

School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

A Case for Improving Student Behavior

Jordan Parks – Bath Middle School Teacher

II. Problem Statement

I chose to focus my attention to the topic of School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports due to the increase of teacher frustration in recent years surrounding student behavior in classrooms. This report also covers the major facets of “Response to Intervention” (RTI) because effective classroom management includes instruction where students are on task and feel confident in their learning, which is one of the tenants of implementing RTI in conjunction with PBIS. Although this topic stretches from early education through secondary education (K-12), my personal relationship to this topic focuses specifically on the middle grades (6-8), and so I have chosen to focus primarily on those grades for purposes of my research. I have been surrounded by a community of teachers –both within and outside of my school district- that feel unequipped to handle the rising behavioral needs of 21st century students. Teachers frequently complain about a lack of student respect, inability to focus on instructing during instructional time, a lack of parent involvement and understanding, and the rising workload handed down to teachers from legislative policies and demands from state or district administration. These frustrations have led to a mass exodus for young teachers from the field of education. According to National Public Radio (NPR), as of October 2016, an estimated 8% of teachers leave the teaching force each year (NPR). This statistic is enough proof that the rising stress on teachers is making the job requirements not worth the income or intrinsic rewards provided by the noble profession of teaching. NPR also reported that one big reason why teachers leave the profession or report being unsatisfied in their role as a teacher is student misbehavior. (NPR)

Although facing this issue may seem insurmountable for American society in future decades, there is one solution that can increase student academic and behavioral performance and allow for teachers to find more enjoyment in their educational responsibilities. I'm writing to inform my audience about the impacts of implementing School-Wide Positive Behaviors and Supports (SW-PBIS). This is written specifically for teachers or school districts around the U.S. that feel uneasy about the upcoming school year, and the ability to control student behavior year after year. For those with anxiety surrounding the topic of student behavior, this program is specifically designed to benefit all students, teachers, and administrative staff. This program also reaches students with diagnosed (or undiagnosed) learning disabilities, and helps districts design methods to allow students with specific needs to be successful. Although this report is geared toward teachers and administrators seeking an answer to the behavioral problems in their school, perhaps students are the most important audience that would benefit from PBIS. Students today come to school with many problems, fears, and anxieties, and unfortunately these characteristics are often heightened when they walk through the doors of school. As a current practicing middle school teacher, I see and hear the challenges students face everyday. Teachers are in a unique position to provide educational and social opportunities for kids to build their confidence and excel amongst their peers. Because students have a variety of personalities, skills, and backgrounds, the PBIS program is tailored to meet these differences and allow for students to be successful – both academically and behaviorally - no matter their differences.

III. Definition(s)/Description of Condition

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is a system implemented in a school or school district that aims to explicitly teach behavioral expectations in the same way as a professionally developed teacher would teach a core subject. Additionally, according to their national website, ... “classroom PBIS includes preventative and responsive approaches that may be effectively implemented with all students in the classroom and intensified to support small groups or a few individual students” (PBIS). The best method to reducing teacher attrition rates would be to introduce research based effective strategies for improving student behavior. Specifically, in Middle Schools, this would include teaching behaviors both inside and outside of the classroom. With “inclusion” in modern day U.S. classrooms (that is, students labeled as receiving special education services learning in the same classroom as the general education population), many teachers simultaneously work with students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), Emotional Impairment (EI), Down-Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Dyslexia, Physical Disabilities, in addition to a variety of general education students with specific needs –all in one classroom.

