Every educator knows the value of appropriate social behavior within the instructional setting. Disruptive behavior interferes with the learning of both the student having difficulty and those around him or her. If it takes 15 minutes to process an office discipline referral (ODR), a school with 550 ODRs per year spends approximately 23 six-hour days processing referrals yearly. By reducing the number of referrals, staff can better use the time to address academic progress. In other words, teachers can teach, and students can learn.

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) focuses on ways to support appropriate social behavior for all students within a school. Using PBS, school personnel can improve school climate, social-behavioral functioning, and the learning environment for all students, despite tight budgets, competing demands, and limited time. Teachers learn to “work smarter, not harder” (Kameenui & Carnine, 2002).

Schoolwide PBS allows teachers and administrators to become more effective and efficient by helping them collect and use data to make decisions about intervention at the individual, classroom, or schoolwide level. The selected interventions help students learn.

**Why Bother with Data?**

As is evident in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), educators are called to be accountable—for what they do and for the achievement of ALL students. Many in education point to a research-to-practice gap in special education (e.g., see *Remedial and Special Education* 20, *Exceptional Children*, 1999, Vol. 65). One factor contributing to this gap is the perception that “research findings won’t generalize to my situation (student, classroom, school, community).”

People, organizations, and situations are unique. That’s why schoolwide PBS takes an individualized approach.
using data to inform each stage of the problem-solving process. For example, information helps decision-makers identify problems within a school. Schools become more effective when they can accurately identify those situations or students in need of additional support or intervention. Schools become more efficient when they identify which current practices work and therefore do not need attention or resources (i.e., “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”). Moreover, since it’s hard to predict how unique persons, schools, or situations will respond to any intervention, evidenced-based practices serve as a best guess of which interventions are most likely to be effective; systematically evaluating how the interventions are working helps schools adapt them to meet the unique needs of the student and the school more effectively.

Finding and Supporting Key Personnel Leads to Success in Schoolwide PBS

Many stakeholders within the school setting want to make informed decisions regarding PBS. Administrators want to know how their leadership is guiding the social climate. Teachers want to know if classroom interventions are effective. Student assistance teams evaluate intervention plans for individual students. And parents want confirmation their children are attending safe schools.

When setting up information systems, school leaders need to take several steps:

- Identify key decision-makers and the data that will inform decisions.
- Assign staff who will collect information, compile it in some usable form, and then report results to various stakeholders.
- Provide staff with the knowledge and skills to make data-driven decisions. These skills include: accurately and consistently collecting, recording, and interpreting information; using technology to store and retrieve information; and linking assessment results to intervention decisions.

Many Types of Behavior Data Inform PBS Decisions

Many types of information are useful in schoolwide PBS. In fact, schools make better decisions when they draw informa-
Assessment should reflect the behavior in the natural environment. The aim is to develop interventions that more effectively support behavior within the natural environment (e.g., classroom, other school setting), so schools need to assess behavior within these contexts. Assessing students in their natural environment also helps identify contextual factors that can influence a student’s behavior.

For example, sometimes students have difficulties because they lack the skills to meet behavioral expectations. However, in other situations, their difficulties may be performance difficulties (i.e., the student has the right skills but the context influences his performance of those skills). Once a problem has been identified, a look at the contextual factors (in the student’s natural environment) can help guide staff as they work to solve the problem.

Assessment should provide ongoing evaluation of progress. Assessment should not be a one-time procedure—something that happens before an intervention is developed. Instead, it should be an on-going process. Before intervention, assessment helps

**Figure 1**

**The Schoolwide Information System (SWIS)**

The Schoolwide Information System (SWIS) is a subscription database program available via Internet. Information is password-protected to maintain confidentiality. In adopting SWIS for use within a particular school, staff develop a referral form that records information about behavior incidents occurring in the school setting:

- Student’s name
- Date of incident
- Time of incident
- Student’s grade level
- Referring staff
- Location of incident
- Problem behavior
- Others involved
- Consequence provided
- Possible motivation for the incident

This information is used to identify patterns of problem behavior. With SWIS, information can be quickly and easily compiled in charts depicting these data in various ways (e.g., types of behavior leading to referral, time or setting of referrals). SWIS can address questions at a range of levels: whole school; specific settings or situations within the school (e.g., playground, classroom); or the individual student level. Staff use data differently based on their roles within the school. The principal and school improvement team look at whole-school data, such as office discipline referrals (ODR), in order to make program modifications. For example, when more than 20 percent of students receive one or more ODRs per year, educators can look at ODR patterns to design appropriate schoolwide interventions (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). One team examined the pattern of their ODRs and discovered that a large number of referrals came from the hallways. As a result, they taught students appropriate hallway behavior and provided more monitoring and support in hallways, rather than intervening with students on a case-by-case basis.

