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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides an analysis of discipline referral data from several schools and illustrates how these data call for specific interventions. It examines ways to link office discipline-referral data to schoolwide discipline, provides referral data-analysis methods, and describes how discipline data can show intervention need and success. The findings indicate that prevention-based approaches to schoolwide discipline and the management of students with severe problem behavior are preferred because of the potential to reduce the development of new cases of problem behavior and the number of current cases of problem behavior. Results from middle schools suggest that universal interventions would be the focus of reform if the number of referrals per student exceeded 2.5, the number of referrals per day exceeded 8, and/or the percentage of students with more than one referral was greater than 45 percent. A model that considers office-discipline referral data as a means of directing the selection of universal, selected-group, and targeted-individual schoolwide efforts is proposed. Schools wishing to provide a safe, disciplined, and violence-free education should begin by assessing their current school safety and behavior support status and then build a three-tiered discipline system of universal, selected, and targeted/intensive interventions. (RJM)

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Using Office Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate School-Wide Discipline and Violence Prevention Interventions

Introduction

Schools wishing to provide a safe, disciplined, and violence-free education for their students should begin by assessing their current school safety and behavior support status and then building a three-tiered discipline system of universal (school-wide), selected (at-risk students), and targeted (high-risk students) interventions. This approach should focus on carrying out procedures that fit the specific needs of the school rather than adopting a single strategy to solve all problems. In this bulletin, we propose that an effective way to evaluate school safety and discipline programs is to collect and analyze office discipline referral data. Office discipline referrals are a simple data source to aid in assessment, monitoring, and planning. We present an analysis of discipline referral data from several schools and illustrate how these data indicate specific interventions. We further show effects of the interventions.

Using Office Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate School-Wide Discipline and Violence Prevention Interventions

Contents

Introduction	3
Office Discipline Referrals	8
Linking Office Discipline Referral Data to School-Wide Discipline	9
Referral Data Analysis Methods	9
Deriving Measures from Discipline Referral Records	9
The Findings: How Discipline Data Can Show Intervention Need and Scucess	9
How Discipline Referral Data Can Show Intervention Success	12
Discussion	15
Cautions Regarding the use of Discipline Referral Data	15
Implications	16
References	17

Using Office Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate School-Wide Discipline and Violence Prevention Intervention

IN FALL OF 1998, SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES RECEIVED A document from the U.S. Secretary of Education and the U.S. Attorney General entitled, *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*. The guide outlined the warning signs of violence and recommended solutions to the unacceptable amount of violent and disruptive behavior in American schools (Dwyer, Osher, and Warger, 1998). A task force of national experts assembled current knowledge related to school safety and prepared the report with the goal of providing guidance for carrying out school-wide discipline and violence prevention plans. The theme of the guide was that while plans must be made to respond in the event of violence, the real solution lies in prevention of these incidents. Schools that are safe, effective, and violence free are not accidents. They are environments where considerable effort has been made to build and maintain healthy, safe and supportive school cultures. School administrators were encouraged in *Early Warning, Timely Response* to assess safety in their schools, and implement comprehensive safe school plans.

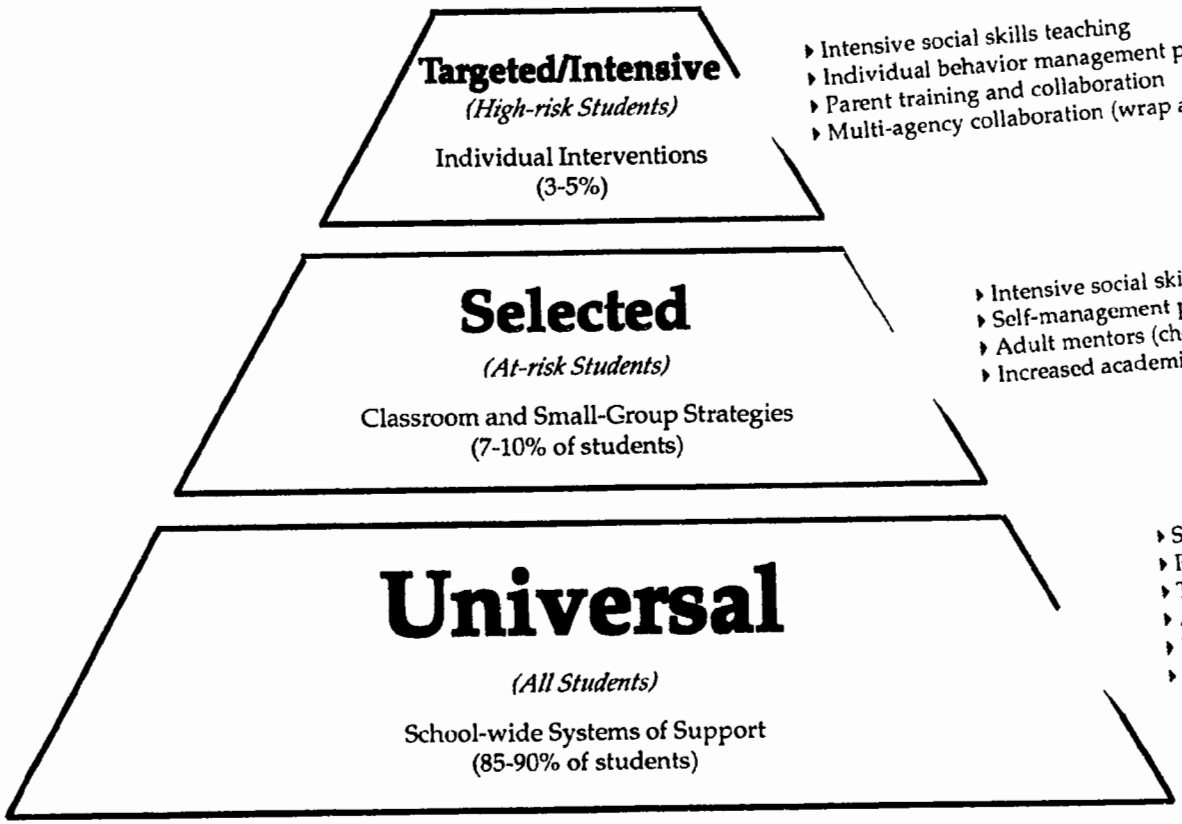
The purposes of this monograph are to outline one method for understanding the discipline challenges facing elementary, middle, and junior high schools and to provide examples of how office discipline referrals may be useful both to assess school discipline and safety needs, and to monitor the effects of intervention. School administrators and their staffs face an abundance of advice on how to make schools safer but receive little help integrating often conflicting recommendations (Andrews, Taylor, Martin, and Slate, 1998; Bowditch, 1993; Gresham, Sugai, Horner, Quinn, and McInerney, in press; Krajewski, Martinek, and Polka, 1998; Mayer, 1995; Murray and Meyers, 1998; Sprague, Sugai, and Walker, 1998; Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey, 1995; Walker, Irvin, and Sprague, 1997; Williams, 1998).

