I will not talk in class.   I will not talk in class.

DOING
DISCIPLINE
DIFFERENTLY

PREVIEW

Reactive and exclusionary approaches to discipline are common in secondary schools but do not improve behavior or ensure safety.

A tiered strategy that combines response to intervention with positive behavior support is more effective.

Schoolwide interventions improve overall school climate and more targeted assistance is available for those students who need more support.

Children and misbehavior go hand in hand—reread *Huckleberry Finn* if you're not convinced. Misbehavior in schools has been a concern since public education began, and school personnel have long debated the nature of the problem and its possible solutions. Throughout history, however, not much has changed: the majority of school-based efforts to manage misbehavior have been reactive—such as corporal punishment and detention—and exclusionary—such as time-outs and expulsions.

Reactive and exclusionary approaches are especially prevalent in secondary schools. High schools, in particular, rely heavily on strategies that involve campus security officers, drug tests, and metal detectors. Although such techniques are popular, research indicates that they have been highly ineffective in improving safety or discipline (Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998; Loeber & Farrrington, 1998).

Punishment has rarely changed student behavior. And in some cases, the severe consequences that are delivered

By Randy Sprick

to students may inadvertently encourage them to leave the education system entirely. It is difficult to pin down an exact number, but it is generally agreed that 25%–30% of U.S. students leave high school before graduation. This statistic highlights a failure in the U.S. education system and emphasizes the inability of educators to prepare all their students to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. It isn't possible to punish students into wanting to stay in school and strive for academic achievement.

So what can educators do? Start with the research. Over the past 30 years, studies have indicated that school climate has a direct bearing on the behavior and academic achievement of students (Blum, 2007; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Freiberg, 1999; Good & Weinstein, 1986; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989; Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980; Rutter, 1983). So let's begin by transforming the climate of the nation's schools.

PBS MODELS

Best Behavior : Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools. 2005. J. Sprague & A. Golly. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

Safe & Civil Schools
www.safeandcivilschools.com

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support
www.pbis.org/main.htm

Project Achieve
www.projectachieve.info

A Two-Pronged Approach

Research highlights two promising models that schools can combine to improve climate and discipline for all students (Peterson, 2005; Coleman, Buysse, & Neitzel, 2006). If schools apply scientifically derived methods to create safer, more positive school climates through positive behavior support (PBS) and combine that effort with changes in the way they deliver services to at-risk students through response to intervention (RTI), they can reduce student misbehavior and increase student responsibility, motivation, and academic achievement.

The combined model enables schools to change authoritarian, punitive, and unsupportive climates into collegial, welcoming, and supportive ones, thereby giving students a greater sense of connection, motivating them to perform at higher levels, fostering responsibility and respectfulness, and catching the 25%–30% of students who are currently falling through the gaping chasms that are blithely referred to as "cracks."

Positive Behavior Support

"PBS" is a broad, generic term that describes a set of strategies that are designed to improve behavioral success by employing nonpunitive, proactive, systematic techniques that are exercised consistently over time. Those techniques involve manipulating settings, structures, and systems to facilitate positive behavior change. PBS can involve procedures at the school, the classroom, and the individual levels. The most essential feature is that more time, effort, staff development, and financial resources should be directed toward proactive, positive, and instructional approaches than to reactive, negative, and punitive ones.

Across the country, many schools and districts are using various models of PBS that rely on school-based data to set goals for improvement and then to devise and implement preventive interventions (e.g., explicitly teaching expectations for student behavior in common areas, providing better adult supervision). One essential characteristic of any PBS model is that a representative leadership team guides the design, implementation, and continued maintenance of positive improvement efforts. Every year, the team guides all key stakeholders in systems-level improvements and in designing better and more efficient delivery of individualized interventions for particular high-needs students, which is better known as "RTI."

Response to Intervention

RTI is an organized, coordinated prevention and intervention effort that enables schools to identify the kind of support that struggling students need and to provide that support as early as possible with a level of intensity that matches student need. Although RTI was originally associated with academic issues, there is a growing recognition that the concepts apply to behavior as well. An RTI framework is multitiered, usually with three tiers through which a struggling student receives services and undergoes interventions at increasing levels of intensity. In each tier, progress monitoring enables a team to determine the progress an individual student is making and whether that student should move to a more intensive tier. Interventions must be research based and they must be implemented with fidelity.

In an academic setting, the first or universal tier is where schools ensure that the instruction provided to all students has been scientifically proven to advance academic achievement. Several times each year, students are assessed. Any student who fails the assessments may be referred to the next tier.

The second tier involves more intensive intervention, such as small group instruction or a more intensive instructional program, which may be provided by a general education teacher or by another school staff member who has the appropriate specialized expertise.

The third tier helps students with chronic, complex problem behavior that is nonresponsive to the collective interventions provided in the first two tiers. At this stage, functional behavioral assessment; individual behavior support plans; and in some cases, multi-agency involvement are required.

Forging a New Solution

Applying the attributes of RTI to PBS strategies offers schools the best chance of providing a quality education to

every student by ensuring that they address the needs of all students, even those who are currently falling through the cracks.

Tier One
To successfully implement a RTI-for-behavior model, a school must start with a strong foundation: a schoolwide PBS strategy that creates an orderly, positive environment for the maximum number of students. This includes all of the school's efforts to improve safety, climate, discipline, motivation, and school connectedness. As part of this universal component, all teachers should be trained to implement a set of simple, effective individual interventions that they can use when any student appears to need individualized help with behavior or motivation.