I believe researchers in southern Louisiana put it best when they described the purpose of PBIS:

“The goal of PBIS is academic and social success; where replacement skills are taught. The method used with traditional discipline is primarily punishment (reactive). The PBIS method alters environments, utilizes teaching and instruction, employs reinforcement procedures (proactive), and has data management tracking system. PBIS is long term, where as traditional discipline appears to be immediate and short term. PBIS concentrates on the whole student.” (Hill, 2013, 26-27)

This process is much more complex than it seems at first glance. Using this system effectively in schools requires many prerequisites. First, a core of “leaders” must

be identified within a school district to help educate, monitor progress, and follow-through with frequent meetings to evaluate the implementation of the multi-tiered systems of support. Also, there will need to be leadership body responsible for grants or funding for the project as the system will require resources for implementation. In an ideal situation, this leadership team should attend a professional development session surrounding PBIS so they are able to provide teachers with the foundational skills, resources, and approaches to implementing the program. It's important for the teaching staff in the school to be on board with the program. One major facet of Response to Intervention (RTI) – the academic implementation of improving student performance – is to provide students with excellent instruction to meet learners where they are at, and help them improve their skills related to their content area. However, students cannot improve their academic knowledge if the learning atmosphere provided by the teacher is not conducive to learning for his or her students. Hence, PBIS is incredibly important to developing an atmosphere where all learners are supported.

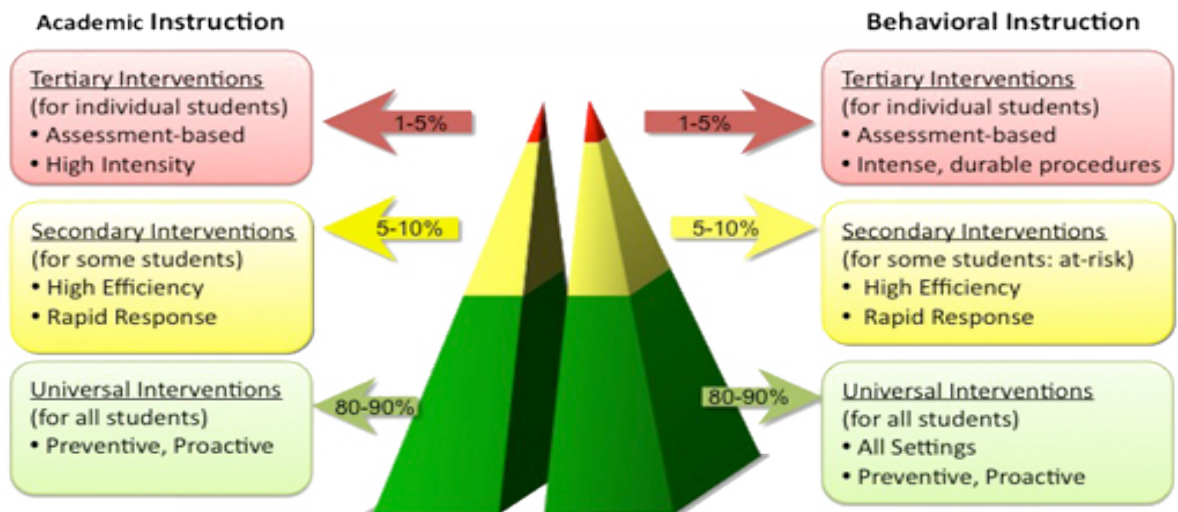
According to research in middle schools using PBIS in Georgia, the teachers modeling appropriate behavior has a significant impact on students. The report noted, “Teachers armed with this knowledge may be more successful in creating a positive atmosphere in their classrooms and extinguishing negative behaviors. By consistently and continuously teaching and reinforcing behavior expectations for student behavior throughout the school environment, undesired student behaviors may decrease and positive behaviors may increase” (Arnold, 2012, 19) Once that has been established, a school-wide buy in from at least 80% of teachers is necessary for PBIS to work in a given school. The reason for this “buy in” is that the teachers are the ones seeking out positive

behaviors and reinforcing them through a reward system. If students are receiving mixed signals or inconsistent messages for what is expected in school, the implementation of PBIS will be ineffective. The next step would be to implement a school-wide expectation for appropriate behaviors in settings all around the school grounds. This could include showing all students examples and non-examples of how to behave on the bus, playground, in hallways, and in the bathrooms. The positive reinforcement of the expected behaviors in those areas would include handing out reward tickets or “students caught being good” slips that may be entered into a reward drawing each week (or as otherwise indicated by the leadership team).