Frank Gresham (Gresham et al., in press) and Hill Walker and colleagues (Walker et al., 1996) recommend a three-tiered analysis of the school population. Student demographics must be considered, including the physical school environment, administrative and management practices of the school, neighborhood and family characteristics, and the characteristics of the student population. These sources of information can guide recommendations for improving school discipline and safety.

The key finding of this analysis is that violent and disruptive behavior takes many forms, serves multiple functions, and has multiple causes. The strategies used by schools to prevent and respond to violence need to be linked to these behaviors and the context in which they are observed. The three-tiered model depicted on page 7 defines the discipline challenge for schools as addressing the needs of three groups of students and linking each of these groups to a different level of discipline intervention (Universal Interventions, Selected Interventions, and Targeted Interventions).This model outlines the error of assuming that a single intervention or approach will meet all the discipline and student support needs within a school. As depicted in Figure 1, our assumption is that one group of students (eighty-five to ninety percent) will arrive at school already having learned important social and academic readiness skills. An important part of any school-wide discipline and prevention program is to ensure that the skills of these students are embedded in the daily workings of the school (Taylor-Greene, et al., 1997). The first intervention need is an efficient system of instruction that is delivered universally (i.e., to all students). Universal interventions attempt to prevent problems before they start. The intervention must be efficient and low cost to deliver to all students without prior individual assessment. Universal interventions for elementary and middle school students can take the form of direct social skills training in class (Committee for Children, 1997; Langland, Palmer, and Sugai, 1998), rules instruction for specific settings (e.g., playgrounds) (Colvin, Sugai, Good, and Lee, 1997; Lewis, Sugai, and Colvin, 1998; Todd, Horner, Sugai, and Sprague, in press), workshops to teach expected school behavior (Taylor-Greene et al., 1997), or alcohol, tobacco, and other drug resistance programs (e.g., Botvan, 1979). Schools must also monitor and teach students who are not currently engaging in problem behavior, for these students must be "inoculated" against exposure to school, peer, and community risk factors in order to model positive social skills for their at-risk peers. The foundation of all effective school-wide discipline efforts lies in attention to the universal training, monitoring, and reinforcement of expected social behavior (Colvin, Kameenui, and Sugai, 1993; Colvin et al., 1996).

Not all students, however, respond to universal interventions. Students with chronic patterns of problem behavior require either more selected support or highly individualized and targeted support. The level and intensity of support is dictated by the level and complexity of the behavior problem (Sugai and Horner, in press; Walker, Colvin and Ramsey, 1995; Walker et al., 1996). Selected interventions often involve support from

THREE-TIERED MODEL OF SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES



- Intensive social skills teaching
- Individual behavior management plans
- Parent training and collaboration
- Multi-agency collaboration (wrap around)

- Intensive social skills teaching
- Self-management programs
- Adult mentors (checking in)
- Increased academic support

- Social skills teaching
- Positive, proactive discipline
- Teaching school behavior expectations
- Active supervision and monitoring
- Positive reinforcement systems
- Firm, fair, and corrective discipline

counselors, special educators, school psychologists, and so on and focus additional resources on the needs of small groups of students. Programs such as extra academic support, extra adult attention (school-based mentors), scheduling changes, self-management, and frequent access to rewards can be used to reduce levels of problem behavior and improve the overall likelihood of school success (March 1998).

