

Research Highlights

Topic: Positive Behavior Support

Warren, J.S., Edmonson, H.M., Griggs, P., Lassen, S.R., McCart, A., Turnbull, A.P., & Sailor, W. (2003). Urban applications of school-wide positive behavior support: Critical issues and lessons learned. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 5(2) 80-91.

BOTTOM LINE

Positive behavior support strategies utilized in non-urban schools are not sufficient to ensure systems level change and overall school improvement in urban settings. In order to be effective, several systems-level factors need to be improved for sustainability of effective school reform efforts. These include, but are not limited to: (a) service integration, (b) coordinated family support, (c) school, family, and community partnerships, and (d) joint responsibilities for developing positive community contexts. Recommendations for integrating school, community, families, students, and business into partnerships are believed to help lead PBS interventions that are more successful and sustainable in inner-city communities.

TIPS

- Address systems-level issues that inner city schools face, such as poverty, violence, and high rates of problem behavior both in and out of school in positive behavior support efforts.
- Adopt schoolwide expectations of being: ready to learn, responsible, and respectful for all students, especially those who attend inner-city schools.
- Integrate teacher and school “buy-in” for universal, group, and individual positive behavior support into the school improvement plan.
- Support school improvement efforts and building community partnerships by conducting stakeholder meetings.
- Create oversight committees that are ethnically diverse and representative of the community population who are critical to the success of positive behavior support efforts.

KEY FINDINGS

- Office discipline referral data from three middle inner city schools of 1,971 students compared to data from 26 middle schools of 15,713 students revealed:
 - ◆ Three inner city middle schools: (a) 38% of students received no office referrals or one office referral, and (b) 62% of students received up to two to 15 office referrals within one school year.
 - ◆ 26 middle schools: (a) 76% of students received either no office referrals or one office referral, and (b) 24% of students received up to two to six or more office referrals in one school year.
- Universal, group, and individual supports served as a framework to increase resource coordination and decrease duplication of the 42 programs that were in place regarding behavioral issues.
- Allocation of resources was met by a variety of agencies and programs including, but not limited to local mental health agencies, Title I school improvement monies, and local businesses.
- The top ranked problem behaviors in schools were seeking attention and escaping difficult tasks.
- After implementing school-wide positive behavior support at all levels, school (described in the case study) data revealed a decrease in office referral data and short term suspensions. However, when direct intervention was faded during the second year, office referral data increased most likely due to:
 - ◆ several of the 42 programs that were in place to address problem behavior were punitive in nature.
 - ◆ implementation of mandatory school uniforms.
 - ◆ management level issues relating to the reward system.
- School and university partnerships increase coordination of efforts among stakeholders and provide needed resources (e.g., staff inservice training) in improving school climate and impact school level changes.
- Effective service integration in urban schools will give families access to needs supports and services.
- Schools need to consider the family as a unity of support rather than the individual student by building on family strengths and preferences.
- Students need to be included as partners in the decision-making process for building school-family-community partnerships.

KEY FINDINGS cont.

- Joint partnerships with students, families, schools, and community members can be effective in developing responsive communities through shared responsibilities and resources.

METHOD

- A case study was used to demonstrate the impact positive behavior support had on performance and graduation rates of students from the sixth grade.
- Office referral data were collected and summarized from four middle schools in Wyandotte County over the course of five years.
- Middle school demographic data were collected for two years that represented the following constellation of the student population with an average yearly enrollment of 724 students. Student demographic data revealed:
 - ◆ 40% African American
 - ◆ 32% Hispanic
 - ◆ 20% White
 - ◆ 8% Asian or Pacific Islanders
 - ◆ .001% Native American.
- Teacher surveys were conducted to determine the functions of the behaviors exhibited by students and overall school climate.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Graves, B., & Schalansky, J. (1999). *Connect Kansas: Supporting communities that care. Wyandotte County data and planning guide*. Topeka, KS: Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services.

Kotlowitz, A. (1998). Breaking the silence: Growing up in today's inner city. In H.I. McHubbin, E.A. Thompson, A.I. Thompson, & J.A. Futrell (Eds.), *Resiliency in African American families* (pp. 3-15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lawson, H.A., & Sailor, W. (2000). Integrating services, collaborating, and developing connections with schools. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 33(2), 1-22.

Turnbull, A., Edmondson, H., Griggs, P., Wickham, D., Sailor, W., Beech, S., Freeman, R., Guess, D., Hale, N., Lassen, S., McCart, A., Riffel, L., Schmerchek, D., Turnbull, H. R., Warren, J., & Wilcox, B. (2002). A blueprint for schoolwide positive behavioral support: Full implementation of three components. *Exceptional Children*, 68(3), 337-402.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Positive Behavior Support (UNI 17495) and the OSEP National Center on Technical Assistance (DED17541). For more information, contact the Beach Center on Disability at 1200 Sunnyside Avenue, 3111 Haworth Hall, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-7534. Phone: 785.864.7600. Email: Beachcenter@ku.edu Website: www.beachcenter.org

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