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Cover Page Footnote

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Supporting Systems Change via Participatory Decision-Making:
Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support Program Development

Positive behavior supports have been gaining wide spread support within the field of education as a system of reducing problem behaviors within schools. Positive behavior supports are a change from a reactive perspective of dealing with these behaviors to a more proactive perspective. With effective supports and the teaching of appropriate behaviors and clear expectations, problem behaviors in schools can be reduced and the opportunities for such behaviors can be minimized. Positive behavior supports are based in solid behavior analysis principles that have been demonstrated in a plethora of research over the last two decades (Cheney, et al., 2010; McIntosh, K., Campbell, A., Carter, D., & Dickey, C. (2009), Kennedy, Mimmack, & Flannery, (2012); Muscott, Mann, Benjamin, Gately, Nell, & Muscott, 2004; Sugai, 2003).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a philosophical framework that encompasses a set of professional practices shown to help students experience greater success at school. The evidenced-based PBIS is an effective method for increasing school safety, enhancing students' social-behavioral skills, establishing an effective learning environment, and creating a more positive school climate (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, (2012); Muscott, et al., 2004; Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999; Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993).

PBIS is an approach that builds the capacity for the members of a school community to manage behaviors in a positive, preventative, and proactive manner. Within this framework there is a continuum of behavioral supports from school-wide to individual based on the needs of a given student. Proactive instruction takes place to teach clear behavioral expectations in all areas of school life. While PBIS is not a “canned” program it is based on empirical best practices

which are data driven. PBIS is continually assessed and decisions are data driven. The focus remains on establishing systems and organizations based on effective practices (Kennedy, Mimmack, & Flannery, (2012); Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Safran & Oswald, 2003).

PBIS examines the many variables that affect a student's behavior. This ecological view perceives behavior concerns as an interaction between the environment and the child. In order for the child to be successful within the school environment, instruction and systems must be in place to teach appropriate behaviors and provide the supports school, classroom and individual wide that assist student in being behaviorally successful (Fallon, O'Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012; Lewis, Powers, Kelk, & Newcomer, 2002; Sugai, 2003). These supports and interventions are built upon the foundation of applied behavior analysis, with a holistic collaborative framework.

Collaborative teams of administrators, special education and regular education teachers, staff and other personnel develop school-wide expectations. These teams facilitate training, instruction and program development and implementation (Bradshaw, Pas, Goldweber, Rosenberg, & Leaf, 2012; Ebner, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002; Peterson & Hittie, 2002). Proactive strategies move schools toward support on a positive level and away from reactive practices.

PBIS can be utilized at three levels to support all students to achieve behavioral success. School-wide supports assist 80% of students within a school, classroom supports assist 15%, and individualized supports assist the 5% of students with the most behavioral needs (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Feinstein, 2003). This article will discuss a school's implementation of a school-wide program to assist most of the students to have clear behavioral expectations and consistent programming to proactively address the behavioral needs of most of the student population.

Participatory Decision Making and the Nominal Group Technique

Horner (2000) posits the positive impact of school-wide PBIS programs on all students, including those with significant difficulties. Even though the approach has proven to be effective, educational professionals often meet innovative system changes with resistance. However, the PBIS program has shown to be more successfully implemented through motivating educational professionals, and providing administrative support (Horner, et al, 2013; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Ayres, Meyer, Erevelles, & Park-Lee, 1994; Kiracofe, 1993).

Teachers and other professionals have demonstrated lack of motivation for implementing some school-wide programs, especially when they are told to reinforce virtues and associated behaviors that are arbitrarily selected by administrators or committees. Such a scenario could contribute to a lack of commitment to the PBIS program. Conversely, including teachers and other educational professionals as active participants in selecting the behavioral expectations for the PBIS program may motivate them to commitment to the process, leading to a more effective proactive approach.

To encourage commitment to a school-wide PBIS program, school faculty, as a whole, must establish behavioral expectations specific to their situation using a participatory decision-making strategy such as the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (Tague, 2004; Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1971). This technique aligns well with development of school-wide PBIS programs as it allows for participation equity, and a combination of individual input and consensus building. Van de Ven and Delbecq (1974) found that participants using the NGT were more satisfied with the decision-making process and the results. Other persons implementing the NGT process have identified additional benefits. The democratic process has been deemed beneficial in that no one person dominates in the decision-making process, and it has shown to be an efficient use of time

as the process can be completed in one session (Tague, 2004; Vella, Goldfrad, Rowan, Bion, & Black, 2000).