For the three to five percent of students who do not respond even to selected-group support, intensive intervention based on functional behavioral assessment procedures (Kern, Childs, Dunlap, Clarke, and Falk, 1994; O'Neill et al., 1997; Lewis and Sugai 1993, 1994; Sugai, Horner, and Sprague, in press; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, and Hagan, in press; Todd et al., in press; Walker et al., 1996; Coie, 1994) is required. These students will test the capacity of any school staff and require intensive social skills training, individual behavior management plans, parent/caregiver training and collaboration, and multi agency (wrap-around) service coordination.

Research and demonstration efforts are focusing on each of the three tiers of behavior support, and new and improved strategies for implementing universal, selected, and intensive behavior support are emerging. The most important message, however, is that a continuum of behavior support comprising three very different levels of intervention is needed. The intensity of the intervention must match the intensity of the problem behavior and the complexity of the context in which the behavior occurs. Universal interventions focus on improving the overall level of appropriate behavior of most students but have limited impact on the few students with chronic patterns of problem behavior. Selected interventions that deliver more intense procedures but are packaged for efficiency and are implemented similarly across many students are designed to address the needs of many students. However, these interventions will not prove effective for the three to five percent of students with the most intense and chronic patterns of problem behavior who need highly individualized, targeted interventions. The challenge for schools is not to identify the one perfect strategy for improving school discipline but to develop at least three different discipline efforts: (a) universal, (b) selected, and (c) targeted/indicated.

Schools wishing to follow the advice from *Early Warning, Timely Response* should begin by assessing their current school safety and behavior support status and then build an efficient, three-tiered discipline system based on the Walker and Gresham models. This effort should focus on the implementation of procedures that fit the specific needs of the school rather than on adopting a single intervention package to solve all problems. It is just as important to define what a school does well and to retain those features of the existing discipline system that "work," as it is to define what is lacking and respond to those needs. We propose that an efficient and effective response to the recommendations in *Early Warning, Timely Response* requires a practical, long-term strategy for assessing and monitoring discipline and prevention interventions. Office discipline referrals are a simple and useful data source to aid in assessment, monitoring, and planning.

Office Discipline Referrals

Office discipline referrals are used by schools as a method for managing and monitoring disruptive behavior. As a source of information, an office discipline referral is an atypical metric. An office discipline referral represents an event where (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) administrative staff delivered a consequence through a permanent (written) product that defined the whole event. Office discipline referrals are more than an index of student behavior. They are an index of the consistency and quality of discipline systems within a school. The major advantage of discipline referrals is that they are already collected in most schools and provide a source of information to document if interventions result in positive change (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997, Tobin, Sugai and Colvin, in press; Walker, Stieber, Ramsey, and O'Neill, 1993; Wright and Dusek, 1998). A limitation of office discipline referrals lies in the unique manner in which each school defines and applies referral procedures. The same student behavior may evoke different responses from teachers in different schools, and different relationships between teachers and building administrators will affect the use of discipline referrals across schools. As such, the value of office discipline referrals as a measure of school-wide discipline must be embraced with caution (Wright and Dusek, 1998).

Research suggests, however, that office discipline referrals may prove a useful metric (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Tobin and Sugai, in press a, b; Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, 1996; Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, in press). Office referral and suspension data have been useful in identifying disproportionately high patterns of discipline for minority students (McCarthy and Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 1997; Williams, 1998), identifying discipline patterns of students with and without disabilities (Wright and Dusek, 1998), and identifying the effects of school-wide interventions (Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Biglan, Metzler, Rusby, and Sprague, submitted) and staff training needs (Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, in press).

We propose here that the information schools already collect in the form of office discipline referrals may be of substantial value as schools plan for improved school discipline and violence prevention. During the past five years we have monitored office discipline referrals from elementary and middle (junior high) schools and learned that by analyzing referral data, we obtain useful information. As we blend information from office discipline referrals with suspension, detention, and expulsion data, we find office discipline referrals a sensitive index.

Linking Office Discipline Referral Data to School-Wide Discipline

Administrators and faculty committed to improving the discipline system in their school may find value in examining: (a) the total number of office discipline referrals for a school year, (b) the number of students enrolled during the school year, (c) the number of school days in the year, and (d) the allocation of office discipline referrals by student, location, and date. We find that most schools have these data, although few use the data for decision making. In light of the three-tier model of school-wide discipline defined by Gresham (Gresham et al., in press) and Walker (Walker et al., 1996), the data listed above can be used to determine whether to focus school discipline reform efforts on (a) universal interventions, (b) selected interventions, and/or (c) targeted, individualized interventions. A simple analysis of the discipline referral data includes the following:

Universal, school-wide intervention is needed if the:

- total referrals per year per student is high;
- average number of referrals per day is high;
- proportion of students with at least one referral is high;

Selected interventions are needed if:

- the proportion of students with at least one or fewer referrals is low, but the proportion of students with two to ten referrals is comparatively high.