In addition to behavioral expectations, each classroom would be responsible for implementing academic positive behaviors and supports. This preventative approach would include Universal Screening multiple times a year to indicate where individual students would fall on the Multi-Tiered Support Systems Approach (MTSS). These screenings would be different for core subjects, and the leadership team would break down screening results to identify where students fall on the MTSS scale. According to PBIS foundational beliefs, “It is expected that approximately 80% or more of all students in the schools should be showing adequate progress in the core curriculum” (Martella, 2013, 328) Generally, Tier 1 supports would include class-wide instructional practices that benefit all learners. This would include approximately 80% of the student population in a school, and the instruction is targeted for all students. Next, Tier 2 supports would be additional strategies focused on a smaller portion of students (about 15%) who need extra support in a content area or with behavior problems. This is for some students, and it would often require small group instruction, a “social skills” club, or something as

simple as signing a check-in and checkout sheet to support their organization. Lastly, the Tier 3 supports are for a small percentage of students (no more than 5%) that are at high risk for chronic intense misbehavior –this requires a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and individualized supports to improve their learning environment to increase the chances for student behavioral and academic success. A visual summary of the MTSS procedure is listed below:

Designing Schoolwide Systems for Student Success



(Image provided by PBIS.org)

PBIS is ideal for schools that want to cut down on misbehavior by preventatively teaching students ideal methods to be successful – academically and behaviorally – inside and outside of the classroom. School employees deal with a wide variety of discipline issues everyday –ranging from gum chewing or tardiness to bullying and vandalism. One study suggests these issues can take up to 80% of an educators time, which takes away from more important issues like teachers being prepared for the next class, ability to

provide feedback to students, and general academic instruction (Arnold, 2012, 21). The implementation of PBIS will give schools an opportunity to retain teachers and allow for students to have a positive school experience.

IV. Facts, Statistics, Incidence

One of the biggest reasons to implement PBIS is the decrease in behavior referrals and suspensions. A study was completed on a Southeastern Louisiana School District to monitor the referral and suspension rate over a three-year period. According to the data produced from this study, the amount of in-school suspensions decreased from 1,151 to 823, and the out-of-school suspensions decreased from 774 to 541 after the 3-year implementation of PBIS (Hill, 2013, 7). The research also concluded that significant results should be observable after implementing PBIS in an elementary school after 3 years, while a high school takes closer to 6 years (Hill, 2013, 6). The other notable statistic is the rise in school violence over the past several years since the Columbine incident back in 1999. In fact, there are twice as many incidents of violence reported in school compared to outside of school for kids aged 12-18 (Hill, 2013, 3). In order for teachers to effectively be able to teach their pupils, a positive environment in schools conducive to learning must first be established. With the current trends of school behavioral reports and violence, a significant shift in our thinking about behavior in school must changed from being reactive to being proactive.

This “proactive” approach is specifically designed to prevent, or severely lessen, the instances where students are misbehaving in class and drawing attention away from the learning objectives. After determining a student needs supports or interventions in

order for them to be successful and level the playing field for all students, an action plan is put in place in order for them to return to a Tier I level. This “action plan” is created by the behavioral support team to assist that particular individual who is struggling in his or her class. According to research, “The first key attribute of the individual organizational system is the use of evidence-based practices and interventions” (Martella, 2012, 324). This requires that our interventions to Tier II and Tier III students involve the ... “application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs” (Martella, 2012, 324). If you’re interested in specific resources for evidence based best practices, please see the resources listed in the final section of this study.

Once teachers have provided effective core instruction, behavioral rules and routines have been taught and positively reinforced, and the MTSS implementation has gone into effect for Tier II and III students, the PBIS leadership team and teachers must continue to monitor progress, document behavior, and provide feedback for the next meeting to breakdown the students Response to Intervention (RTI). Perhaps the most meaningful part of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports occurs at this stage in the system. If students do not respond to initial interventions or supports, the behavior team will meet and complete a Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA). Students typically misbehave for a reason; they usually are trying to gain access to something. The motivation leading to misbehavior could be teacher attention, peer attention, escape from work, over-stimulation, or a multitude of many other factors. The team then sets up specific interventions or supports based on their hypothesis for why the targeted misbehavior in class is occurring. The student will never achieve the status of a self-

