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## Effective Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: The Key to Dramatic Changes in Student Behavior

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## **Effective Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: The Key to Dramatic Changes in Student Behavior**

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### Abstract

As education professionals continue to focus on the critical issue of behavior management, a number of schools are turning toward the use of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS). As over a decade of research indicates, SWPBIS provides an effective, evidence-based approach to behavior management utilizing universal screening and the teaching of prosocial behavior across the campus. Reliance on data-based decision making has resulted in dramatic gains in positive student behavior for many schools utilizing a SWPBS program. As explained here, implementation of such a program requires specific but flexible steps that lead to the establishment of a SWPBS program tailored to the particular needs of a school.

For decades special and general education teachers alike have identified behavior management as a critical issue within schools (Lui & Meyer, 2005). An increasing number of schools are turning toward Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) as an evidence-based approach which uses universal screening and teaching of prosocial behavior across a school. A SWPBIS program refers to a systematic approach a school uses to a) establish universal behavior expectations, b) translate these expectations into appropriate student behaviors within the various school environments, and c) teach and acknowledge these appropriate student behaviors. For example, one school's expectations might include 'respecting others'. Within that school's hallways, respect might translate to students walking quietly with hands at their sides. Inside the classrooms, respect might

translate to staying within one's personal space, not interrupting someone who is speaking, waiting to be recognized, etc. This school's instructional matrix would include clear and consistent instruction around how to engage in these behaviors so that all students are afforded a more authentic opportunity to succeed within the school environment. Unlike traditional behavior programs that focus on punishment procedures to reduce problematic student behavior, key to the SWPBIS approach is that students not only learn what not to do, but more importantly, they learn what to do. The entire school environment is set up to support students by offering consistent messages about expectations and behaviors and recognizing those who choose to engage in such behaviors. SWPBIS approaches use data throughout the year to assess student outcomes related to behavior both across the school and within individual classrooms.

Using such data, instruction is proactively modified throughout the year resulting in dramatic decreases in such areas as office referrals for problematic behavior and referrals for special education testing. Drawn by such favorable outcomes, entire states have begun using an SWPBIS approach within schools. The purpose of this article is to briefly describe the main components of a SWPBS program. Statewide SWPBS Programs

Over the last decade, statewide SWPBIS initiatives have been successful in increasing desired behavior. Research documents gains schools have experienced in both student achievement and behavior as a result of utilizing an SWPBIS strategy (i.e. Lewis, Powers, Kelk, & Newcomer, 2002; Mass-Golloway, Panyan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008; McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006). For instance, Alabama has implemented SWPBIS since 1999 in elementary, middle, and high schools across the state (Alabama Department of Education, 2008a). As shown in Figure 1, office discipline referrals at one elementary school were reduced from 180 to 60 (67% decrease) over a three-year period.

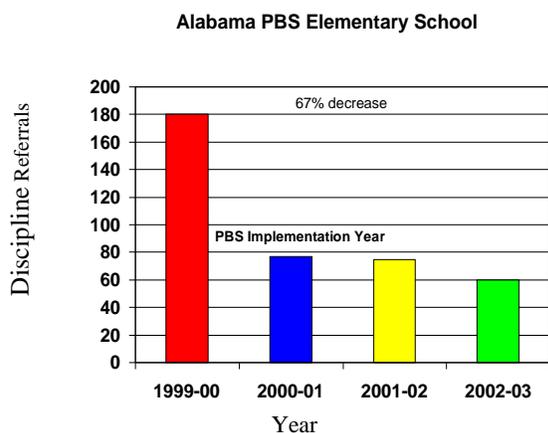


Figure 1. Alabama ODR Data: Elementary School (Alabama Department of Education, 2008b)

A middle school with approximately 3000 office discipline referrals in 2001 saw this number plummet to 1244 (55% reduction) within three years of implementing a SWPBIS strategy (Figure 2).

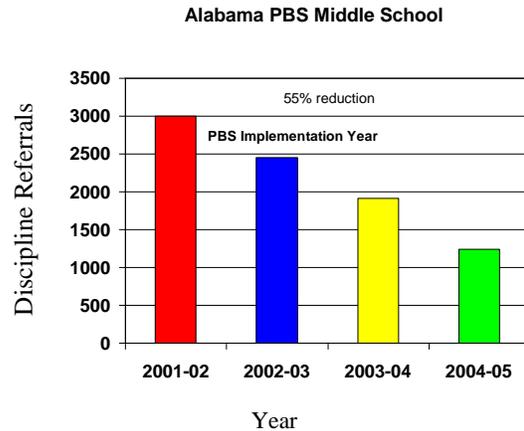


Figure 2. Alabama ODR Data: Middle School (Alabama Department of Education, 2008b)

In addition to the time saved in the reduction of office discipline referrals, Alabama schools have saved time responding to referrals to student support teams and requests for special education evaluations. Their data indicates a 69% reduction in referrals to the school support team and a 93% reduction in referrals for special education evaluation after implementing SWPBS over a three year period (Alabama Department of Education, 2008c).