Individualized, targeted interventions are needed if:

- there are students who have received ten or more referrals during the year; and/or,
- the five percent of students with the most office discipline referrals account for a high percentage of all referrals.

To use the information to the best advantage, multiple years of referral data should be compared. Examining the results from a single school with general patterns from similar schools can also be useful. With this comparison in mind, we provide office discipline referral data from elementary and middle (junior) high schools collected between 1994 and 1998.

Referral Data Analysis Methods

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

Office discipline referral data were collected from eleven elementary (grades K-6) schools and nine middle/junior high (grades six through nine) schools across seven school districts in two western states. Six schools provided referral data for multiple years. Including schools with multiple years, a total of twenty-one academic school years of data were available for a total of 18,598 students (9,070 elementary and 9,528 middle/junior high).

Schools were selected for inclusion in the database because of their interest in improving their school discipline systems, the existence of an established system for collecting and maintaining office discipline referrals, and their willingness to provide the data. Four schools provided data for the year prior to and following the advent of school-wide interventions. Some of the schools reviewed their data, considered their systems adequate, and did not employ reforms. Other schools noted unacceptable levels of problem behavior and are in the process of using the referral data to plan, implement, and evaluate interventions.

DERIVING MEASURES FROM DISCIPLINE REFERRAL RECORDS

Each of the schools maintained an office referral database developed from individual written office referrals. Each written referral indicated a student, date, location, referring teacher, primary rule violation, and consequence for the student associated with the referring incident. Although different terms were applied, the schools used a surprisingly consistent set of problem behaviors to initiate office discipline referrals. Page 10 presents a model discipline referral form that includes all the elements needed for useful analysis. This form includes key elements of the forms from several schools.

Each school was asked to report (a) the grade levels in their school; (b) the number of students per school year; (c) the number of office discipline referrals per school year; (d) the number of school days per school year; (e) the number of students with one or more office referrals, five or more office referrals, and ten or more office referrals; and (f) the number and proportion of referrals from the five percent of students with the most office referrals. These data were used to calculate (a) the average number of office discipline referrals per student attending school, (b) the average number of office referrals per student who received at least one referral, (c) the average number of office discipline referrals per school day, (d) the proportion of students with one or more and ten or more referrals, and (e) the proportion of all referrals accounted for by the five percent of students with the most office discipline referrals. Data on the proportion of students with one or more and ten or more referrals were unavailable for two elementary and two middle schools.

The Findings: How Discipline Data Can Show Intervention Need and Success

Our findings are separated for elementary and middle/junior high schools, and summarized in the table on page 11. Where data were available from one school for multiple years, the results for each year are reported (letter name plus number indicates a school and the year), and means and standard deviations were computed based on all school years (sixteen for elementary and fifteen for middle/junior high schools). Elementary schools averaged 567 students per year (range 240-

OFFICE DISCIPLINE REFERRAL

STUDENT: _____ GRADE: _____ PERIOD: _____ TIME: _____

STAFF MEMBER: _____ DATE: _____

ISSUE OF CONCERN

LEVEL I

- ❑Abusive Language/Profanity
- ❑Defiance/Disrespect/ Insubordination
- ❑Fight/Physical Aggression
- ❑Forgery/Theft
- ❑Habitual Classroom Disruption
- ❑Harassment
- ❑Tardy
- ❑Use/Possession of Combustible Items
- ❑Use/Possession of Tobacco
- ❑Vandalism
- ❑Skip Class/Truancy

LEVEL II

- ❑Arson
- ❑Assault
- ❑Bomb threat/False Alarm
- ❑Endangering Safety
- ❑Serious Bodily Injury
- ❑Use/Possession of Alcohol
- ❑Weapons Possession/Use

DESCRIPTION OF BEHAVIOR

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

LOCATION	OTHERS INVOLVED	POSSIBLE MOTIVATION	PREVIOUS ACTIONS FOR SAME PROBLEM	DATE
❑Bus Area	❑Peers	❑Attention Peers	❑Time Out	_____
❑Cafeteria	❑Staff	❑Attention Staff	❑Call Home	_____
❑Classroom	❑Teacher	❑Avoid Peers	❑Teacher/Student Conf.	_____
❑Commons	❑Other_____	❑Avoid Work	❑Parent Conference	_____
❑Gym		❑Obtain Items	❑Detention	_____
❑Hall		❑Other_____	❑Office Referral	_____
❑Other_____		❑Don't Know		

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSEQUENCES

❑Conference/detention — during student lunches Date: _____ Lunch: 1 2 3

❑Community Service: _____ Date: _____

❑Saturday School, 8:30-11:30 a.m. (at _____ High School) Date: _____

❑Suspension

- ❑In-House Suspension Date: _____
- ❑Out-of-School Suspension Date: _____

Parent Signature _____ Phone No. _____ Copy sent to parent ___

Student Signature _____ Administrator Signature _____

We ask that you remind the student that suspension removes the privilege of attending or visiting the school (unless in-house suspension is given). School-related activities are not open to a suspended student. Call our homework hotline for work missed as a result of this suspension at _____ or _____

