A STUDY OF THE NEWLY IMPLEMENTATION OF A SCHOOL WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT SYSTEM

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if using the newly implemented Positive Behavior Support system, PBS, decreased the number of office referrals. The research includes finding the answer to the question, “Is there a difference between the pre-behavior system and the new implementation of the PBS system?” The research was conducted using the fall, 2010 semesters number of office referrals not using PBS and comparing that data with the fall, 2011 semesters number of office referrals that used PBS. The findings were analyzed through Microsoft Excel and A Statistical Program (ASP) software. Findings indicate that there was a significant difference with dealing with office referrals that did not use the school implementation of PBS, and the one that did. Five out of the thirteen elementary schools began to pilot this program, which the district may want to consider implementing this system within all schools and train staff on using this not only in the school, but in their classroom.
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background, Issues, and Concerns

A Title I, suburban elementary school, located in the Midwest, in a district with an exceptional reputation is under study. This particular elementary school comes from a large school district that has over 15,000 students enrolled, which consists of three high schools, four middle schools, one freshmen center, and thirteen elementary schools. In regards to the elementary school under study, over 400 students have been enrolled since 2004. This elementary school is a Title I school that has a plethora of diverse parents and students, as well as being the one elementary school in the district to house the emotionally disturbed students. In 2011, the school was made up of 80.1% white, 9.8% African American, and the demographics keep getting smaller from there. Also, in 2011, the free and reduced lunch rate was 31.7% and the attendance rate was over 95%. The student to teacher ratio is 16:1. This school is implementing a school wide positive behavior support system, which will be compared to the previous year where no school wide system was in place. This analysis will be determined by the number of office referrals to differentiate between having a school wide positive behavior support system verses not having one.

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation is to determine if the use of a school-wide positive behavior support system is affecting the number of office referrals.

School Policy to be informed by Study

This study is going to be used to inform a Title 1, suburban school and school district about adopting Positive Behavior Support, or PBS, as a school wide, and most importantly, a district wide behavior practice that influences achievement.
**Conceptual Underpinning**

It can be theorized that student achievement goes hand in hand with student behavior. When a student is behaving appropriately, more than likely, their academic achievement will be a success. Therefore, all schools should have and want a school wide behavior system that makes student achievement a success. Positive behavior support, or also known as PBS, is just that. PBS is a system that primarily focuses on setting a positive climate for all students. This method of positive behavior directs individuals of all ages in the right path to success, not only when it comes to academics in school, but in life in general. In theory, PBS will increase student achievement.
Statement of the Problem

Throughout the school, there is a lack of student effort, focus, and determination to be successful at this Title I school.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to detect how the new implementation of PBS (positive behavior support system) was affecting school wide behavior in a Title I school.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a difference in office referrals between the pre-behavior system and the new implementation of the PBS system?

Null Hypothesis:

H_0: There is no difference in behavior when the implementation of PBS is in place and when it is not.

Anticipated Benefits of Study:

The result of this study will inform schools whether or not the implementation of PBS will make a dramatic decrease in regards to behavior issues school wide, which will affect the teachers, students and of course, student learning.

Definition of Terms:

PBS – Positive Behavior Support System

SW-PBS – School-Wide Positive Behavior Support System

EBD – Emotional and Behavior Disorders

NIDRR – National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

RRRTC – Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
DESE – Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education

Summary

This Midwestern, Title I, suburban elementary school under study consists of an extremely diverse socio economic status with a wide range of students. This research investigates how the new implementation of a school wide positive behavior support system affects the number of office referrals. The research looks at whether there is a difference in the number of office referrals between the pre-behavior system and the new implementation of PBS.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When attending schools, it is clearly obvious that students are there to master specific expectations within the areas of reading, writing, math, science, social studies and much more. However, after students complete school and continue on to the next phase in their life, whether that is more schooling, a job, traveling or family – “each individual must be able to interact in a group, function in a work environment, and be an engaged and effective member of a broader community” (School, 2008). With that, who is responsible for teaching these life skills? It has been assumed that social skills should be, and are, taught at home. Unfortunately, that is not the case in all households. Therefore, schools have to teach those skills, as well as all the academic expectations they are required to teach. That is an immense amount of teaching to do by the teachers, as well as a lot of learning to be done by the students.

