



Research Developments

A Publication of the May Center for Applied Research

Issue 3, 2003

Addressing the Need for Behavior Management in Public Schools

Public schools today are under increasing scrutiny to improve their outcomes across district-wide, school-wide, classroom, and individual student levels. While these outcomes encompass both academic and behavior domains, disciplinary problems continue to be ranked by teachers, parents, and students as one of the leading concerns facing schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996). Accumulating evidence demonstrates that positive behavior support, or PBS, can effectively improve the outcomes of public schools, particularly in the reduction and prevention of antisocial behavior (Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Gottfredson, 1997). In most public schools, however, personnel lack expertise in initiating and sustaining behavior support interventions. Sugai and colleagues (2002) noted that the challenge is not to identify interventions that work in public schools, but to develop ways to implement them effectively. Behavioral consultation can improve the competencies of educators in both initiating and sustaining effective and efficient interventions. School-wide positive behavior support interventions have been shown to significantly improve the behavioral climate of the school by reducing the number of office discipline referrals, suspensions and/or detentions. This issue of *Research Developments* provides information about the May Institute's Positive Schoolssm program and a case study from Edison Charter Academy in San Francisco, CA.

Improving Behavioral Climate and Academic Achievement Through School-wide Behavior Support

Positive Schoolssm is a unique, research-based, data-driven school reform program developed by the May Institute. It is designed to fully integrate academic instruction with best practices in pro-social skills development and behavior support.

The Positive Schoolssm program has provided teachers, administrators, and school support staff in



Bob Putnam, Ph.D., Director of Positive Schoolssm and Marcie Handler, Ph.D., Assistant Director of Positive Schoolssm, review results of ongoing programs.

14 locations across the country with a framework for positive behavior support that is grounded in research and best practices endorsed by eminent scholars in the field of discipline and student behavior as well as the U.S. Department of Education.

Research shows that transforming school discipline from the traditionally reactive, punitive, and exclusionary practices to ones focused on prevention can dramatically improve school climate and academic engagement. (Among others, see Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, et al. 2000; Sugai, Prague, Horner, & Walker, 2000; Mayer, 1995; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Luiselli, Putnam, & Handler, 2001; Luiselli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002; Putnam, Luiselli, Handler, & Jefferson, in press; Putnam, Handler, & Luiselli, in press.)

Positive Schoolssm is the most intensive program of its kind. In addition to positive behavior support, it offers access to doctoral-level psychologists and behavior specialists who provide professional development and technical assistance in building a school-wide plan and integrating effective classroom management strategies with the academic curriculum. May Institute professionals work with school personnel to develop an information database to monitor discipline and school climate. These data, updated daily, significantly enhance school decision-making, identifying and validating specific problem areas for the school to address directly.

Case Study: Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco, CA

The Edison Charter Academy, founded in 1998, is a K-5 school in San Francisco, California. The school serves roughly 500 students, 55 percent of whom receive free or reduced cost lunch, and employs 39 full-time instructional staff. The school's student population is 52 percent Hispanic, 30

percent African American, 14 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and other ethnicities, and 4 percent Caucasian.

Positive Schoolssm consultants began working in the school in the fall of 2000. A school-wide assessment was conducted and found a significant number of students being referred to

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Recent Publications of the May Institute

- Putnam, R.F., Luiselli, J.K., Handler, M.W., & Jefferson, G.L.O. (2003). "Evaluating student discipline practices in a public school through behavioral assessment of office referrals." Scheduled for publication, *Behavior Modification*.
- Luiselli, J.K. (2002). "Focus, scope and practice of behavioral consultation to public schools." *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, 24, 5-21.
- Luiselli, J.K., & Diament, D. (Eds.) (2002). *Behavior Psychology in the Schools: Innovations in Evaluation, Support and Consultation*. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.
- Putnam, R.F., Luiselli, J.K. & Sunderland, M. (2002). "Longitudinal evaluation of behavior support intervention in a public middle school." *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 4,3, 182-188.
- Putnam, R.F., Luiselli, J.K. & Handler, M.W. (2001). "Improving discipline practices in public schools: description of a whole-school and district-wide model of behavior analysis consultation." *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 2, 1.

Case Study... continued from front

the office for disciplinary issues as well as being suspended. After training and consultation, a school-wide plan was developed and implemented. Class-wide behavior support interventions were also implemented to improve academic engagement. As a result of these efforts, suspensions were reduced by 97 percent (see Figure 1) from the period prior to intervention as compared to a similar period a year later. Office discipline referrals showed a similar decrease.

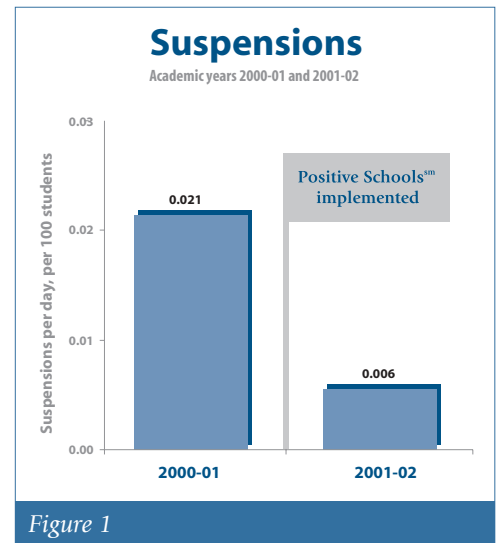


Figure 1

Changes were also seen in the academic performance of the students. Edison Charter Academy students taking the norm-referenced SAT 9 reading achievement test in grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 improved from the 23rd percentile rank in the 1999-2000 baseline year to the 36th percentile in 2002-2003. Meanwhile, students in the comparison school actually declined in performance over the same period, moving from the 30th percentile to the 20th percentile. On the SAT 9 math achievement test, Edison advanced 14 percentile ranks (from an average percentile ranking of 32 to 46), while the comparison school declined 13 ranks (from an average percentile ranking of 38 to 25).

Improvements were also seen in the overall school climate as measured by staff satisfaction surveys. For example, prior to implementation, 57 percent of the teachers stated that their school-wide discipline was ineffective. After implementation, only 4 percent of the teachers reported their school-wide plan was ineffective. Likewise, 50 percent of the teachers had reported problems with classroom disruption. After implementation, only 22 percent of the teachers reported problems with classroom disruption. In addition, the implementation of Positive SchoolsSM resulted in a significant improvement in teacher retention, a greater focus on academic improvement, and a more positive and enjoyable learning environment.

ABOUT THE MAY INSTITUTE

The May Institute is a private, nonprofit organization committed to providing the highest standard of behavioral healthcare, educational, and rehabilitative services. Featured in the book "In Search of America's Best Nonprofits," (Jossey-Bass, 1997), the May Institute operates 180 programs nationwide, serving nearly 20,000 individuals and families each year. An active center of research and training, we maintain affiliations with 39 universities, hospitals, and agencies worldwide, and have a Professional Advisory Board comprised of leading authorities in the field.

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