PLEASE SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

1st white copy - parent 2nd white copy - file yellow copy - teacher pink copy - student

REFERRAL PATTERNS FOR 11 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS & 9 MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS 1994-95 to 1997-98

Schools	Grade	Number of Enrolled Students	Number of Office Discipline Referrals	Referrals per Enrolled Students	Referrals per School Day	% of Student with One or More Referrals	% of Students with Ten or More Referrals	% of Referrals from 5% of Students with Most Referrals
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS								
A	4-6	240	208	0.90	1.3	32.0	0.4	41
B	K-5	469	163	0.40	0.9	17.0	0.1	60
C1	K-5	430	313	0.70	1.9	24.0	0.1	55
C2	K-5	430	304	0.70	1.8			
C3	K-5	451	201	0.50	1.2			
C4	K-5	485	233	0.50	1.4			
D1	K-5	586	171	0.30	1.1			
D2	K-5	450	94	0.20	0.6			
E	K-6	991	579	0.60	3.4	20.0	0.4	56
F	K-6	713	331	0.50	1.9	12.0	1.5	82
G	K-6	648	268	0.40	1.6	18.0	0.3	64
H	K-6	1065	445	0.40	2.6	21.0	0.2	55
I	K-6	451	124	0.30	0.7	13.0	0.4	70
J1	K-5	573	607	1.10	3.5	39.0	1.2	42
J2	K-5	638	409	0.60	2.4	25.0	1.1	51
K	K-5	450	79	0.20	0.4	9.6	0.0	73
Mean		*566.9*	*283.1*	*0.50*	*1.7*	*21.0*	*0.5*	*59*
Std.Dev.		*212.3*	*154.7*	*0.24*	*0.9*	*8.4*	*0.5*	*12*
MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS								
A	6-8	550	663	1.2	4.1	41	2	35
B	7-8	635	1274	2.0	7.1	23	5	72
C	6-8	478	1708	3.6	10.0	66	11	29
D1	6-8	530	2644	5.0	14.9	57	8	38
D2	6-8	535	1564	2.9	8.5			
D3	6-8	540	1234	2.3	6.7	37	7	41
D4	6-8	570	1348	2.4	7.3			
E1	6-8	618	1747	2.8	10.0	50	6	39
E2	6-8	628	1256	2.0	7.2	37	4	36
F	7-8	695	1768	2.5	10.3	52	8	35
G	7-8	1194	3520	3.0	20.6	65	1	35
H	7-8	204	136	0.7	0.8	33	1	44
I1	7-9	815	1259	1.5	4.8			
I2	7-9	723	1552	2.1	9.0			
I3	7-9	813	1360	1.7	8.0	15	1	
Mean		*635.2*	*1535.5*	*2.4*	*8.6*	*47.6*	*5.4*	*40.4*
Std.Dev.		*206.6*	*748.2*	*1.0*	*4.4*	*16.3*	*3.3*	*11.0*

1065) with a mean of only 0.5 office discipline referrals per student per year, and a mean of 1.7 office discipline referrals per school day. On average only twenty-one percent of the student body of the elementary schools received one or more office discipline referrals per year, and only three of the schools reported more than one percent of their students with more than ten referrals. The five percent of students with the highest level of discipline referrals contributed on average fifty-nine percent of the total referrals for the elementary schools reporting these data. schools B, I, and K reported low levels of discipline referrals per student (≤ 0.4) and low proportions of students with one or more referrals (≤ 17 percent). These three schools compare favorably to schools A and J1.

Elementary schools using these data for planning intervention may see schools A and J1 as candidates for universal, school-wide interventions, and schools F and J as candidates for intensive, targeted interventions. School F may also need selected interventions based on the fact that more children had ten or more referrals than can be addressed via targeted, individualized interventions.

The discipline referral picture changes when middle/junior high schools are compared. The middle schools averaged 635 students per year (range 204B1194) with an annual mean of 1535.5 office discipline referrals. On average, each middle school student received 2.4 office discipline referrals, with schools averaging 8.6 discipline referrals per school day. An average of 47.6 percent of the students in participating middle schools were referred to the office at least once, and 5.4 percent were referred ten or more times. The five percent of students with the most office referrals accounted for an average of 40.4 percent of all referrals.

An analysis of these data sets gives schools direction as they plan and implement discipline interventions. For example, schools C, D1, D2, E1, and G report both higher-than-average levels of office discipline referrals per student and proportion of students with more than one referral. These schools might consider universal efforts targeting all students in the school.

School G reports a high proportion of students with one or more referrals but a low proportion with ten or more referrals. School G may not only need careful attention to school-wide efforts but also may benefit from school reform focused on selected interventions. Schools C, D1, and F have more students with ten or more referrals than can typically be addressed through the resources available for targeted individualized support. These schools also would be encouraged to consider more efficiency-focused, selected intervention systems.