The Alabama statewide initiative on SWPBIS is just one example of numerous statewide programs across the country that are actively training, implementing, and documenting SWPBS programs in schools. Within Georgia, the Department of Education is providing SWPBS training and technical supports for district teams to begin and maintain this comprehensive approach. Schools or districts interested in implementing this approach can find additional support via the implementation

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guidelines, forms, assessment tools, training material, videos, and research-based evidence provided at [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org).

### Framework for Implementing SWPBIS

Research on SWPBIS has produced a wealth of information on how schools can implement an effective program. Generally, there are six steps that schools can use to implement this process. These include, 1) establishment of commitment, 2) creation of a leadership team, 3) engaging in a self-assessment, 4) development of schoolwide expectations, 5) establishment of an information system, and 6) building a capacity for function-based support (Office of Special Education Programs, 2004). The process is specific enough to make implementation straight-forward yet broad enough to be utilized uniquely by a variety of schools.

#### **1. Establish Commitment**

For a SWPBIS approach to be successful, active involvement of all administrators will be particularly important during the development and crucial first year of program implementation. In addition to administrative support, the support of at least 80 percent of the faculty and staff is also recommended (OSEP, 2004).

#### **2. Establish and Maintain Leadership Team**

The school should use a team of professionals representing a range of stakeholders (i.e., general education teachers, special education teachers, families, administrators) to develop the schoolwide program. This team meets regularly (i.e., monthly) to review data, monitor progress, and make changes to improve outcomes (OSEP, 2004).

#### **3. Self-assessment**

To help determine target areas as well as establish baseline data, the

leadership team must first conduct a school self-assessment. After implementation of the SWPBIS program has begun, the team charts progress by completing quarterly assessments to define what is working well and what areas need attention to improve outcomes (OSEP, 2004). Multiple self-assessment tools are available via the web (e.g., [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)) to help in this regard.

#### **4. Establish SWPBIS Action Plan**

Based on the results of the self-assessment, the leadership team develops three to five schoolwide behavioral expectations and creates a teaching matrix translating those expectations into behavioral rules within each school environment (OSEP, 2004). Such environments might include hallways, classrooms, cafeteria, buses, pick-up and drop-off zones, and playgrounds. The faculty develops instructional plans to address how students will be taught both the schoolwide expectations as well as the necessary behaviors to meet such expectations in each area of the school (OSEP, 2004). These plans are then implemented with students in all areas of the school.

As an important part of the SWPBIS program, the school develops a system of acknowledgement for appropriate behavior (OSEP, 2004). This system provides faculty and staff with multiple opportunities to recognize desired student behavior across environments as a way of reinforcing such behaviors to the students. Likewise, a system of clearly defined and consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior is also developed (OSEP, 2004). Figure 3 shows an example of an acknowledgement for desired behavior from the Alabama PBS Initiative (Alabama Department of Education, 2008b). This school is reinforcing their three schoolwide rules of “be respectful, be responsible, and be resourceful”. Teachers and staff are free to

hand out such acknowledgements to various students at random times to give students positive recognition for following expectations.

Name _____		 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alabama Middle School</b></p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be Respectful	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be Responsible	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be Resourceful	

Figure 3. Acknowledgement slip for students (Alabama Department of Education, 2008b)

The leadership team decides what data the school will collect on indicators of undesirable and desired behavior. These data are used to inform the team when changes in the SWPBIS plan are needed during implementation (i.e. lack of schoolwide agreement on how students behave to follow expectations), and when school wide events should be planned to celebrate improved outcomes (OSEP, 2004).

**5. Establish Information System**

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**6. Build Capacity for Function-Based Support**

Generally, students who have received a consequence for inappropriate behavior more than twice in a week need

more support than the universal schoolwide positive behavior supports are currently providing. A team of personnel (e.g., the student support team) who understands the aspects of student behavior can make an assessment of such a student’s behavior and develop a functional, positive behavior support plan for him.

**Conclusion**

As both federal and special education laws continue to emphasize the use of empirically based instructional interventions, more schools are turning to SWPBIS to help teach students those behaviors that will help them succeed within the school environment. Across the country such schools are seeing a dramatic decline in inappropriate student behavior with a resultant savings in administrative time devoted to office, support team and special education referrals. A reduction in classroom interruptions and student suspensions translates to more instructional time for all students. This is an important step toward supporting a school’s overall mission of improving student achievement.

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