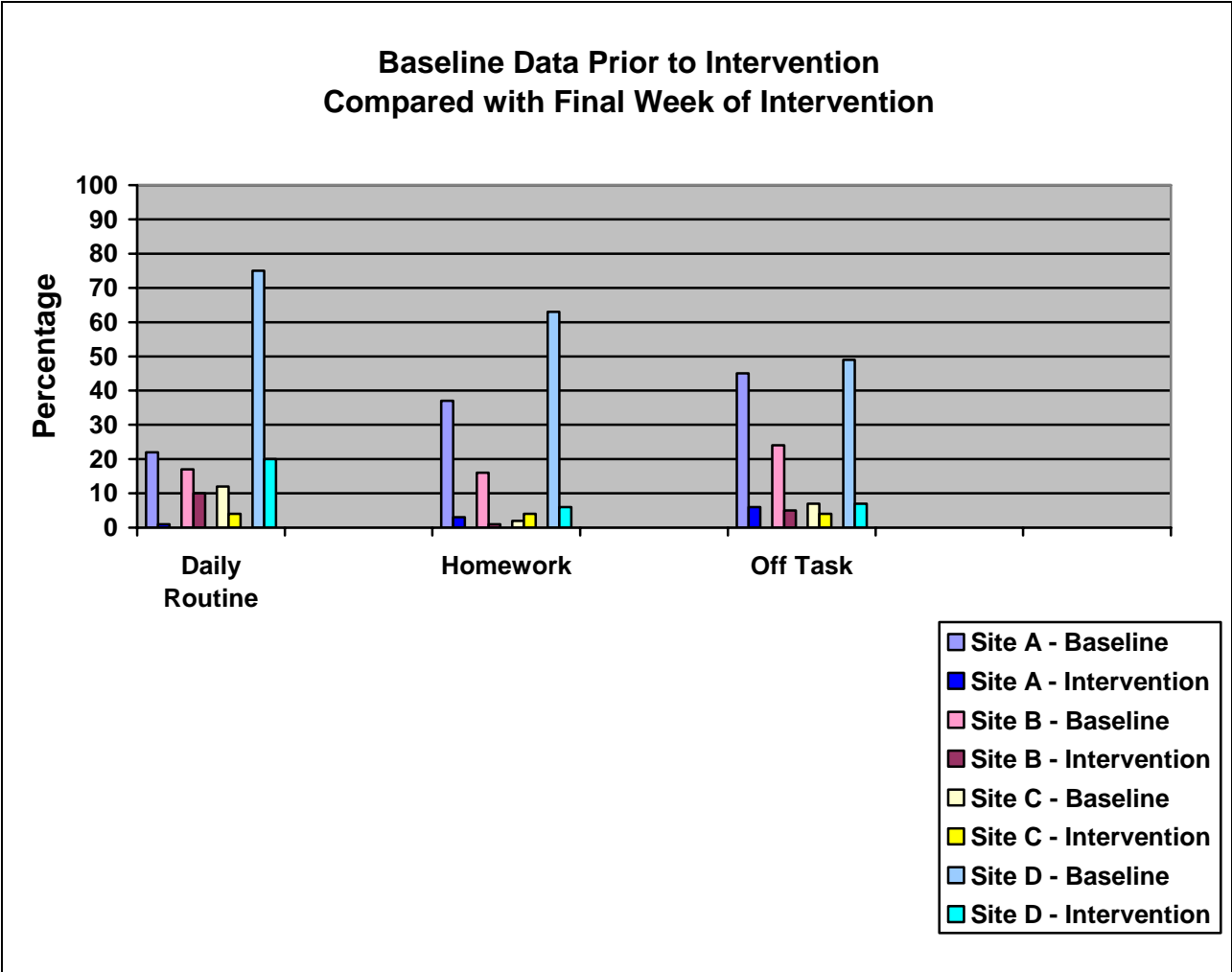
Figure 14. Baseline data and final week comparison of all four sites.

As shown in Figure 14, there was a significant improvement in response to the intervention for almost all the targeted areas. Site A showed that 21% more students followed the daily routine. Site B showed that 7% more students followed the daily routine. Site C showed that 8% more students followed the daily routine. Site D showed that 55% more students followed the daily routine.

Site A showed that 34% more students turned in homework. Site B showed that 15% more students turned in homework. However, Site C was the only location that showed a 2% *decline* in response to the intervention with regards to turning in homework. Researchers concluded that there were many variables that could have affected this outcome. Possible factors could have included, but were not limited to: absences, forgetting to turn it in, recordkeeping errors, etc. Site D showed that 57% more students turned in homework.

For the last targeted goal, Site A showed that 39% more students stayed on task. Site B showed that 19% more students stayed on task. Site C showed that 3% more students stayed on task. Site D showed that 42% more students stayed on task.

Overall, the students in each site responded well to the positive reinforcement techniques. However, researchers noted that while Site C did exhibit an improvement with the intervention in almost all areas, the percentages were not as significant as the other sites. Researchers can only speculate that differences in teaching styles and consistency could have impacted the results.