Schools C, D1, E1, and F report both higher-than-average levels of one or more referral and ten or more referral patterns. These schools may benefit from attention to intensive, targeted intervention systems. School B has a lower than typical level of students with one or more referrals, but a high proportion of students with ten or more referrals, and these students account for an impressive seventy-two percent of all referrals. School B would also be a candidate for careful attention to targeted, individualized intervention systems reform.

How Discipline Referral Data Can Show Intervention Success

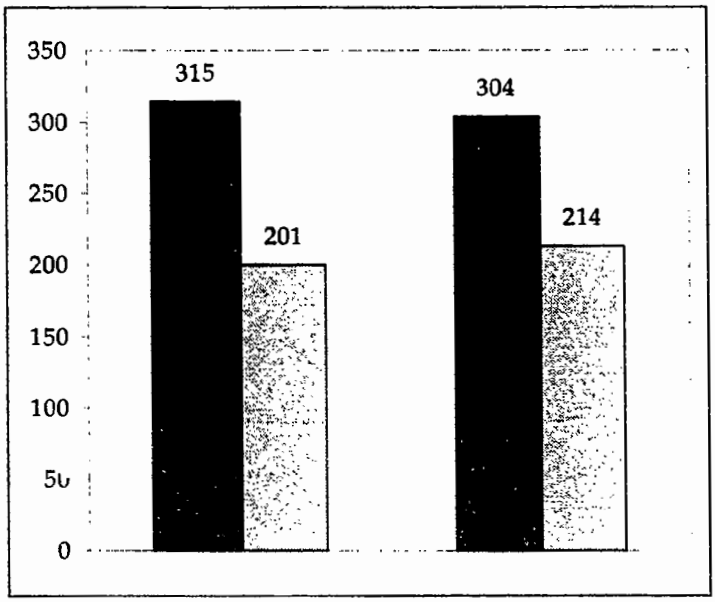
Figures 1 and 2 illustrate graphically how schools can use discipline referral data patterns to monitor the effects of school discipline interventions. Figure 1 shows the effect of a comprehensive school-wide intervention for school C. School C tracked discipline referrals for two years and recorded more than three hundred discipline referrals per year in years one and two (C1 and C2 in Table 1). In year three (C3), the staff implemented a school-wide social skills teaching program that included rule teaching and higher order skills such as anger management and problem solving. The staff also implemented school-wide system of positive reinforcement in the form of a token economy. Students could be "caught" following one of the school rules and receive a ticket for reinforcement such as activity privileges. A team of teachers and the school administrator met regularly to improve consistency of the discipline referral system and to monitor the effects of the intervention. Total discipline referrals decreased in year three (C3 to 201 and maintained in year four (C4) at 233. School C continues to monitor and improve interventions and expects a further decrease in referrals this year.

Figure 2 illustrates improvements in discipline referral patterns for two middle schools. Each of these schools tracked referrals in a "baseline" year and then followed with comprehensive, school-wide interventions that included rule teaching, positive reinforcement systems, increased monitoring of student behavior in classes, hallways, etc., and regular feedback to staff on the progress of the intervention. The intervention for school D is described in greater detail in Taylor-Greene et al., (1997) and the intervention for school E is outlined fully in Biglan et al., (submitted). Figure 2 shows the total discipline referrals for each school prior to intervention, as well as the number of referrals per day in a given month. Both schools show dramatic decreases in overall referral data patterns as a result of intervention. Each school continues to refine school-wide interventions and is adding improvements in their selected and targeted (individual student) interventions. We have found the "referrals per day per month" measure to be an especially useful feedback tool for school staff.

Discussion

Schools face significant challenges in their efforts to establish and maintain safe and orderly environments that allow all teachers to teach and all students to learn. Clearly, prevention-based approaches to school-wide discipline and the management of students with severe problem behavior are preferred because of the potential to reduce the development of new cases

Total Discipline Referrals per Year



Mean Discipline Referrals per Day

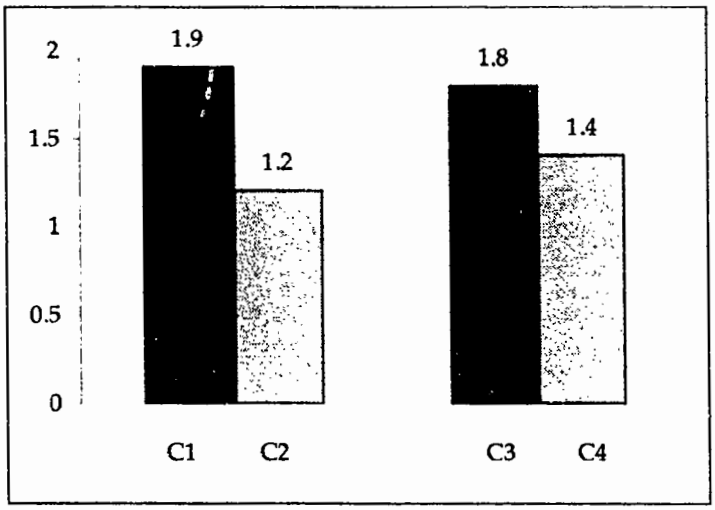


FIGURE 1. SAMPLE DISCIPLINE REFERRAL GRAPHS ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN DISCIPLINE REFERRAL PATTERNS BEFORE AND AFTER INTERVENTION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL C.