regulated learner if he or she misbehaves and receives the item they desired. This only teaches students that misbehaving will help them get what they want. It's our job as teachers to identify antecedents of behaviors, document them closely, and use the RTI model select a "replacement" behavior to teach the student to ensure his or her previous behavior doesn't reoccur. Research suggests this method of intervening with non-desired behaviors is the best way to allow students to have their needs met, but in school-appropriate ways. A group of behavioral researchers suggest, "In developing a function-based intervention, the goal is to provide the student with an alternative (i.e., replacement) behavior that serves the same purpose of the previous behavior, but is school appropriate" (Shepard, Shahidullah, Carlson, 2013, 101).

V. Implications for Classrooms, Parents, Building

The existence of this program is great news for teachers, administrators, and students. The research defends that implementing PBIS allows for fewer discipline issues in school, which frees up more time for teachers and administrators to focus on their jobs related to their content area or specific responsibilities. The system takes at least a year to implement effectively, and the measurable benefits may not occur rapidly, but research suggests that implementation of PBIS with fidelity leads to fewer office referrals, incidents involving bullying, and less suspensions. Another positive outcome associated with PBIS (specifically the RTI component of PBIS) is the fact that fewer students are inaccurately referred to special education or falsely diagnosed with a learning disability. Information gathered by the Center on Response to Intervention suggests that "effectively implemented RTI frameworks contribute to the process of

disability identification by reducing inappropriate identification of students who might appear to have a disability because of inappropriate or insufficient instruction” (Center on Response to Intervention).

Teachers and school districts are required by law to provide students “specialized instruction” as needed in school by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) (RTI Network). Implementing the PBIS framework in schools should be clearly articulated, communicated, and even modeled for parents at home so they understand the meaning behind the program. Research suggests simply telling a parent what to do is not sufficient for a positive home and school relationship. Rather, research suggests a “new paradigm is emerging and gaining strength, characterized by equal partnerships among children, youth, families, and youth-serving staff and leaders, and the research base is growing and documenting that when these partnerships are in place positive educational, health, mental health, social, and occupational outcomes for youth are promoted.” (PBIS) Through implementing PBIS strategies, we want to focus on providing students the best instruction possible at the Tier I level, assist those students in Tier II supports that require additional assistance in their learning environment or skill deficit, and replace negative behaviors that exist with more intense interventions for Tier III students. This means our framework for thinking about educating future students must change if we haven’t already reflected on the many different skills and abilities our students bring into the classroom. This new approach to classroom management gives a positive mindset in addressing student behavior, and focuses on how we can change our instruction or the learning environment of the student to meet their specific needs, rather than how they can adapt to fit our one-size fits all

approach to teaching. This mindset simply will not work for the wide variety of students we receive year in and year out, and implementing PBIS strategies is a evidence-based solution to fixing many of the problems facing our school districts today.

For administrators, teachers, school psychologists, or others reading this information, there's two ways to get involved. The first would be to join a PBIS leadership team in your building for the school you are associated with, and the second, if you are a teacher, would be to be part of the 80% of the teaching staff statistically required to make this process effective for your school. If you are choosing the latter, you might choose to focus on one or two things for your upcoming school year. My suggestion, since you are trying to establish a level of growth of 80% in your content area, is to focus on your Tier I academic supports (primarily your instruction), as well as establishing and teaching your classroom routines and reinforcing them consistently and positively. This means simple topics such as sharpening a pencil, turning in work, what to do when a student is absent, where to put your name on an assignment, when it is appropriate to use the restroom, where to walk in the hallway, and when to approach the teacher's desk, all need to be modeled, practice, reinforced, and reminded consistently throughout a school year. In addition to explicitly teaching behavioral routines both inside and outside the classroom, we must remember that students often come to school with high anxiety and a lack of social skills modeled for them. All teachers should include some form of social skills curriculum in their classroom. According to experts, "it is clear that (1) social skills (i.e., expectation following) should be explicitly taught, (2) instruction should occur in context of the natural routine or setting, and (3) follow-up

strategies are likely needed to promote skill use and generalization (Simonsen and Myers, 2015, 119).