The researchers felt that they needed to re-administer the student survey to determine if the students felt their personal responsibility had improved due to the intervention. When researchers compared the pre-survey and post-survey, as shown in Figures 15 through 21, they found that the results were inconclusive because the questions were too subjective. In addition, the researchers felt that the results were ambiguous because students completed the pre-survey without a good understanding of what responsibility was. Their answers were clearly based on their lack of awareness. However, after the intervention, when the post-survey was completed, researchers felt that student maturity and clarity, though positive, may have skewed the results of the comparison. While the results of the comparison between the pre-survey and post-survey

were not clear, students in all four sites claimed that the intervention increased their ability to

be more responsible. Researchers agreed that the students exhibited their claim.

Shown below are the actual results:

**Pre- and Post-Student Survey,
"I am responsible for my actions."**

Percentage

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

☐ Site A - Pre-survey
■ Site A - Post-survey
☐ Site B - Pre-survey
■ Site B - Post-survey
☐ Site C - Pre-survey
☐ Site C - Post-survey
☐ Site D - Pre-survey
☐ Site D - Post-survey
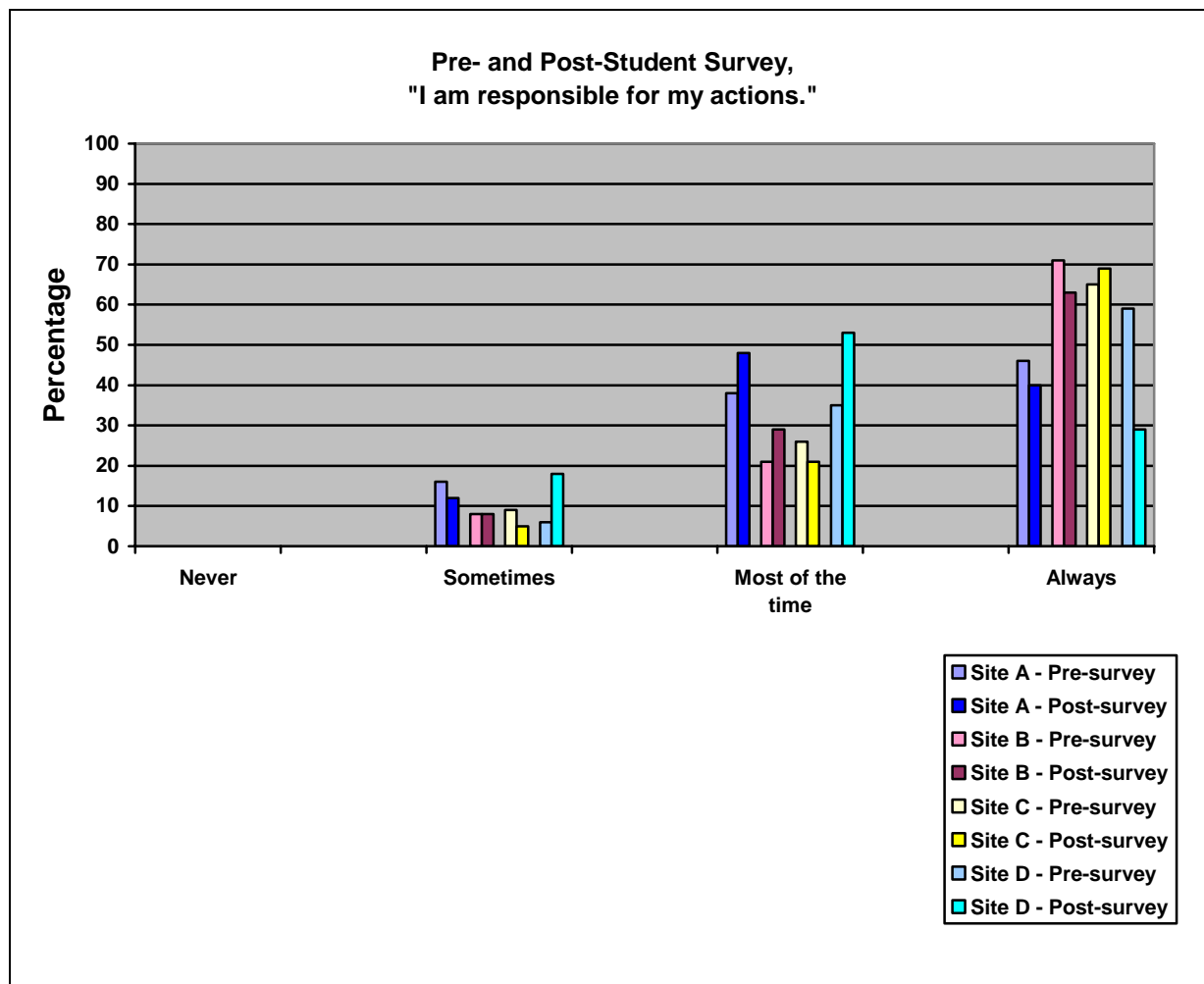
Figure 15. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement, "I am responsible for my

actions," 0% answered never, 16% answered sometimes, 38% answered most of the time, and

46% answered always. On the post survey, 0% answered never, 12% answered sometimes, 48%

answered most of the time, and 40% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 15, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 8% answered sometimes, 21% answered most of the time, and 71% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 8% answered sometimes, 29% answered most of the time and 63% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 15, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 9% answered sometimes, 26% answered most of the time, and 65% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 10% answered sometimes, 21% answered most of the time and 69% answered always.