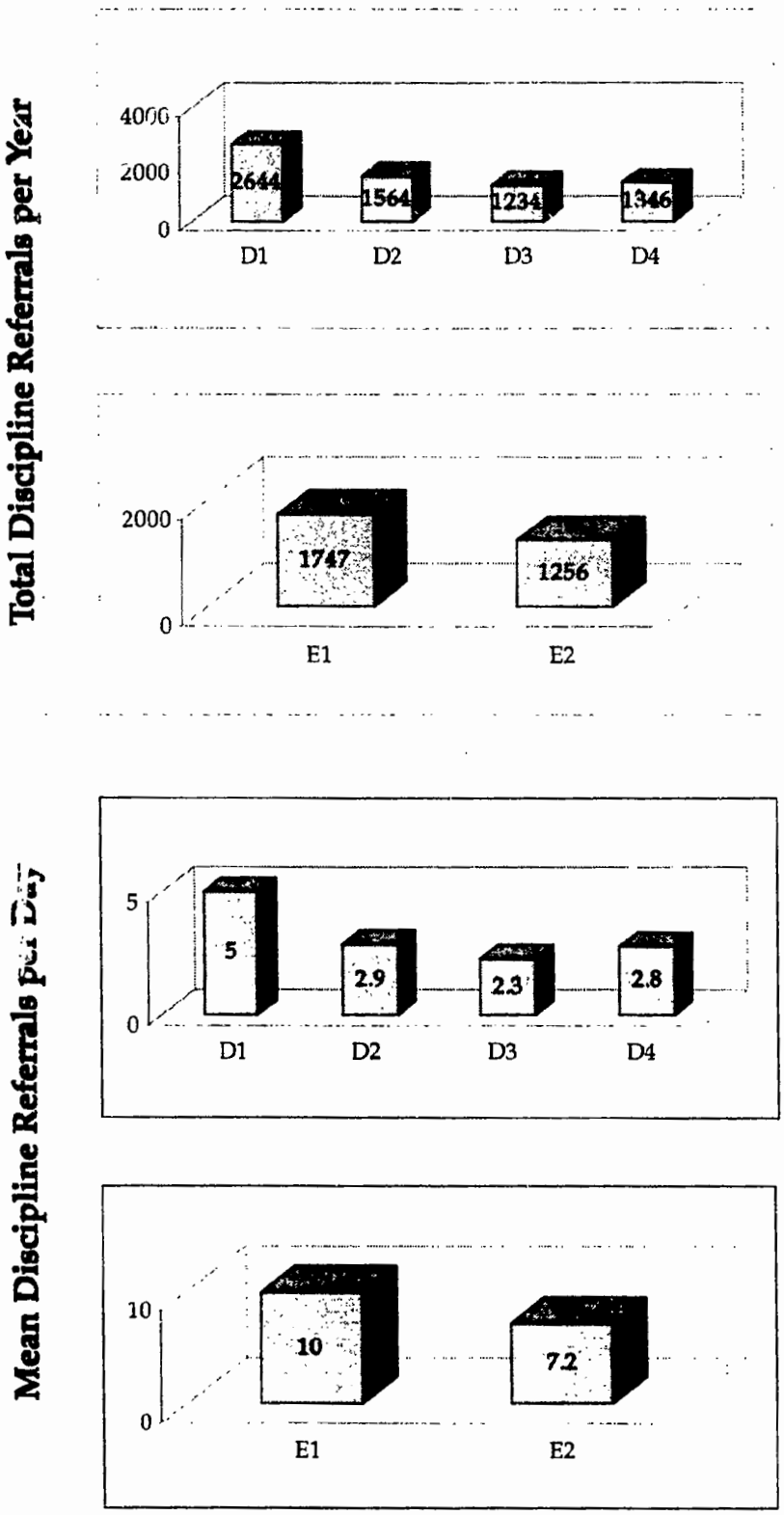


FIGURE 2. SAMPLE DISCIPLINE REFERRAL GRAPHS ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN DISCIPLINE REFERRAL PATTERNS BEFORE AND AFTER INTERVENTION IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS D AND E.

of problem behavior (incidence) and the number of current cases of problem behavior (prevalence). A well-functioning school-wide system also improves the impact of classroom and individual behavior support interventions. However, prevention interventions are difficult to establish and maintain because students with significant learning and behavioral challenges are often unresponsive to universal interventions, have such a dramatic impact on the overall and daily functioning of classrooms and schools, respond slowly to even targeted interventions, and demand intensive and ongoing behavioral support.

When students with behavioral problems are dangerous or harmful to others or property, the first reaction is a call for dramatic measures that include installation of metal detectors, hiring security guards, conducting random drug tests, or harsh punishment for small offenses. Because of the tragic nature of recent violent school acts, these kinds of reactions are predictable and understandable. The immediate and natural response is to remove the source of the discomfort and to use structural modifications to prevent similar acts from recurring. Unfortunately, these reactive approaches do not provide positive and preventative measures based on careful and ongoing assessment of multiple indicators, nor do they provide for change in the way in which teachers behave and school systems operate.

