Research Highlights

Topic: Positive Behavior Support


BOTTOM LINE

Direct observations, interviews with school staff, and data on discipline issues revealed patterns of challenging behavior and formed the basis for developing a schoolwide positive behavior support (PBS) plan for a middle school in Kansas City, Kansas. Schoolwide PBS is applied on three levels: universally across an entire school and for all students, for students in smaller groups, and individually for just one person at a time. The approach to schoolwide PBS is discussed with regard to assessment, intervention, and how it is grounded in the policy mandates of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994, as well as the 1997 reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

TIPS

- Use observation, interviews with staff, and examination of existing data on discipline matters to identify problem behavior in schools and develop a plan for adopting PBS.

- Implement steps for developing schoolwide PBS including (a) becoming familiar with currently available resources, (b) devoting time and resources to professional development, and (c) intensifying the application of schoolwide PBS strategies in urban schools.

- Clearly identify and communicate common expectations of positive behavior standards for the entire school, so that they can be reinforced through PBS and taught directly in the classroom.
- Provide opportunities for practicing both acceptable, “cool” behavior and behavior that is “uncool,” meaning inappropriate or an impediment to learning. Simultaneously establish procedures for rewarding and recognizing positive, acceptable behavior.

- Institute appropriate scope and intensity of PBS for students according to their needs, including more intensive support for students for whom universal or group support alone is not sufficient to reduce or stop challenging behavior.

- Take advantage of the many resources listed in the article including those on the following websites: www.pbis.org; www.rtcpbs.org; www.cec.air.org.

---

**KEY FINDINGS**

- Implementation of positive behavior support (PBS) at a Kansas middle school was achieved on all three levels of universal, group, and individual support. The five universal expectations that guided PBS at the school were: be safe, be cooperative, be ready to learn, be respectful, and be responsible.

- At the beginning of this study, approximately 2/3 of the student body exhibited serious problem behavior in contrast to about 1/4 in most schools. Over two years of introducing PBS in the school, out-of-school placements remained constant, but office discipline referrals decreased by 19%; in-school conferences to discuss behavior problems decreased by 23%, time-outs went down by 30%, in-school suspensions were reduced by 12%, and 1-5 day suspensions decreased by 60%.

- When the behavior of some students is not changed through universal support, group support may be appropriate. Its tools include self-monitoring, self-management, and the use of check in/check out systems.

- Individual PBS is the most intense form of PBS. It can be a part of a student’s IEP and is typically for students with disabilities who exhibit problem behaviors. Individual PBS has been proven to be equally beneficial for students with a single or multiple disabilities and others who do not qualify for special education.

- Tools for developing a PBS plan may include not only the IEP and a functional behavior assessment (FBA), but also make use of document reviews, direct observation, and interview questionnaires.

- In this study, PBS significantly reduced behaviors that are known to impede learning. It was demonstrated that the effectiveness of PBS is enhanced when
  - support(s) are based on FBA
  - support(s) are based on FBA
  - the people around the individual with the problem behavior adapt
KEY FINDINGS cont.

- their own behavior to harmonize with his or her changed behavior
- the individual’s environment is changed to provide a more supportive and better setting that is conducive to behavior change
- significant people in a person’s life, and not stranger’s, implement it.

- PBS team members can be most effective when they have comprehensive knowledge of policies covering many social issues, because this makes it possible for them to provide individual support across multiple settings, including home, school, and community environments.

METHOD

- Document reviews, direct observation, and interview questionnaires formed the basis of the PBS planning and implementation.

- A case study within a case study, in this case focusing on an 8th-grader with autism and the urban middle school he attends, examined how PBS was implemented in his school and home.

- The PBS research focus was on school-wide and system-wide models, co-existing on continua of scope and intensity, which researchers examined.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS


*This research was conducted in collaboration with the Beach Center on Disability. It was funded by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Families of Children with Disabilities of the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research (H133B980050) and private endowments. For more information, contact the Beach Center on Disability at 1200 Sunny Side Avenue, 3111 Haworth Hall, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-7534. Phone: 785-864-7600. Email: Beachcenter@ku.edu. Website: www.beachcenter.org.*

Permission granted to reproduce and distribute this research brief.
Please credit the Beach Center on Disability.