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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature concerning school-wide discipline systems. It examines strategies suggested by experts, the effectiveness of these systems, and research indicating promising school-wide discipline practices. Only systems containing proactive or positive school-wide procedures were considered in the review of 34 articles. The study identified ten commonly used strategies, then analyzed similarities and differences as well as whether the use of the strategy was empirically justified or not. All of the systems reviewed incorporated at least two of the strategies and 76% used three or more. Results suggest that no one strategy is powerful enough to be effective in isolation. The strategies analyzed, in order of frequency of use, are as follows: (1) teaching social skills to students; (2) development of school and class rules; (3) 3-tiered systems (strategies for all students, intense strategies for students at-risk, and individual strategies for specific students); (4) community involvement; (5) school climate; (6) individual counseling; (7) teaching students negotiation and choice-making skills; (8) thinking time/processing time; (9) peer mediation; and (10) effective instruction. (Contains 22 references.) (DB)

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SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES: A LOOK AT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMON PRACTICES

Creating safe schools is a priority in the United Sates. The highly publicized school shootings of the late 1990's created a public perception that schools are unsafe (Dwyer, Osher, & Hoffman, 2000). Because of the publicity of these issues, attention has focused on preventing school violence and making schools safer places (Dwyer, et. al., 2000).

Schools have always used school-wide discipline procedures, typically by providing a negative consequence to students who engage in inappropriate behavior. The emphasis on proactive, preventative strategies has not been a focus until the last ten years. In 1998, "Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools" (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) was commissioned by President Clinton in response to school violence issues. Clinton directed the Department of Education and the Department of Justice to develop this resource to provide schools with strategies that will prevent violence. The booklet was distributed to every school in the United States. Its purpose was to help "adults reach out to troubled children quickly and effectively" and to focus on promoting safe schools through community-wide efforts (Dwyer, et. al., 1998). While this resource has provided valuable information to schools as they plan for safety, there continues to be a great deal of discussion regarding which techniques and strategies are proven to be effective, and which should be adopted by schools.

Despite the fact that this resource was so widely distributed and schools have placed so much emphasis on designing effective school-wide discipline plans, the vast majority of schools in the nation continue to use negative consequent methods of school-wide discipline, with little or no positive or proactive strategies (Dwyer, et. al., 2000; Henley, 1994; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998). These methods occur after the behavior problems have surfaced and include probation, suspension and expulsion (Adams, 1992). Investigation of the most commonly used procedures indicates that they use very few proactive or remedial processes in addition to the negative consequences (Adams, 1992; Chung & Paul, 1996; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998).

The literature commonly agrees that these negative consequence forms of school-wide discipline have not been effective (Adams, 1992; Chung & Paul, 1996; Henley, 1994; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Walker, Shinn, O'Neill, & Ramsey, 1987). Changes can be made to these systems which would likely make them more effective. Professionals commonly agree that when schools use negative consequent-based school-wide systems, other positive and proactive techniques or strategies should also be used (Dwyer, et. al., 2000).

There are indications that school districts are working toward developing positive behavior strategies which could be incorporated into school-wide discipline systems. Despite the general agreement that negative consequence only methods of school-wide discipline are not adequate, there is little agreement as to what systems should be used in addition, or in place of these procedures. The strategies proposed range from teaching setting specific social skills (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998), teaching self control curriculum (Henley, 1994), incorporating individual student counseling (Adelman & Taylor, 2002), increasing teachers' repertoires of discipline strategies (Chung & Paul, 1996), creating a positive school climate (Murphy, 1996), using peer mediation (Tschannen & Moran, 2001), and many other proactive strategies. The variety of these strategies crosses a wide spectrum and have various theoretical underpinnings.

When considering the findings of the experts, there are some common themes. All agree that punitive methods alone are ineffective. They all agree that considering and analyzing risk factors first is important to the development of effective school-wide discipline systems. Adams (1992) proposes considering general risk factors, while Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin (1998) and Henley (1994) suggest reviewing the school environments and teaching students social skills necessary for appropriate behavior. Chung and Paul (1996) believe that better preparation of teachers so that

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they are able to handle discipline issues without relying exclusively on punishment will positively impact school-wide student behavior. Turnbull, Edmonson, Griggs, Wickham, Sailor, Freeman, Guess, Lassen, McCart, Park, Riffel, Turnbull, & Warren (2002) propose early identification of students who are likely to demonstrate inappropriate behavior so that intervention can be used before the problems become serious to the student and the school community.