A specific strategy that teachers can use to begin this Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is to consider implementing a classroom reward. The “token system” allows for students who display a positive behavior or expectation in class to be reinforced with a token. This has been used by many teachers to focus on the positive aspects of student behavior. These can be exchanged for something of value (pencils, highlighters, free time in class, extra recess time, etc.) and the students benefit from their positive behavior. The research on this system suggests, “Token economies have been successful at improving student behavior in residential settings for delinquent teens, self-contained special education classrooms, and general education classrooms” (Simonsen and Myers, 142). Furthermore, specific research in token systems was recently studied at three middle schools in Pennsylvania. The researchers noted that “privileges, such as being involved in planned school activities, or being dismissed two minutes early, were considered particularly valuable to students” (Zack, 2013, 127). These measures will help prevent future mishaps and plant positive seeds in the minds of students so misbehaving in class does not even cross their mind because they already are receiving the desires they otherwise would have tried to seek out through misbehaving. An entire project could be written separately on the specific topic of behavior modifications and responding to problem behavior, but in regards to PBIS it is extremely important to reward and reinforce positive behaviors while choosing to respond to negative behaviors in a multitude of effective ways.

On the other hand, if you are an administrator, the results of the study in Pennsylvania assessing the implementation of SWPBIS in three middle schools from the perception of the students repeatedly indicated that students felt safer after PBIS began. Research suggests schools just beginning PBIS “should consider the strong impact that adult monitoring had on the students’ perceptions of safety” as well as “...when students felt safe, they were more likely to take academic risks, question, and explore” (Zack, 2013, 131). The other actionable step a leadership team member would need to begin with is identifying the principles of the behavior you want the students to exhibit. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Organization suggests coming up with three to five simple behavioral expectations students can remember. The study suggests that respect, safety, responsibility, and readiness are fundamental principles deemed by school personnel. During multiple interviews, students easily could see the connection between their positive behavior that received rewards, and the negative behaviors that had consequences. For instance, one interviewee, when asked why they received a dragon star, responded, “There was a girl who was sitting at lunch by herself. And I asked her to come sit with us; one of the aides gave us all dragon stars” (Zack, 2013 97) This instant recall shows us that students are aware of the behavioral decisions they make due to the school-wide token system that was implemented as part of PBIS. Lastly, for an administrator, implementing PBIS has shown a 19% decrease in the amount of referrals. (Hill, 2013, 34) This means less time conferencing with a parent, making phone calls, and issuing consequences to a student, which can sometimes take up hours of the day.

VI. Conclusion/Summary of "Big Ideas"

As of 2015, over 20,000 schools in the U.S. believe taking the time to implement PBIS is worth it. The big idea is that research suggests, “PBIS implementation has been associated with lower rates of office discipline referrals, increased attendance, higher test scores, fewer referrals to special education, and overall improvement in school climate (Simonsen and Myers, 2015, 53) The basic principles of developing a leadership team, having 80% buy in by the staff, implementing the RTI strategies and progress monitoring for Tier II and III learners, and providing scaffolds and visual reminders of positive behaviors consistently throughout the school year will lead to positive changes in the school emotional and social climate. The social learning theory indicates that as social beings we learn our behaviors through observing others and through processes—hence the reason explicitly teaching behavior is vital to PBIS. Thus, “students will likely imitate positive behaviors by observing praise and avoid behaviors that they have seen lead to negative consequences. (Arnold, 2012, 34)

The reasons for implementing PBIS are very simple, and the defense of its use is included in this writing. Education is simply using the same precautions used by the health industry for years. Health experts recognized hospitals were being over used and decided to develop medicines and procedures to allow people to visit less often. For people who have more chronic issues, more intense interventions are in place to get their needs met (i.e., psychology treatment, therapists, preventative medicine, physical therapy, etc.). Teachers and schools need to be in extra supports for kids that are not simply “healthy” when they enter the classroom. These extra supports are a simple reality of the world we live in, and we provide instruction to those that need extra supports because it is necessary for them with their specific circumstances. The same idea exists with

behavioral analysis –different students have different needs and it is important that they all are accurately identified, treated, and supported so all students can be successful in our schools.