However, one of the most evident tasks teachers, administrators and classmates have to deal with within a school setting is misbehaved students. “Problem behaviors, such as aggression, defiance, truancy, property destruction, disruption, and self-injury remain a major challenge in schools and a dramatic barrier to academic achievement” (Horner, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004, pg 2). To teach, a teacher needs a functioning class where structure is set in stone and students are well behaved. Unfortunately, teachers do not have that. Misbehavior in schools has been going on forever and is not going away. How can teachers teach with a chaotic class? Most importantly, how can students learn?

Normally, when a student misbehaves, the action the teacher takes is to eliminate the problem, which sends the message that this inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. This elimination process of behavior is exclusionary. Students are usually moved to a safe seat,
buddy room, principal’s office, or even suspension when the specific behavior occurs. However, with moving children to a “special” place to ensure that the student changes their behavior, it can sometimes do more harm than good (Horner et. al, 2004). It is safe the say that the majority of students, especially the ones who are identified with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD) need the structure aspect of school and consistency to be in the same room throughout the day. Students do not benefit from transferring from room to room. When a student is removed from their “typical” social interactions that occur in their regular education classroom; that is definitely doing more damage than good. When transitioning from room to room - what is the student getting out of it? Most importantly, what are they learning from it?

When entering a math classroom, one should observe a teacher teaching a math concept by introducing the skill, modeling it, having the students practice the skill independently, and then revisiting the concept at a later day. When a teacher needs to teach a writing skill they teach it, practice it, and reteach it. When a child misbehaves, the teacher, normally, removes the student and expects the student to know what to do different next time. Why is it when a child misbehaves, the teacher does not teach that particular behavior skill? Just like every other concept teachers teach, the teacher needs to teach the behavior skill, practice it, and revisit the skill later on to ensure the student grasps the concept that was taught. It has been found that exclusionary approaches have never been affective and as the number of students with problem behavior has increased, schools face an overwhelming demand from teachers and families to respond. In a variety of ways policy-makers, school board administrators, and teachers are being asked to make schools safe, positive, predictable places of learning. Increasingly and ironically, schools that
do not invest in building a positive social culture have difficulty achieving the academic standards that are now expected (Horner et al., 2004).

Therefore, a School-Wide Positive Behavior Support System (SW-PBS) is extremely beneficial, not only in an individual classroom, but in a school building, and even district wide due to the fact that it only practices positive reinforcement.

Positive Behavior Support, or PBS, is “an empirically validated, function-based approach to eliminate challenging behaviors and replace them with prosocial skills” (Cohn, 2001, pg. 1). PBS is intended to decrease the need for punishment or suspension. PBS focuses on “changing environmental variables such as the physical setting, task demands, curriculum, instructional pace and individualized reinforcement” (Cohn, 2001, pg. 1).

Another defines PBS as “an applied science that uses educational methods to expand an individual’s behavior repertoire and systems change methods to redesign an individual’s living environment to first enhance the individual’s quality of life and, second, to minimize his or her problem behavior” (Johnston, Foxx, Jacobson, Green, Mulick, 2006, pg.51 ). PBS is intended to primarily focus on the positives and wants to catch students who do the right thing, not focusing on the negatives. It is an approach that in essence, sort of blends the values of the rights of people and learning how behavior changes occur. “These values include commitments to resect for the individual, meaningful outcomes, social validation, dignity, normalization, inclusion, person-centered planning, self-determination, and stakeholder participation” (Johnston et al., 2006, pg. 54).

An additional source defined PBS as a “researched-based, highly effective, approach to creating, teaching, and reinforcing students’ social, emotional, and academic learning skills that
Positive Behavior Support improves and sustains academic achievement and mental and emotional wellbeing for all students” (School, 2008). PBS is a cost-effective system that forms a social climate needed for the entire school building to be an effective learning atmosphere for all students. It has been said that PBS, “eliminates barriers to learning, creates and maintains a safe and effective learning environment in schools, and ensures that all students have the social and emotional skills needed to succeed in school and beyond” (School, 2008). With using PBS, the goal for teachers and administrators is to determine what is triggering the change of behavior? In essence, PBS wants to notice and define what the changing factor of the behavior is, before the behavior even occurs.