For site D, shown in Figure 15, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 35% answered most of the time, and 59% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 18% answered sometimes, 53% answered most of the time and 29% answered always.

Figure 16. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

As shown in Figure16, Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement "I follow directions," 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 25% answered most of the time, and 71% answered always. On the post survey, 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 20% answered most of the time, and 80% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 16, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 25% answered most of the time, and 71% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 33% answered most of the time and 63% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 16, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 14% answered sometimes, 34% answered most of the time, and 52% answered always. On the post-survey, 0 % answered never, 25 % answered sometimes, 35% answered most of the time and 40% answered always.

For Site D, shown in Figure 16, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 24% answered most of the time, and 70% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 24% answered most of the time and 71% answered always.
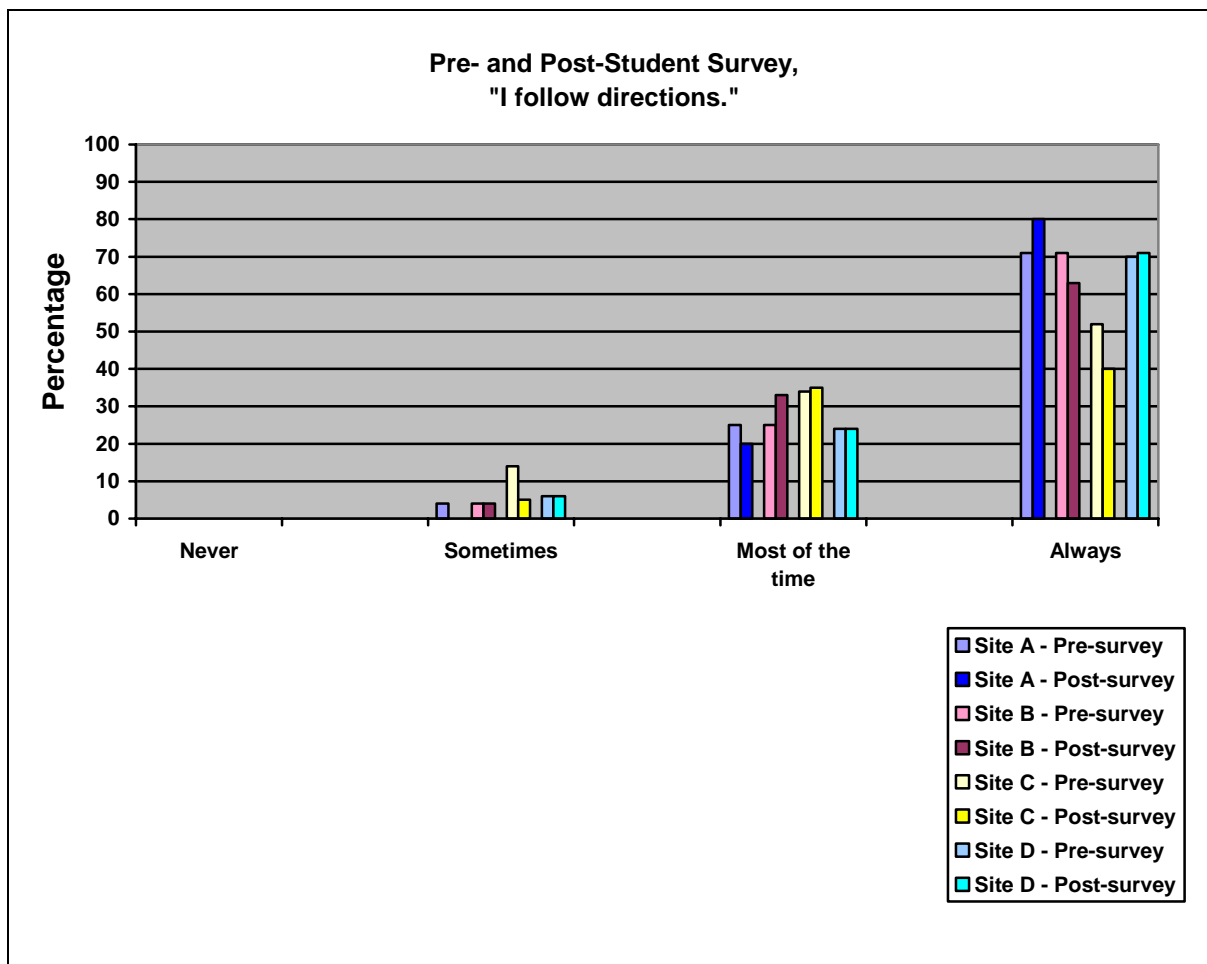

Figure 17. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

As shown in Figure17, Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement "I listen well to others," 0% answered never, 13% answered sometimes, 29% answered most of the time, and 58% answered always. On the post survey, 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 48% answered most of the time, and 52% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 17, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 21% answered most of the time, and 75% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 25% answered most of the time and 71% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 17, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 39% answered most of the time, and 61% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 5% answered sometimes, 46% answered most of the time and 49% answered always.