Every proposed system for addressing discipline problems involves some proactive measure. While many of these suggestions are not supported by empirical evidence, the common theme is clear. Schools need to incorporate some type of interventions to avoid behavior problems in addition to the typically used negative consequence only measures. Determining precisely which types of proactive strategies are most effective needs to be the subject of further study. Only by studying and validating effective school-wide discipline systems will schools know how to change systems so that they better meet the needs of schools and students.

The purpose of this article is to review current literature regarding school-wide discipline systems used across the United States. The review looks at strategies suggested by experts, the effectiveness of these systems and research indicating promising school-wide discipline practices.

Article Selection. For the purposes of this review, school-wide discipline systems were defined by the author as any program or system used by a school, applied to all students in that school and which uses positive or proactive strategies to manage student behavior. There were many articles which addressed narrow or specific student behaviors, such as curriculum addressing bullying, but these articles were not included in this review unless the curriculum was used with all students in the school in a systematic manner. Likewise, articles addressing individual student behaviors or the use of functional behavioral assessment were not reviewed because they were not applied to all students in the school.

Only those systems containing proactive or positive school-wide systems were reviewed. A number of articles studied the effects or outcomes of traditional consequence-only systems, but because they did not use positive strategies meant to prevent inappropriate behavior, they were not included.

Keyword searches of educational and psychological journals were conducted. Searches included the keywords "school-wide discipline", "school-wide systems", "discipline systems", "discipline", "school-wide approaches", and "behavior systems". Thirty-four articles met these criteria.

Analysis Procedures. Articles that met criteria were reviewed and key components of the system described were plotted on a matrix to aid in the comparison. Ten common components were identified (see figure 1). All 34 articles reviewed recommended the use of at least one of these ten components.

Then the various ways that each component was used was compared. Similarities and differences in the use of the strategies were analyzed as well as whether the use of the strategy was empirically justified or not. Results of this analysis follow.

Figure 1. Ten strategies articles had in common.

Strategy	Percent of articles
Teaching social skills to students	97%
Development of school and class rules	59%
3-tiered systems (strategies for all students, intense strategies for students at-risk, & individual strategies for specific students.	50%
Community involvement	32%
School climate	29%
Individual counseling	26%
Teaching students negotiation and choice-making skills	15%
Think time/processing time	6%
Peer mediation	6%
Effective instruction	6%

Analysis Results

While there are many commonalties between systems reviewed, the way that these strategies are used is slightly different between the various school-wide systems. A brief review of these differences is worthy of discussion.

Teaching social skills to students. Thirty-three of the 34 articles (97%) target teaching social skills to students to give them strategies for managing their behavior in future situations. The one article that did not specify teaching social skills focused on developing collaborative partnerships with community members. Although social skill development was not specifically targeted, it is not incompatible with the strategies proposed. Essentially 100% of proactive, school-wide discipline strategies incorporate teaching students what they should do in social situations.

There are differences between the systems and how they propose to teach social skills. The general split is the theoretical philosophy about how to teach skills. There is a distinction between cognitive approaches and behavioral approaches. The basic concept is the same and both use role play, modeling, and practice but behavioral approaches teach very specific skills for certain situations or settings (Turnbull, et. al, 2002) and cognitive approaches focus on teaching students to use their understanding of the skills to create functional strategies to make decisions and resolve interpersonal problems (Brion-Meisels & Selman, 1984).