For example, one such intervention is a planned discussion during which the teacher confers with a student about a particular concern and together they develop a plan for resolving it. Often behavior problems result because a student doesn't understand what is expected. This intervention allows a teacher to respectfully demonstrate his or her concern about the problem behavior and at the same time display interest in the student's well-being. Planned discussion is quick and easy to implement and can have a positive impact on just about any behavior.

Beyond the schoolwide implementation of PBS strategies, schools must incorporate a systematic process for early identification of those students who are not responding to tier one strategies and interventions. This behavior screening can consist of paying attention to red flags—predefined criteria that illustrate a student's need for targeted interventions, such as chronic absenteeism, failing grades, and disciplinary referrals. If a student has more than three disciplinary referrals in a semester, for example, the system automatically brings the situation to the attention of an intervention team that reviews the data to determine whether different interventions can be applied at the universal level or whether the student should move to a subsequent tier.

Tier Two
Tier two interventions provide assistance to students who require more support than tier one systems can supply. Examples of tier two interventions include social skills instruction, check-in/check-out systems, mentoring programs, meaningful school-based jobs for students, and academic support.

When choosing interventions, schools must rely on data to analyze which interventions will best address the needs of each student in the group. Even though a particular intervention is supported by research, it may be ineffective if it doesn't match the individual needs of the student.

Tier Three
Tier three provides the most intensive set of interventions and includes increasingly extensive assessments and support plans for the most challenging students. Usually at this stage, a school-based intervention team develops and implements a behavioral intervention plan that is based on a functional behavioral assessment. Occasionally, depending on individual student variables, an intervention team may decide to incorporate community-based service providers—medical professionals, mental health providers, social workers, and so on—into the team to provide wraparound support. As in all RTI models, the team relies on a constant flow of data to monitor plan implementation and student response to the behavioral intervention and to guide planning for ongoing support. In addition, as characteristic of RTI, any intervention attempted must have been proven effective by research and the intervention must be implemented as designed.

Is It That Simple?
All of this seems fairly straightforward and logical. But implementing RTI for behavior presents challenges—especially in secondary schools.

The foundational components of a universal system of PBS are the same in secondary schools as they are in elementary schools and include:
- Clearly defined and explicitly taught behavioral expectations
- Fair and consistent responses to problem behavior among students
- A system for increasing positive interaction and regularly acknowledging desired student behavior
- Data-based decision making that informs effective intervention and efficient allocation of school resources.

The process requires staff members to agree to and commit to work toward and participate in a consistent schoolwide vision. The characteristics of many secondary schools offer additional challenges to implementing a schoolwide effort. In secondary schools, which usually have larger staffs and more students than elementary schools, communication can be problematic. The key to implementing a combined RTI and PBS program is to involve the entire staff in a unified, consistent approach. One way to accomplish that goal is to assemble a fully functional and completely representative leadership team to guide development and implementation efforts. With the active participation of the

principal, this team can unify and motivate staff members to carry out all agreed-upon policies and procedures.

Another challenge for secondary schools is the number of students who are served by each teacher. Whereas elementary school teachers spend all day with 20–30 students, secondary school teachers face 30 students at a time for 50 minutes, with 5 minutes between each class. As a result, secondary school teachers may feel a lack of ownership or accountability for student success. Many schools are experimenting with "schools within schools" or small learning communities (SLCs) to address this issue. In the SLC model, four to six teachers are responsible for 120–150 students, thereby increasing the sense of ownership and shared responsibility that teachers feel toward a particular group of students. In turn, students have more access to their teachers and an increased sense of connectedness and well-being.

A related challenge stems from staff members' assumptions that secondary school students already know how to behave and are motivated to do so. In the primary grades, teachers are prepared to teach behavior, but as students age, teachers often expect them to know the behavior rules. But each classroom is a unique mix of rituals, routines, procedures, and cultural norms that are idiosyncratic to an individual teacher. There is no standardized set of classroom rules. Students do not know how a teacher expects them to behave unless they are told. Teachers can rectify this situation by giving their students a comprehensive behavioral expectation syllabus that clarifies such topics as rules, grading procedures, and routines for handing things in and covers each activity, such as lectures, discussions, and group and independent work.

Conclusion

The remedies to behavioral problems in schools require school leaders to unify secondary school staff members—administrators, teachers, counselors, custodians, security officers, and food service and clerical personnel—to reach and teach students who exhibit challenging behavior. To facilitate a change in student behavior, staff members' behavior must change as well. Think about an arch as a metaphor for school efforts to foster safety and civility, create a positive climate, and instill discipline and motivation in students. RTI and PBS are the two sides of that arch and staff development is the keystone that holds it all together and makes it strong.

The combined model has great potential to help a large number of students succeed in school who historically have

not. Universal PBS systems within a school make it safer and more inviting for the majority of students so that they will want to come to school and do their best every day. And an RTI service delivery model ensures that when an individual student struggles to thrive in that system, positive and proactive interventions will be implemented to provide individualized support.

Schools can do business differently to offer the greatest chances of behavioral (and thus academic) success for all students. It's time to relegate the reactive, punitive, and exclusionary tactics to the dustbins of history where they belong. **PL**

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