SWIS can also provide clues about behavioral needs of individual students or groups of students. Again, ODR data provide an example. Most students within a school experience very few ODRs (0 to 1). The next most frequent group receives a few ODRs (3 to 5). Using the SWIS database, educators can easily identify this group and target selected interventions or risk reduction strategies. Further assessment of the students and/or the settings from which referrals are made can then guide appropriate problem-solving efforts. Finally, the typically small group of students who receive a significantly higher number of ODRs may need individualized interventions by student assistance teams. SWIS can easily identify each of these groups of students.

**Source:** Elizabeth Schaughency, Ph.D. and Steve Goodman, Ph.D.
identify and describes problems (and the contextual factors that influence them) in order to develop an appropriate behavior support strategy. During the intervention, assessment helps us determine whether the behavior is changing in the desired direction. Later, assessment tells us whether change is being maintained over time or whether there is a need for additional support.

- **Measures should be efficient and serve a range of uses, e.g., screening, eligibility determination, goal setting, intervention planning, program evaluation.** Data must provide useful information while not being time-consuming to collect. If possible, data collection should be embedded within ongoing activities in the school. In this way, educators save time and resources that can be better spent on behavior support.

To help educators collect data efficiently, PBS leaders at the University of Oregon developed the Schoolwide Information System (SWIS). Using SWIS, educators can easily record information about student behavior and record it in a form that can be used later to solve problems (see Figure 1 previous page). For example, a student who breaks a school rule typically is sent to the principal’s office. Unfortunately, too often these behavioral difficulties are not documented. If they are recorded, the records are not made available to others who work with the child. This means that potentially valuable information is unavailable for future problem solving. By using SWIS, school staff can record, retrieve, and analyze information about such behavior incidents to provide school personnel with behavioral data for decision-making.

- **Use a multiple-gating approach to assessment.** One way to increase efficiency of data gathering is to use a multiple-gating approach to assessment. In this approach, schools start with less costly and time-consuming strategies, such as office discipline referrals (ODRs), moving to more intensive strategies only when indicated.

For example, planning behavior interventions using functional assessment (FA) is a promising strategy for developing effective behavior support plans (Repp, Felce, & Barton, 1988). However, some methods for conducting FAs require more work than others (See Figure 2). When staff members enter into the SWIS database information about setting and possible motivation, a SWIS data report provides a potential starting point for a FA-based behavior support plan. After looking at
the SWIS data, if the student assistance team agrees about possible function, it may be ready to plan effective behavior intervention (Gersten, 2001). However, when team members do not agree, they may need to pursue more formal FA.

Final Comments: Data Are Important, But Data Aren’t It.

Within the PBS framework, data are simply tools educators use to inform their practice. The process of collecting data is not the same as educating children and implementing behavior intervention plans. These important tasks remain to be done; but the careful collection and consideration of data in educational problem solving can improve these tasks.

References


For More Information on Data-Based Decision Making and Evaluation in the Problem-Solving Process


Focus on Results is produced and distributed through an IDEA Mandated Activities Grant for an Education Information Network, known as the Center for Educational Networking, awarded by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to the Eaton Intermediate School District (ISD). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Michigan State Board of Education, the U.S. Department of Education, or Eaton ISD, and no endorsement is inferred. This document is in the public domain and may be copied for further distribution when proper credit is given. For more information or inquiries about this project, contact the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.

Download copies of Focus on Results at www.cenmi.org/Products.asp

Statement of Compliance with Federal Law
The Michigan Department of Education complies with all Federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and with all requirements and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education.

WEB LINKS

Positive Behavior Support Web Sites

- Association for Positive Behavior Support
  http://apbsinternational.org

- Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Positive Behavior Support
  http://rrtcpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/

- Schoolwide Information System (SWIS)
  www.swis.org

- Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports,
  Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education
  www.pbis.org

National Special Education Web Sites with PBS Information

- The Journal of Pediatrics Online
  http://www.mosby.com/jpeds

- Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (The Alliance)
  www.taalliance.org

- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)
  http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html

Michigan Special Education Web Sites

- Citizens Alliance to Uphold Special Education (CAUSE)
  Michigan’s designated parent training and information center
  www.causeonline.org/

- Center for Educational Networking (CEN)
  www.cenmi.org

- Michigan Department of Education
  www.michigan.gov/mde
  (Click on Administrators, then Special Education)