For Site D, shown in Figure 17, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 35% answered most of the time, and 59% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 41% answered most of the time and 59% answered always.

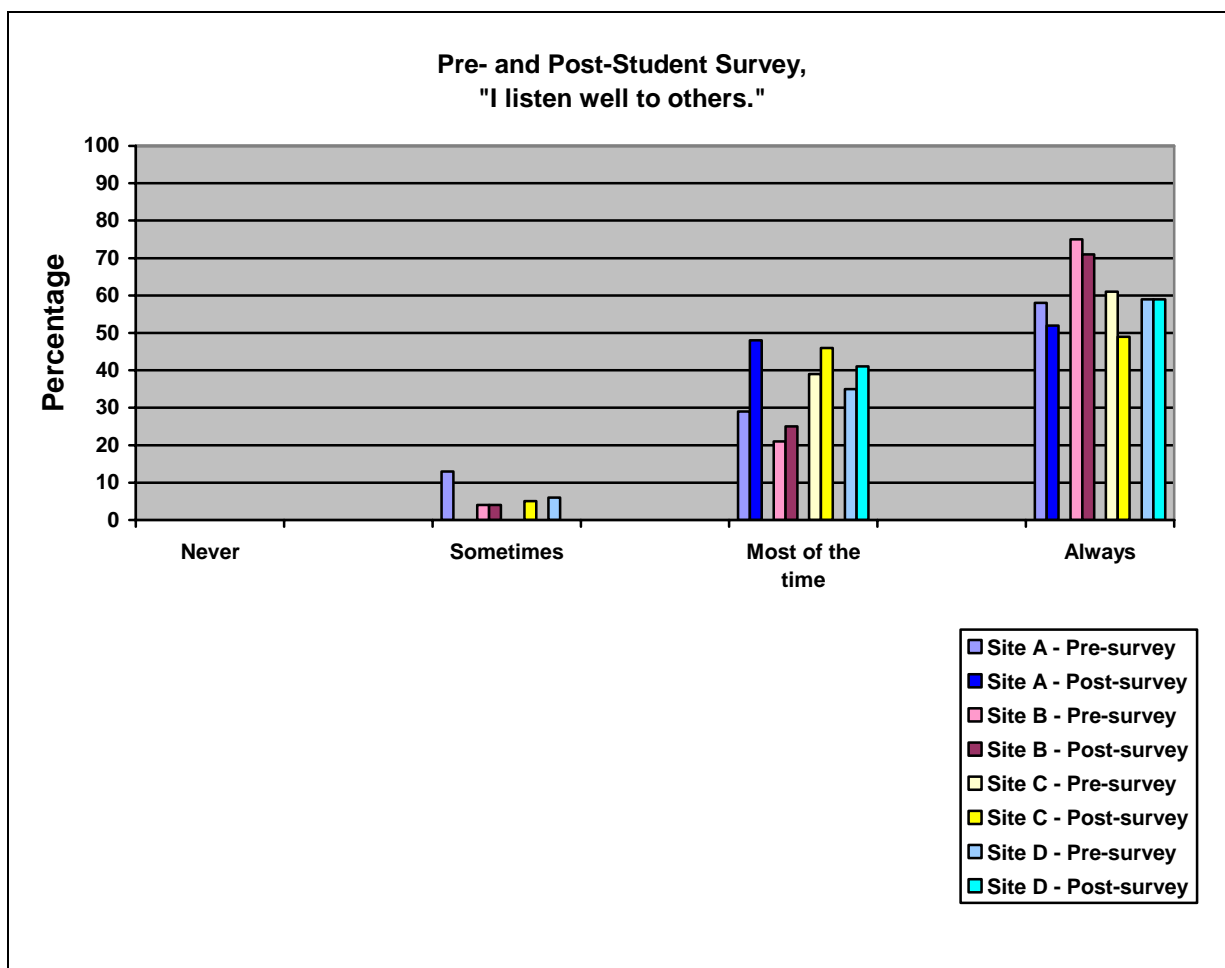**Pre- and Post-Student Survey,
"I turn in my assignments on time."**

Figure 18. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

As shown in Figure18, Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement "I turn in my homework on time," 4% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 25% answered most of the time, and 71% answered always. On the post survey, 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 36% answered most of the time, and 60% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 18, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 63% answered most of the time, and 33% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 29% answered most of the time and 67% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 18, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 14% answered sometimes, 56% answered most of the time, and 30% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 13% answered sometimes, 71% answered most of the time and 16% answered always.