Given the need for a preventive, assessment-based approach to school-wide discipline and intervention, the purposes of this monograph are to suggest one approach to understanding the discipline challenges facing elementary, middle, and junior high schools, and to provide an example of how office discipline referrals might be a useful index both to assess school discipline needs and monitor intervention effects. Office discipline referral summaries from twenty elementary and middle schools were presented to illustrate how referral patterns might be used to guide school-intervention decisions: (a) selection of potential areas for system modification or reform and (b) indicators of change across time.

Office discipline referral patterns were suggested as a means of assessing the need for development of universal, selected, and targeted intervention systems. Specifically, preliminary data for the elementary schools suggest that universal intervention support reform is needed when (a) the referral-per-student ratio exceeds 0.5 or (b) the percentage of students receiving one or more referrals per year exceeds twenty. Reform of selected behavior support systems would be warranted if the school had more than ten children with more than ten referrals, and reform of the targeted intervention systems would be called for if (a) there are more than 0.5 percent of the students with more than ten referrals or (b) the five percent of students with the most referrals accounted for more than sixty percent of all referrals.

The results from middle schools suggest that universal interventions would be the focus of reform if (a) the number of referrals per student exceeded 2.5, (b) the number of referrals per day exceeded eight, and/or (c) the percentage of students with more than one referral was greater than forty-five percent. Selected intervention would be recommended if more than ten students received more than ten referrals. Targeted intervention would be indicated if the percentage of students with more than ten referrals exceeded five percent, and/or if the percentage of referrals from the top five percent of students with referrals exceeded forty percent.

CAUTIONS REGARDING THE USE OF DISCIPLINE REFERRAL DATA

We consider this analysis of office discipline referrals as an important preliminary step to improving the way schools make decisions about school-wide discipline efforts. However, a number of cautions must be considered. First, we selected schools that (a) had existing and established systems for collecting and maintaining office discipline referrals and (b) were in the initial stages of developing or initiating a plan to improve their school-wide discipline procedures. As the integrity of the office discipline referral monitoring system is weakened, so is the integrity of the data to inform decision making. School safety assessment and evaluation should involve collection of other types of data (e.g., attendance, tardies, direct observation, student social skills, intervention quality, staff satisfaction) to provide a full picture of the school context and culture. Previous research by Walker, Tobin, Sugai, Peterson, and others supports the use of these types of archival data as indicator of the status of school-wide discipline practices (Colvin, Kameenui, and Sugai, 1993; Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, and Larson, in press; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, 1996; Tobin and Sugai, in press a, b).

Second, a relatively small number of schools were represented in the analysis. Clearly, the addition of more data sets from a larger number of schools would improve the identification of data patterns. An examination of data patterns from schools with diverse characteristics (e.g., SES, rural/urban, size, etc.) should be conducted. In addition, the office discipline referral patterns from high schools should be investigated.

Finally, we proposed a model that considered office discipline referral data as a means of directing the selection of universal, selected-group, and targeted-individual school-wide efforts. Whether these data patterns actually result in improved school safety and discipline should be tested.

IMPLICATIONS

Given these limitations, we believe this analysis is important and encouraging because it represents one of the first attempts to link a systematic analysis of office discipline referral data to inform school-based safety and discipline interventions (Tobin and Sugai, in press a, b, Wright and Dusek, 1998). Clearly, more

work is needed in this area; however, a number of implications are indicated. First, office discipline referral data are collected in most schools to document major behavioral incidents and represent an economical and readily available source of information.

Second, a regular summary and analysis of discipline data may help identify where individual schools should invest their intervention efforts. Rather than relying on impressions or time to guide decisions to maintain or modify what, how, and where changes in discipline policy and procedure are necessary, schools could use patterns in discipline referral data at least to direct attention to universal, targeted-group, or targeted individual programming.

Third, schools should not assume that a single system of intervention will meet all the needs/challenges associated with school-wide discipline practices and policies. At minimum, disciplinary practices can be delineated into four subsystems: (a) school wide, (b) classroom management, (c) non classroom setting (e.g., cafeteria, hallways, playground) supervision and management, and (d) individual student programming (Sugai and Horner, 1994, in press). A continuum of behavior support (universal to targeted) needs to be applied to these subsystems; however, data and data decision rules must be identified to guide how supports are assigned and associated within and across these subsystems.

Fourth, school-wide discipline systems are the foundation from which all other efforts are based and directed. If school-wide discipline systems are not in place and functioning effectively and efficiently, the establishment of sustainable systems of support for students with significant behavioral challenges is difficult, because these systems require significant human and material resources, time, and financial costs.

Finally, students with significant problem behavior present major challenges to schools at the school-wide, classroom, and individual programming levels. The problem is not having a technology for identification, assessment, and intervention. The real challenge for the future will be increasing our ability to adopt and sustain what we already know about effective school safety and discipline practices. Information-guided improvement of school discipline systems and practices could improve this gap.

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