Building Positive Schoolwide Behavior

A three-tiered system that actively teaches and acknowledges expected behavior has been implemented in more than 7,000 schools.

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T o prevent minor as well as serious problem behavior, educators are turning to a comprehensive preventive approach to discipline commonly referred to as school wide positive behavior support (SWPBS). It is an approach based on the assumption that when faculty and staff members in a school actively teach and acknowledge expected behavior, the proportion of students with serious behavior problems will be reduced and the school's overall climate and achievement will improve.

More than 7,000 schools across the country are actively implementing SWPBS. These schools are reporting reductions in problem behavior, improved perceptions of school safety, and improved academic outcomes.

SWPBS is organized around three main themes: prevention; multilevel support; and data-based decision-making.

Prevention of problem behavior involves:

- Defining and teaching positive behavioral expectations to all students;
- Acknowledging and rewarding expected behavior (e.g., following school rules, positive peer-to-peer interactions, academic effort); and
- Establishing a consistent continuum of consequences for problem behavior.

The focus is on building a positive social climate in which behavioral expectations for students are highly predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored.

Multilevel support is available beyond the prevention level for those students with moderate to severe problem behavior. The greater the student's need for support, the more intense the support provided. Within the SWPBS approach, the principles and procedures of applied behavior analysis guide the process for defining behavioral problems, completing student assessments, and using these assessments to design effective behavior support plans for those students that need them.

Data-based decision-making is a practice that is interwoven throughout SWPBS, and builds on the assumption that the faculty, staff, and family members will be most effective if they have access to regular, accurate information about the behavior of students. The SWPBS approach includes adoption of practical strategies for collecting, summarizing, reporting, and using data on regular cycles, such as counting and categorizing patterns of office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. This form of progress monitoring is used for both initial program design and ongoing assessment of effectiveness.

Evidence suggests that sustained use of SWPBS practices can alter the trajectory of at-risk children toward destructive outcomes, and prevent the onset of risk behavior and academic failure in typically developing children. It is expected that effective and sustained implementation of SWPBS will create a more responsive school climate that supports the twin goals of schooling for all children: academic achievement and social development.

Working With Parents
In addition to its direct benefit on student behavior in school, the SWPBS system creates the context for school-based efforts to promote effective parenting. When school personnel have a shared vision of the kind of social behavior they want to pro-

mote among students, and a shared understanding of the type of social environment that is needed to achieve such behavior, they are in a position to inform and support families in creating the same kind of supportive environment at home.

When educators are clear about how to use rules, positive reinforcement, and mild, consistent negative consequences to support behavior in schools, they are better able to coordinate their efforts with those of parents. As a result, parents will know more about their children's behavior in school and will be able to provide the same supports and consequences that the school is providing.

A Successful SWPBS School

Prevention Elementary School is located in a suburban community in Southern California. There are 625 students in grades K-5, and approximately 50 percent qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch. In the summer of 2005, staff members agreed on the need to improve discipline in the school.

Beginning the process. The process began with a faculty forum where problem behavior, communication with parents, and the implementation of SWPBS were discussed. Following the faculty forum, the staff formed a team of grade-level teachers (one each from grades K-5), a special education teacher, and the principal. They developed a plan for reducing problem behaviors in the school and implemented that plan in the 2006-2007 school year.

The SWPBS team met monthly to develop and adjust the plan. The meetings were used as work sessions where the team developed goals, brought back ideas from grade-level teams regarding problem behaviors, defined the rules and expectations for the school, defined the reward systems, developed lessons for teaching the behavioral expectations to the students, and worked out the logistics of implementing the lessons.

Setting positive school rules. The SWPBS team reviewed discipline referral summaries from the 2004-2005 school year to help determine the areas in which student behavior could be improved. The main discipline difficulties the team wanted to address were:

- Verbal and physical harassment of students;
- Fighting;
- Noncompliance; and
- Class disruption.

Based on these priority behaviors, the team defined the student behaviors that they would like to see increase at the school. These behavior expectations were further refined into three separate rules: Be safe, be respectful, and be responsible.

A small set of topics under each rule was established, and lesson plans to teach students the behavioral expectations were

developed for each topic (see Table 1). Staff members agreed to consistently enforce and reinforce these three basic rules.

Table 1. Behavioral Expectations Developed for Prevention Elementary School

Rule	Lesson Topic
Be respectful	Follow adult directions. Use appropriate language.
Be safe	Respect other's space and belongings. Keep hands and feet to self. Walk, don't run.
Be responsible	Work together and help each other. Be on time. Be prepared.

Teaching the rules. For each rule and topic, the lessons outlined what students were expected to do, how to teach the expected behavior, how to prevent problem behaviors from occurring, how to give both positive and corrective feedback to students, and how to review the behavioral expectations with students regularly. The teaching strategies incorporated into each lesson included an explanation of why the rule is important, examples of the expected behaviors, and practice for the students via brainstorming, games, discussions, and role-playing.

Recognizing and rewarding. The school also introduced "success tickets," which listed all of the school rules. Teachers and staff were given stacks of the tickets and agreed to "catch kids being good" by giving them success tickets and indicating the school rules that they had demonstrated. Students could place their tickets in a bucket in the school cafeteria for a drawing at the end of the week. The staff also designed several other ways to recognize and reward good behavior in the school, including good news referrals, where a student could be sent to principal for demonstrating good behavior; praise notes from the teacher; and positive phone calls home by teachers.

Monitoring progress. Staff members were given feedback on reductions or changes in discipline referrals at their monthly meetings. Data about student behavior were summarized to evaluate progress and drive the further development of intervention efforts. Patterns of discipline, including good news referrals and success ticket tallies, were charted and discussed at the monthly SWPBS team meetings. The following week, a summary of the data was presented to the grade-level teams, where teachers had the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas.

In addition, school faculty members were surveyed at mid-year about school safety, student behavior, student progress toward academic goals, and the frequency in which they implemented lessons and engaged in activities for SWPBS. Overall, the majority agreed that the school was a safer place for students and that student behavior had improved compared with the previous year. Further, 100 percent agreed that providing recognition to students for positive behavior had a beneficial impact.

Measuring Success. In the first year, discipline referrals were reduced by 35 percent, and an additional 20 percent in the current school year. Suspensions were reduced by more than 55 percent. Students and staff members also reported feeling safer and happier with the school under the SWPBS program.

Note
See **www.pbis.org** for more information about schoolwide positive behavior support.

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On the Same Page

Here are suggested questions that principals and teachers can use to spark discussion about how to apply the points made in this article to their particular schools.

1. What are the most common forms of problem behavior that our students display?
2. What is our school's current approach to mitigating problem behavior?
3. What are strategies that our school can implement to create a more positive social climate?
4. How can we get parents more involved in preventing problem behavior?