For Site D, shown in Figure 18, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 41% answered most of the time, and 53% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 18% answered sometimes, 47% answered most of the time and 35% answered always.
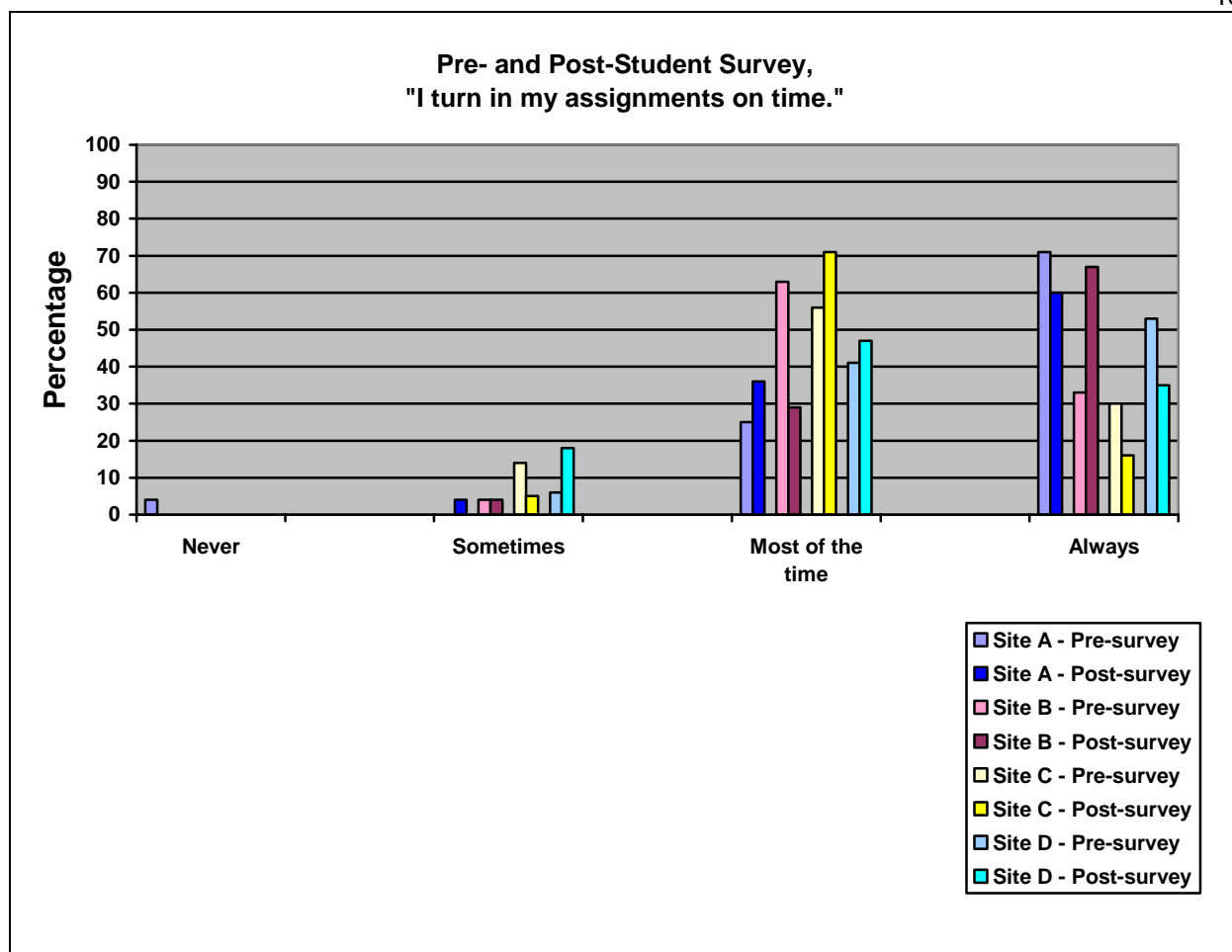

Figure 19. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

As shown in Figure 19, Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement "I follow the daily routine in the classroom," 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 8% answered most of the time, and 92% answered always. On the post survey, 0% answered never, 12% answered sometimes, 16% answered most of the time, and 72% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 20, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 0% answered sometimes, 8% answered most of the time, and 92% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 4% answered sometimes, 17% answered most of the time and 79% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 20, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 14% answered sometimes, 43% answered most of the time, and 43% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 11% answered sometimes, 43% answered most of the time and 46% answered always.

For Site D, shown in Figure 20, the pre-survey showed that 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 35% answered most of the time, and 59% answered always. On the post-survey, 0% answered never, 6% answered sometimes, 29% answered most of the time and 65% answered always.