A question to ponder as you leave this report would be, “Are we giving our students the best opportunities for them to be behaviorally and academically successful in our classrooms today?” Many school studies suggests there is a growing achievement gap in U.S. schools, and implementing PBIS is an effective approach to reducing student misbehavior and improving school climate to ensure student success for all pupils.

VII. Additional Resources

For more information about the benefits of implementing PBIS, the best resource is to search the website www.PBIS.org. It provides the ideology behind the program, steps to get it started at your school, and resources that can be used by the leadership team to ensure a smooth transition to a PBIS school. For more information regarding best practices for interventions, the following three websites should be used (Martella, 2013, 355):

1. Best Evidence Encyclopedia: <http://bestevidence.org/>
2. Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/wwb.html>
3. Division of Early Childhood CEC – Recommended Practices: http://www.Dec-sped.org/About_DEC/Recommended_Practices

All of the “references” below used in this report are excellent tools to view how PBIS is being implemented, and why the outcomes associated with the program are worth pursuing. The resources on the final page of this document include the studies completed

in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and Georgia. They also include the three national organizations related to PBIS and RTI: PBIS.org, RTI4Success.org, and RTInetwork.org.

Here's the contact information for these three national organizations:

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Organization: The address and phone number were inaccessible from the website (PBIS.org); However, the contact e-mail address is: tapbis@ku.edu

RTI Action Network: The mailing address is:

National Center for Learning Disabilities
32 Laight Street, Second Floor
New York, NY 10013

No phone number was provided for this non-profit organization.

Center on Response to Intervention: The mailing address is:

American Institutes for Research
1000 Thomas Jefferson St., NW
Washington, DC 20007

No phone number is provided for this organization; However, there is a "contact us" form to fill out located at their website www.rti4success.org

Lastly, the following online resources may provide additional information that can and should be reviewed before implementing PBIS:

Randy Sprick's Safe and Civil Schools: <http://www.safeandcivilschools.com/>

Illinois PBIS Network: <http://pbisillinois.org/>

Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSI):
<http://miblsi.cenmi.org/>

References

1. Arnold, K. (2012). The effectiveness of school-wide positive behavior programs in georgia middle schools (Order No. 3502670). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (993006063). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/993006063?accountid=12598>
2. Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <http://www.rti4success.org/>
3. Feldman, R. (n.d.). RTI Action Network. Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/>
4. Hill, J. M. (2013). Implementation of positive behavior intervention and supports in louisiana (Order No. 3587531). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1427344624). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1427344624?accountid=12598>
5. Martella, R. C., Nelson, R., Merchand-Martella, N. E., & Reilly, M. O. (2012). Comprehensive behavior management: individualized, classroom, and school wide approaches. Los Angeles: Sage.
6. Phillips, O. (2015, March 30). Revolving Door Of Teachers Costs Schools Billions Every Year. Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/03/30/395322012/the-hidden-costs-of-teacher-turnover>
7. Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports - OSEP. (n.d.). Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <http://www.pbis.org/>
8. Shepard, J. M., Carlson, J. S., & Shahidullah, J. D. (2013). Counseling students in levels 2 and 3: a PBIS/RTI guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
9. Simonsen, Brandi, and Diane Myers. Classwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: A Guide to Proactive Classroom Management. New York: The Guilford Press, 2015. Print.
10. Westervelt, E., & Lonsdorf, K. (2016, October 24). What Are The Main Reasons Teachers Call It Quits? Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/10/24/495186021/what-are-the-main-reasons-teachers-call-it-quits>

11. Zack, B. A. C. (2013). A phenomenological study: Students' perceptions of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports in pennsylvania middle schools (Order No. 3603990). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1474901335). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1474901335?accountid=1259>