PBS was developed from 1987 to 1992 by the U.S. Department of Educational National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) grant of $670,000 for a “Rehabilitation Research and Training center on Community-References Technologies for Nonaversive Behavior Management.” Several universities were given the opportunity to test this grant. After several years of testing, the center later became known as Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Positive Behavior Support. The primary determination of this grant was to create an effective, practical, and empirically validated technique for improving provision for individuals with disabilities (Johnston et al., 2006). The mission statement that came about states that, “schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining school-wide disciplinary practices” (Johnston et al., 2006, pg.5).

PBS has countless benefits. First, PBS is intended to target an entire school. As well, PBS targets each and every student, not just those individuals already diagnosed with a mental health, emotional support, or social skills needs. When an entire school is using the same behavior management system, it gets every staff member, student, and parent on board to support
this school wide behavior system. With that, the positivity and academics throughout the classroom and school building increases significantly.

PBS operates completely differently from schools that use the traditional discipline methods. First, PBS is all about the positive. When beginning the school year off with using PBS, schools spend a significant amount of time each day defining and teaching positive social expectations. However, schools that use the traditional approach spend the first couple weeks going over the student code of conduct and rules, as well as the consequences if a student breaks the rules. A PBS school acknowledges and rewards positive behavior. In comparison, a traditional school using the problem behavior and addresses the issue in a negative manner. A PBS school collects data on a regular basis and uses that data collection to inform their school and discusses ways to detect the problem prior to it happening. On the other hand, the traditional school creates systems and consequences for student behavior without the use of data. A PBS school provides a continuum of intensive, individual intervention for students, as a traditional school has no system for providing individual interventions (School, 2008).

Another vital benefit that PBS has is that “students thrive academically and behaviorally in a positive school climate that promotes resiliency and social emotional learning” (School, 2008). It is the duty of each administrator and teacher, as well as each school district and school building to change this negative culture schools give off and transform them into a positive atmosphere. With PBS being implemented in schools, it creates a climate where students have “a clear sense of what is expected of them and where they can receive needed supports” (School, 2008).
In regards to expense, PBS has some initial costs in the beginning, especially if PBS is not applied throughout the entire state. When implementation occurs, each school will need to develop a leadership or problem solving team that consists of a mixture of administrators, teachers, and other staff. Schools will have to cover the costs of time missed by these individuals for attending professional development meetings in regards to PBS. When the second year of PBS hits and more districts throughout the state begin to pick up on this positive approach, the costs will decrease due to the fact that districts can begin to hire their own PBS coaches to educate their own district staff, rather than hiring outside the district. After that second year of implementation, no additional expenses should be needed to keep the program up and running. In fact, the study at Pennsylvania State saw that when PBS was fully implemented, schools noticed “a significant drop in the problem student behavior and a commensurate reduction in staff time needed to respond to these behaviors” (School, 2008). Since time is considered money at times, that is a considerable savings.

In regards to how PBS is structured, PBS is broken up into a three-tier approach of behavior support to “proactively address the social behavior needs of all students and prevent social and academic failure” (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008, pg. 33). The primary tier, or first tier, is created to support each and every student and staff member in all surroundings of the school building. This first tier of PBS has meaningful outcomes for the majority of individuals, and when implemented appropriately, Simonsen states that “schools can expect most students (approximately 89%, 74%, and 71% of elementary, middle, and high school students, respectively) to respond to the primary tier intervention” (Simonsen et al., 2008, pg. 33). However, even with an efficient tier one in place, a group of students will require additional behavior support, which is where the second tier comes into play.
The secondary tier, or tier two, is “designed to support a targeted group of students who have not responded to primary tier intervention, but whose behaviors do not pose a serious risk to themselves or others” (Simonsen et al., 2008, pg. 33). Tier two targets individuals who need additional support, but do not have behavior that poses a serious threat to themselves and others. To monitor the progress within tier two, data is collected on a regular basis in regards to office referrals, points for desired behavior, attendance, etc. When implementing the secondary tier, practices primarily focus on intensifying the support from tier one, which includes providing more intensive social skills instruction and delivering more frequent reinforcement (Simonsen et al., 2008).