**Pre- and Post-Student Survey,
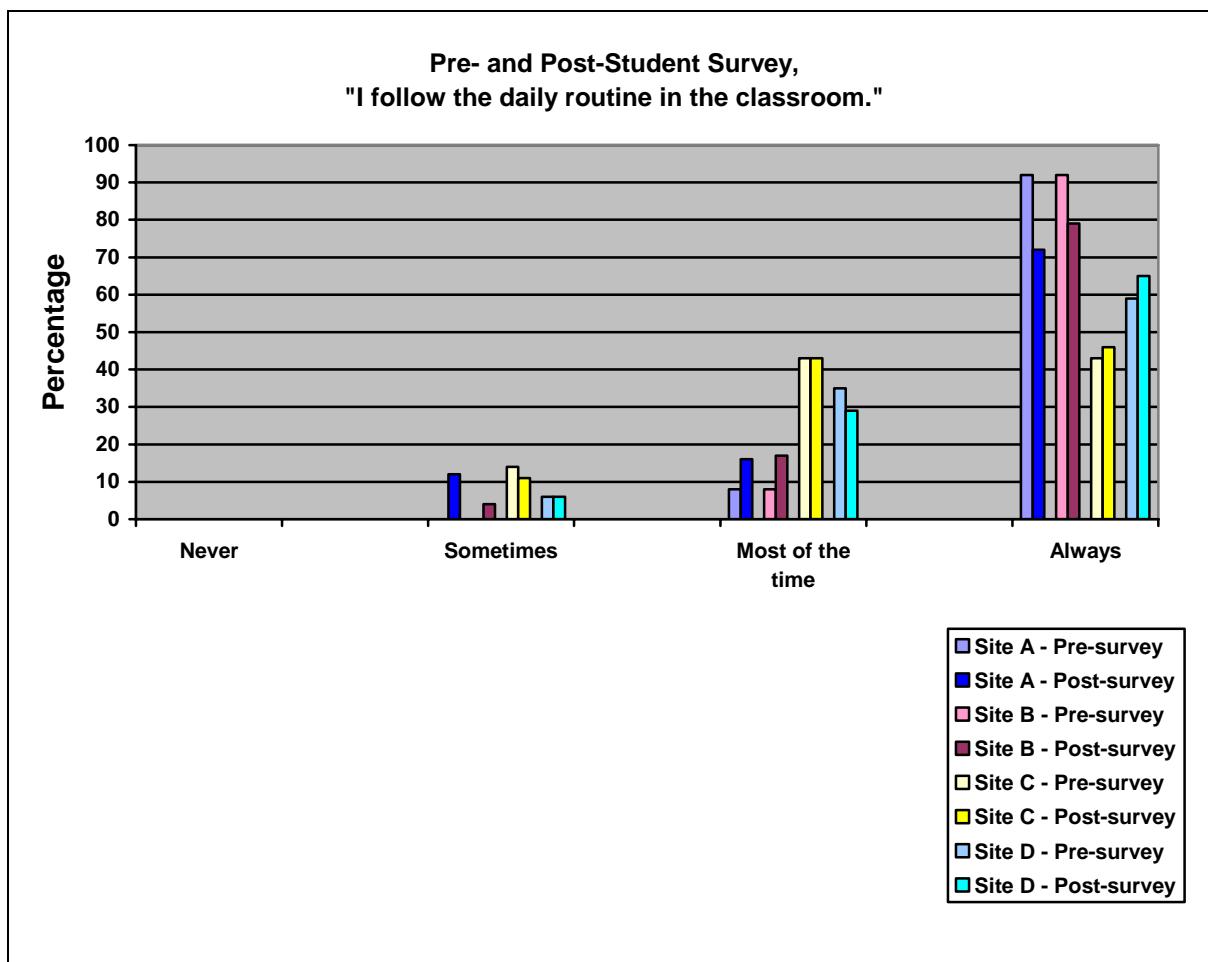"I talk when I am *not* supposed to."**
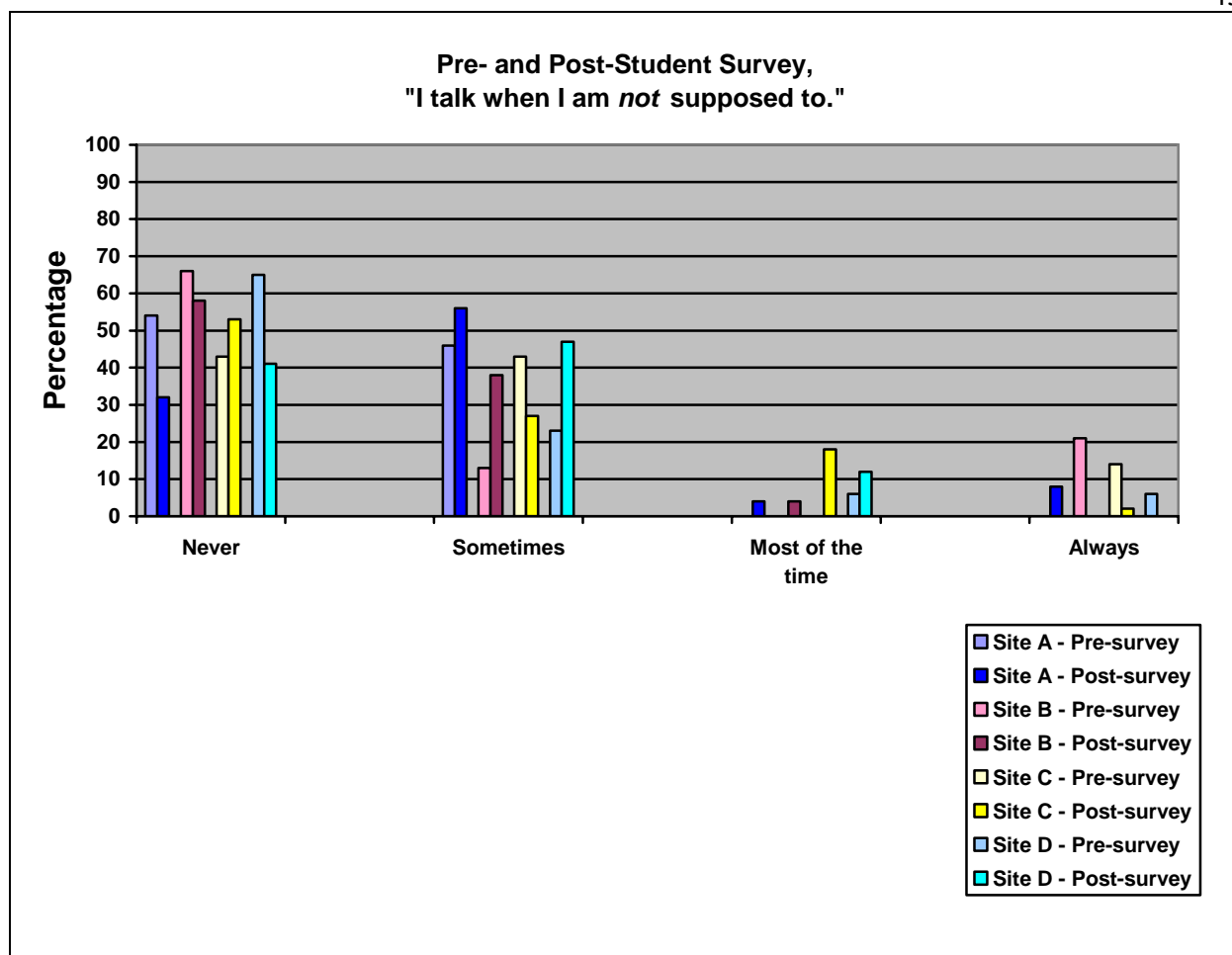
Figure 20. Comparison of the pre- and post-student survey question.