Development of school and class rules. Twenty of the articles (59%) stress the importance of setting school-wide or classroom rules for students to serve as a guide for their behavior. Stating three to five behavioral expectations for students is a key component of the Positive Behavioral Supports school-wide discipline system (Sprague, Sugai, Horner, & Walker, 1999). Even systems other than Positive Behavior Supports suggest establishing rules to serve as behavior guidelines for students so that they are better able to self regulate their behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Three-tiered systems. Thirteen reviewed articles (50%) suggest the use of a three-tiered school-wide system that provides the level of intervention that is appropriate for each student in the school, rather than adopting a single intervention package that attempts to meet all student needs (Sprague, et. al., 1999). A three-tiered system provides universal strategies that would be available to all students and likely meet the needs of 85 to 90% of students. Selected strategies would target those students who are considered "at-risk" because they have shown some problems. Selected strategies are used with small groups and likely meet he needs of 7 to 10% of students. Targeted or intensive strategies would be provided individually to specific students who have demonstrated that they are at high risk for problem behaviors. This group of students is likely to encompass 3 to 5% of students in a school (Sprague, et. al., 1999). A three-tiered system provides support for all students and allows for progressively more intense and individualized strategies for specific students who have greater need.

Community involvement. Eleven articles (32%) stress the importance of schools working with the entire community that surrounds the school. The premise is that schools must reflect the values of the community and that schools lack the range of resources to address all student needs. Schools that build collaborative relationships with families, mental health providers, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice programs and other human service agencies are better able to develop systems within the school to address all student needs and achieve better outcomes for students (Eber, 2001; Bemak & Cornely, 2002; Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Policies developed with these multiple inputs will be more comprehensive and the support system for students will be broader.

School climate. Ten articles (29%) describe school climate as being an important influence on student behavior, and describe a positive school climate as an indicator of low student problems. School climate involves school stakeholders and community members developing a vision of the ideal school and working together to create that school (Willert, 2002). Strategies might include administrators and teachers adopting a supportive attitude toward students and reflecting community values in their policies. It also means having adequate support services, such as counseling and interventions responsive to students needs (Willert, 2002; Hyman & Snook, 2000).

Individual counseling. Nine articles (26%) promote the use of individual counseling for students who exhibit behavior problems which are not prevented by other proactive strategies. As in the three-tiered systems, these articles recognize that universal school-wide systems will not adequately address all student needs. Counseling students individually allows for treatment of severe and chronic problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2002), and emphasizes primary prevention and healthy development of students (Jackson, 2000).

Teaching students negotiation and choice-making. Five articles (15%) propose the use of a curriculum which teaches students to become aware of conflicts and teach them how to make choices for negotiating and resolving conflicts (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Teaching students to use choice-making and negotiation skills is similar to other social skills curricula, but specific in the skill that is taught. The use of this type of curriculum, as described in articles reviewed, was primarily used as a supplemental strategy in conjunction with other proactive strategies.

Brion-Meisels and Selman (1984) describe the components of teaching interpersonal negotiation strategies as including student ability to: 1) label the interpersonal problem, 2) generate alternative solutions, 3) anticipate consequences for self and others, and 4) evaluate outcomes. Although other descriptions of teaching negotiantion and choice-making skills are not as detailed in other articles reviewed, the general procedure is similar in all.

Think time/processing time. Two of the reviewed articles (6%) suggest allowing students to have time to think through a problem, or process the problem, in order to give the student time to stop a negative interaction and have time to think of and use an appropriate behavior or skills to use in the future. This can be used when an inappropriate interaction occurs (Nelson, 1997) or as a goal setting activity which can guide future academic and social behaviors (Rice, 1994).

Peer mediation. Two reviewed articles (6%) suggest the use of peer mediation as part of their school-wide discipline plan. Peer mediation involves teaching a small group within the student body to mediate conflicts of other students (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Student mediators are supported and taught by school faculty.

Effective instruction. Two articles (6%) make the premise that school violence and student behavior problems begin with academic failure. Both state that in addition to other positive and proactive strategies, effective instruction will foster student safety. Scott, Nelson and Liaupsin (2001) suggest that research indicates that improved academic performance is associated with reduction in delinquency, and therefore there appears to be a clear reciprocal relationship between academic and social behavior.

Several strategies were used only once in any system. These included using a democratic approach, teaching students to be resilient, fostering student responsibility, using cooperative learning strategies and using a unified discipline approach.

Summary. Every article that was reviewed incorporated at least two of the ten strategies in its proposed school-wide system and 26 of the 34 articles (76%) used three or more of these ten strategies. Five of the 34 articles described additional, unique components that were not used in other systems. This demonstrates that no proposed positive school-wide system suggests that one strategy is powerful enough to be effective in isolation.

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