The tertiary tier, or tier three, is created to support individual students “who require additional support to benefit from secondary or primary tier invention or whose behaviors are serious enough to require more immediate and intensive support” (Simonsen et al., 2008, pg. 34). Interventions at tier three are extremely molded for the individual, which all the data collected will be specialized for each student in tier three (Simonsen et al., 2008).
When conducting a cost benefit analysis for schools implementing SWPBS, Simonsen et al. (2008) found that administrators saved $15^{3/4}$ days of administrator time on discipline issues and students saved $79^{1/2}$ days of their instructional time. The authors of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports in *Teaching Exceptional Children* stated, “schools need to identify observable, measureable, specific, and achievable annual outcomes, which will become the metric by which success an intervention is judged (Simonsen et al., 2008, pg. 34). It is evident that PBS does just that.

When beginning the implementation progress within a building, there are key factors that need to be done prior to implementation. First, schools need to establish what they want their students to achieve, which this should parallel the schools improvement plan. Schools need to create observable, measurable, specific, and achievement outcomes, which will show the success...
of the behavior intervention. For example, outcomes could include a reduction in percentage of yearly discipline office referrals (Simonsen et al., 2008).

After establishing the meaningful outcomes, schools need to identify and invest in a school-wide system. As mentioned early, throughout each building, a team of professionals needs to be set in place. This team should include a school administrator, a group of teachers who represent certified staff throughout the building, a representative of a special service teacher (counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, etc.), as well as a member of support staff (paraprofessional, secretary, etc.). All of these members should be a positive influence throughout the school and are willing to get all the staff on board to participate. It is crucial for schools to secure at least 80% buy-in, or contract from the faculty and staff to implement SWPBS successfully (Simonsen et al., 2008).

Once a respectable team is established, schools need to select and implement practices. The PBS team, or the entire school, needs to come up with at least three to five positively stated school wide expectations. These rules, or behavior guidelines, will be used throughout the entire school to ensure that desired behavior from all students. These expectations could consist of be respectful, be responsible, or be safe. These expectations should be located on posters throughout the entire building – in classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, gym, bathroom, bus, etc. Students should know what is expected of them at all times. After setting the expectations, the PBS team needs to develop lesson plans to teach each expectation within each setting. Each lesson plan should state the rule and routine and provide students with the description of what it looks and sounds like to follow each rule. After teaching the lesson, the students should independently practice each expectation (Simonsen et al., 2008).
Following the teaching of the expectations, schools need to celebrate successes with PBS. When an administrator, teacher, or staff member sees an individual following one of the expectations, they should be rewarded. Also, parents, as well as the community need to be informed about SWPBS. Sharing the schools successes with parents, not only makes them feel more confident within their child’s school, but gets their involvement with PBS implemented at home as well. Sharing the news with parents could be done within newsletters, PTA meetings, PTO meetings, or even having a school assembly about the new behavior implementation and inviting the public to be a part of it. This positive publicity helps get the energy of SWPBS up and running and may even generate donations that the school can invest within the implementation process (Simonsen et al., 2008).

As the implementation of PBS gets set in place, the PBS team needs to make it a priority to collect data along the way on, consistently. Data should be looked at on a regular basis after collection, and that data should be used to base decisions off of. After data is reviewed, it should be shared with the faculty. Faculty should know what is going well and what needs to be modified to improve the achievement of this behavior program. Most importantly, successes should be shared with the students, staff, parents, and other community members.
RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The number of office referrals served as the research design in this study. The alpha level was set at 0.25 for all tests with this research. The dependent variable is the number of discipline office referrals, as the independent variable is the pre-behavior system and the new implementation of the school-wide positive behavior support system.

Study Group Description

The study group for this research consisted of a Title I, suburban elementary school in the Midwest that contains over 400 elementary students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. The numbers of teachers that serve in this building is 23.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Office referrals were collected with the new implementation of the school-wide positive behavior support system and compared to the office referrals from the previous year, when there was not a school wide support system in place.