As shown in Figure 20, Site A students responded on the pre-survey to the statement "I talk when I am *not* supposed to," 54% answered never, 46% answered sometimes, 0% answered most of the time, and 0% answered always. On the post-survey, 32% answered never, 56% answered sometimes, 4% answered most of the time, and 8% answered always.

For Site B, shown in Figure 20, the pre-survey showed that 66% answered never, 13% answered sometimes, 0% answered most of the time, and 21% answered always. On the post-survey, 58% answered never, 38% answered sometimes, 4% answered most of the time and 0% answered always.

For Site C, shown in Figure 20, the pre-survey showed that 43% answered never, 43% answered sometimes, 0% answered most of the time, and 14% answered always. On the post-survey, 53% answered never, 27% answered sometimes, 18% answered most of the time and 2% answered always.

For Site D, shown in Figure 21, the pre-survey showed that 65% answered never, 23% answered sometimes, 6% answered most of the time, and 6% answered always. On the post-survey, 41% answered never, 47% answered sometimes, 12% answered most of the time and 0% answered always.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The intervention plan showed a significant improvement in student responsibility. All four researchers felt that the use of the positive reward system and individual conferences, combined with teachers' expectations, encouraged and promoted student responsibility.

Based on the analysis of the results, students showed positive growth in taking personal responsibility on the targeted behaviors. The students in all participating classrooms understood that they were held accountable for the targeted behaviors: following the daily routine, turning in homework, and staying on task.

To promote the desired changes, researchers planned and initiated a positive reward system, consisting of tickets earned daily, for the use of a weekly visit to the "Goodie Store." Students enjoyed receiving tickets for their achieved goals. They felt a sense of accomplishment, while learning good habits of responsibility. The conferences accentuated the students' awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses in completing the tasks independently.

Therefore, the researchers would recommend a positive reward system, along with

conferencing to promote and increase student personal responsibility.

The researchers have some suggestions that would improve the quality of this study. The

first suggestion would be to extend the time allotted for the collection of the baseline data. This

would contribute to a more accurate analysis of how well the intervention worked. In addition,

researchers became aware that there were differences between sites, with regards to the daily

routine, homework assignments, and what is considered off-task behavior. Researchers suggest

that clear and consistent procedures must be established prior to the launch of the study. Also,

researchers determined that the survey given to the second grade teachers was irrelevant to the

study because it was subjective, and inconsistent with third grade expectations.

At one point during the study, the researchers recognized that it might be more effective

to take a ticket away instantly, right when the student neglected to complete the desired goal.

Waiting until the end of the day to distribute tickets earned was not immediate enough. The

researchers found that students often forgot which targeted goal had even been ignored.