According to Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson (1975), the NGT process consists of the following four consecutive steps that encourage participatory decision-making and group consensus building:

- i. Each participant lists ideas individually in response to a specific topic.
- ii. The individual participants are grouped and they use a round-robin reporting technique to share their comments.
- iii. The group discusses the items generated to provide clarification.
- iv. The participants rank the items to reach a consensus about the importance of each item in relation to the specific issue.

A modification of the NGT provided the framework for a Positive PBIS program developed by teachers, other professional staff and a principal in a Midwest elementary school, and faculty at a nearby university. The modification involved an additional step inserted after Step 3 which requires the teachers to classify each behavior under a designated virtue before ranking each item by importance in Step 4.

Entire School Personnel Participation in Developing the School-Wide PBIS Program

Educational professionals in the Midwest elementary school including general educators from kindergarten through fourth grade, special educators, therapists and the principal met for a 2-hour in-service with faculty from a nearby university to determine school-wide PBIS positive for their students, specifically behavioral expectations. During the first hour, the PBIS program was described to the participants as a proactive approach to challenging behavior that involves teaching students behavioral expectations rather than reacting to inappropriate behavior after

they are displayed. Legislative mandates for a PBIS program and specific steps in developing and implementing such a program were addressed. In addition, the faculty presented a taped version of a PBIS program being systematically implemented in a public school setting.

In the second hour, university faculty used a modified version of the NGT to help the participants reach consensus on their school-wide behavior expectations. A university faculty coordinated the participatory decision making process but the participants were actively involved in generating the behaviors and virtues for their PBIS school-wide program.

In the first step of the NGT process, the participants were instructed to individually list the positive behaviors that they expected of their students in the school setting. They were encouraged to list as many behaviors as possible on their paper while in the presences of, but without talking to the other participants.

During the second step of the NGT process, the participants were organized into groups of five and asked to share their expectations with others in the group using a round robin approach. One person was assigned the role of recorder and listed the expectations on newsprint. The round robin process continued until all behaviors on the participants' lists were either placed on the newsprint or crossed off because of duplication.

During the third step of the process, the sheets of newsprint from each group listing their positive expectations were hung on the wall. After a list of virtues was distributed to the participants, the university presenter read each behavior and asked two questions: Which virtue is associated with this behavior? Are any other behaviors on the newsprint sheets that would fit under this virtue category? The participants were encouraged to discuss the behaviors for clarification prior to grouping them under a virtue. This modification of the NGT allowed the

participants to think about the behavioral expectations in relation to specific virtues and assisted them in stating the virtues in behavioral terms.

In the fourth step of the process, the university faculty member asked the participants to rank the behaviors under each virtue according to importance. The number 1 was assigned to the most important behavior in that virtue, number 2 was assigned to the next most important until all of the behaviors under each virtue had been assigned a rating. The ranking system prioritized the behaviors under each virtue according to the consensus of the participants. This information would be used to determine the order to address each virtue throughout the year.

In an additional step to the Nominal Group Technique, the university presenter wrote on a separate sheet of newsprint all of the virtues that had been associated with the behavior expectations. All the behaviors were categorized under five virtues of **self-control**, **manners**, **attitude**, **responsibility**, and **team player**. The final step of the PBIS school-wide program development process required the school personnel to look at the first letter of each virtue and create a name that would become the title for the PBIS program. After a few minutes the participants brainstormed and agreed upon the Get SMART program (a combination of the first letter of each virtue). The specific behaviors under each of the aforementioned categories are listed at the end of the manuscript (appendix A).

In anticipation of implementing the Get SMART program, the participants were told to define the various categories in simple terms, and plan engaging strategies to teach the expectations throughout the year. In addition they were told that this could be accomplished through role-play, books, videos, discussions or presentations. It was suggested that they combine some of the behaviors under the categories to simplify expectations for the students and

to attach incentives to the expectations, so students are recognized for Getting SMART in regard to their behavior.