Statistical Analysis Methods

A Statistical Package (ASP) software was used to complete the statistical calculations in this study. A descriptive T-test was calculated to come up with the findings. Additionally, Microsoft Excel was used to compile some totals used in the research.
FINDINGS

To detect how the new implementation of PBS was affecting school wide behavior in a Title I school, the last two fall semesters were compared. The fall of 2010, which PBS was not being used, was compared with the fall of 2011, which had the new implementation of PBS set in place.

Table 1

2010-2011 Office Referrals T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-Test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>22.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12.83</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant when p ≤ 0.25

Table 1 above shows the t-test of office referrals for the fall of 2010 and the fall of 2011 at a Title 1 school in a suburban area. For the fall of 2010, without PBS being used, the mean was found to be 22.33. For the fall of 2011, with PBS set in place, the mean was found to be 12.83. Mean D was found to be 9.5 and the t-Test was found to be 1.68. The degrees of freedom (df) was found to be 10. The p-value was found to be 0.12. As shown in table 1, the t-test indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected, due to the fact that the p-value, 0.12, is less than the alpha level, 0.25. That means there is a significant difference in office referrals when it comes to using PBS and not having PBS implemented.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Office Referrals</th>
<th>Fall 2010 (No PBS)</th>
<th>Fall 2011 (With PBS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>134</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the total number of office referrals broken down in each month from the fall of 2010 without PBS and the total number of office referrals from the fall of 2011 with PBS in place. The table reveals that when PBS is implemented, the number of office referrals decreases dramatically.

Graph 1

Going along with table 2, the graph above displays the total number of office referrals broken down in months from the fall of 2010 without PBS and the total number of office referrals from
the fall of 2011 with PBS in place. Graph 1 makes it known that when PBS is implemented, the number of office referrals drops dramatically.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Fall 2010 (No PBS)</th>
<th>Fall 2011 (With PBS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the total number of office referrals broken down by grade level from the fall of 2010 without PBS and the total number of office referrals from the fall of 2011 with PBS in place. Yet again, the table above table conveys that when PBS is applied, the number of office referrals is reduced tremendously.
Graph 2

Going along with table 3, the graph above displays the total number of office referrals broken down by grade level from the fall of 2010 without PBS and the total number of office referrals from the fall of 2011 with PBS in place. Graph 2 makes it known that when PBS is implemented, the number of office referrals drops dramatically.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The null hypothesis stated that there is not a difference in behavior when the implementation of PBS is in place and when it is not. The results of this study rejected the null hypothesis, which indicated that there is in fact a significant difference in behavior with implementation of PBS in place. When looking at the number of office referrals from the fall of 2010 without PBS in place compared to the number of office referrals from the fall of 2011 with PBS implemented, there was a dramatic decrease in office referrals. With that, it is evident that PBS does not only work, but proves the conceptual underpinning. This study found that PBS has a definite positive influence on achievement.

PBS sets a positive, warming environment that meets the needs of all individuals, which pushes each student to their best, not only in a school setting, but in life as well. It teaches students those life skills that matter in the long run, which makes individuals successful after the years following school. PBS has “clear and measurable outcomes, collects and use data to guide their decisions; implements relevant, evidence based practices, and invests in systems that will ensure that practices are implemented with fidelity and sustained overtime” (Simonsen et al., 2008, pg. 33).

The school district of this Title 1, suburban elementary school is highly encouraged to consider implementing PBS throughout the entire district. PBS has made such an impact on one school, that it could be a major implementation that could trigger a definite increase in achievement and success district wide. For the implementation of PBS to be utilized to the best of its ability, the schools would need to take time to train all staff members. Administrators, teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and every other important staff member that makes a difference in a school building, would need to be professionally trained on how to
properly partake in using PBS in the classroom, as well as the school building. It would be imperative that new adults beginning to implement this system know that this positive structure takes several years to be completely trained on.

An additional study could be done to compare PBS at an elementary level to PBS at a secondary level. This study only focused on the elementary level, but could be interesting to compare the different levels. Also, a study could be done to compare PBS in the regular classroom to a special needs classroom. It would be valuable to see if PBS made such a drastic impact in that area as it did at the elementary level.
REFERENCES


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