Therefore, the immediate consequence would help promote a clearer connection.

The researchers also felt that the parent survey was unnecessary and immaterial to the

study. The parents' input was based solely on their view of responsibility in the home

environment, and not in the classroom. It proved to be of no value to the study's results.

There is another aspect to consider when reading the results of this study. The

researchers kept a daily checklist to document each student's infractions of the targeted goals.

While this proved to be an effective way to record data, it was not without complications. A

natural difference in teachers' expectations and levels of patience caused fluctuations within the

data collected.

The researchers also felt that home support, or lack thereof, may have affected the results of this study. Those parents, who take an active role, by being involved in their child's education, tend to model responsible behavior inherently. The students, whose home environment complimented the targeted goals, may have faired better, due to the increased reinforcement. This caused an uneven playing field for some students which may have influenced the outcome of the intervention and the results of this study.

Important to note, researchers did have to purchase out of pocket items for the "Goodie Store," which proved to be costly. Suggestions would be to ask for parent donations, collect a small sum of money from each student, and/or use district or PTA funds.

Reflection

This action research project has made a positive and significant impact on both students and researchers. Prior to implementing this project, the researchers were consistently assuming responsibility for students completing the targeted behaviors. Many times the researchers had to provide verbal and visual reminders. These reminders were unsuccessful in increasing students' acceptance of responsibility. The positive reward system provided a structured format for teaching individual accountability. At the end of the study, students showed that they took more ownership for being responsible.

The researchers concluded that focusing on targeted behaviors through a positive reward system and individual conferences, had a positive impact on students' personal responsibility. Most of the students were able to independently complete daily routines, turn in homework, and stay on task, by being aware of the rewards and consequences. Not only did the researchers see

success with this program, it's important to point out the additional benefits that emerged in

the process. Students gained self-confidence, self-motivation and self-respect when they

received positive feedback during individual conferences. These positive attributes carried over

into the classroom atmosphere providing an optimum learning environment.

It is the researchers hope that the students who participated in this study will continue to

hold themselves accountable for assuming personal responsibility.

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APPENDIX A

SECOND GRADE TEACHER'S SURVEY

TEACHER SURVEY

Completion of this survey implies consent to participate.

Please check the boxes that apply to the student.

Student Number	Does Not Follow The Daily Routine	Does Not Turn In Homework	Does Not Stay On Task
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22			
23			
24			

APPENDIX B

PARENT SURVEY

PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parents,

    In our classroom we are working on improving student responsibility.   I would appreciate you taking the time to fill out this survey. Please return this to me by Friday, September 6, 2006. COMPLETION OF THIS SURVEY IMPLIES CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE.

Thank you,

1. My child shows accountability for his/her actions.

    Never   Seldom   Frequently   Always

2. My child completes routine tasks independently and consistently without repeated reminders.

    Never   Seldom   Frequently   Always

3. My child listens attentively to others.

    Never   Seldom   Frequently   Always

4. My child turns in homework on time.

    Never   Seldom   Frequently   Always

5. Improving student responsibility increases student performance.

    Never   Seldom   Frequently   Always

6. There is a need for teaching responsibility at

    Home   School   Both

APPENDIX C

STUDENT PRE AND POST-SURVEY

STUDENT SURVEY

1. I am responsible for my actions.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

2. I follow directions.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

3. I listen well to others.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

4. I turn in my assignments on time.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

5. I follow the daily routine in the classroom.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

6. I talk when I am not supposed to.

   Never   Sometimes   Most of the time   Always

APPENDIX D

BEHAVIOR CONTRACT

Behavior Contract

Date _____

The student will demonstrate responsibility each day at school by staying on task, turning assignments in on time, and following the daily routines of the classroom.

The student is expected to follow the above responsibilities promptly and with good attitude. Each day, students can earn a ticket for each achieved goal. The tickets can then be used for a reward at the "Goodie Store". Three tickets can be earned each day.

We agree to the terms of this responsibility contact as set forth above.

_____

Student Number

APPENDIX E

WEEKLY CHECKLIST

Responsibility Check List

	Doesn't Stay On Task	**Doesn't Turn In Assignments On Time**	**Doesn't Follow Daily Routine**
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Responsibility Check List

	Doesn't Stay On Task	**Doesn't Turn In Assignments On Time**	**Doesn't Follow Daily Routine**
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Responsibility Check List

	Doesn't Stay On Task	**Doesn't Turn In Assignments On Time**	**Doesn't Follow Daily Routine**
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

APPENDIX F

"GOODIE STORE" PRICE LIST
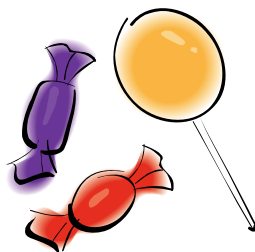
GOODIE STORE

Price List

Item	Number of Tickets
Pencil	10
Sharpener	10
Notepad	20
Eraser	10
Ruler	15
Smarties	5
Tootsie Pop	5
Jolly Rancher	3
Sour Patch	5
Skittles	10