The PBIS School-Wide Get SMART Program Implementation

To implement the Get SMART program, the principal decided to use the morning assembly time in the gym from 8:10-8:15 a.m. This would not interfere with classroom instruction time, and all students would be present. Since only one behavior was highlighted each week, the principal needed to be creative. A variety of activities were planned which included chants, skits, cheers, role-play, and discussions. The short, creative student-produced skits activity proved to be the most popular with the students. A group of three, fourth grade boys named themselves Tex, Rex, and Mex. The skits they created had a Western theme. Another group of girls were “Valley Girls.” With their constant use of the word “Like,” they were a hit. Students loved watching their peers model positive behavior and learned from the experience.

To further reinforce this school-wide PBIS program, the principal created a large bulletin board by the front door. The board displayed the Get SMART logo and provided a place to put up the names of the students who had chosen to use that behavior during the week. Whenever a student was sent to the office with a notice that they had made a Get SMART choice, that student was allowed to pick a small prize from a tray. At the end of the month, all names were removed from the bulletin board and placed in a drawing. Eight names were drawn and those students got to come to the office for another small prize. The notes were all sent home and the incentive program started over with the new month.

The notes that were sent home provided another communication tool between home and school. The note had a picture of a magnifying glass, signifying that “we were looking” for

children who make good choices. The child's name, the name of the teacher giving the award, the good choice the child made, and a short paragraph explaining the program was included on the note.

Teachers displayed the Get SMART Behavior of the Week in their classrooms. They also talked about it to their students. The principal discussed it on the intercom during morning announcements, so the students were hearing it, discussing, and seeing it acted out. To finally reinforce this program, every class said a daily "Kindness Pledge" right after the Pledge of Allegiance.

Kindness Pledge

I pledge to myself on this very day
To try to be kind in every way
To every person, big or small
I will help them if they fall.
When I love myself and others too,
That is the best that I can do!

Summary

The goal of this school-wide PBIS program focused on proactively teaching students how to make positive behavior choices. The educational professionals were trained in the PBIS program, they were included in the decision-making process regarding the program development using the Nominal Group Techniques, and they had strong administrative support for the implementation of the program. The program established a proactive element as the educational professionals decided on behavioral expectations and presented them to the students using a creative approach. Finally, adults in the school reinforced the student's positive behaviors with an ongoing incentive program.

Personal observation and informal interviews with the participants (principal, teachers, other professional staff and students) indicated wide spread support and enthusiasm for the PBIS

program. Inertia to change was not evident. In fact, a follow up review two years after the practical application revealed that the school had voluntarily adopted the school-wide PBIS program outlined above and was still using it enthusiastically.

Conclusion

Key to the successful implementation of the PBIS program at this Midwest elementary school was the use of the NGT implemented on a school-wide basis. It maximized participation and consensus that resulted in acceptance and enthusiasm, powerful forces that help overcome the natural inertia against change within organizations. The successful collaboration between school personnel and university faculty to field implement this process demonstrates the high potential of converting research to practice in the existing area of enhancing positive behavior choices among young students.

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Appendix A

Get SMART School-Wide PBIS Program: Virtues and Behaviors

Self Control

1. Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
2. Walk in hallways.
3. Stay seated and on task.
4. Think before acting.
5. Feet, hands, chairs, and desks remain quiet during instruction.
6. Use words to tell feelings.
7. Resolve conflict before going to the teacher.
8. Raise hand before responding.
9. Use correct volume for the activity.
10. Refrain from whining over an unimportant matter.

Manners

1. Speak with inside voices, one at a time.
2. Use polite words when making requests.
3. Use positive language with others.
4. Respond to a greeting appropriately.
5. Use good manners, 'please' and 'thank you'.
6. Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.

Attitude

1. Be honest and truthful.
2. Accept correction with a positive attitude.
3. Enjoy the activity or game for the purpose of involvement instead of always winning or getting the highest grade.
4. Take pride in your work and do your best.

Responsibility

1. Listen attentively to the lesson and directions and follow the first time they are given.
2. Maintain eye contact with teacher or materials.
3. Stop and think of the answer on your own before coming to the teacher.
4. Work responsibly and independently.
5. Complete assignments in a reasonable amount of time.
6. Hand in neat work.
7. Turn in homework on time.
8. Be ready with name on paper.
9. Put papers in folders or other designated space independently.
10. Put supplies away when finished or when asked.
11. Take responsibility for actions and work such as bring supplies and finishing work carefully.

Team Player

1. Be considerate of others: no name-calling.
2. Cooperate with others by putting forth effort and participating.
3. Respect property of others.