

## **Data-Based Decision Making in Hawaii's Behavior Support Effort, 1998 - 2000**

### **What is EBS?**

Effective Behavior Support, or EBS, is a systematic approach to encourage proactive social behavior in students, and to prevent problem behavior, by establishing within schools a sustainable continuum of positive behavioral intervention and supports. When EBS is put into practice, school-based teams work in concert with other school initiatives to address specific behavioral concerns that affect the school climate. EBS is a research-validated system based on the principles of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

Initially, PBIS was developed as an alternative to aversive interventions for students with severe disabilities who engaged in extreme forms of self-injury and aggression. More recently, EBS has been applied successfully with a wide range of students, in a wide range of contexts, as an intervention approach for entire schools. A key element in EBS implementation is the use of data to guide decision making, both for the development of school-wide discipline action plans and individual behavior support plans for students with simple to complex behavioral challenges.

### **Background to Hawaii Effective Behavior Support (HEBS) Implementation**

Data from the Hawaii State Department of Education's 1996 Native Hawaiian Educational Project revealed a high proportion of academic and behavioral failures among the Native Hawaiian public school population. The impact of this information, followed by the incidents at Springfield and Columbine, and the implementation of the Felix Consent Decree in 1998, demanded a completely new approach to positive behavior supports in Hawaii's public schools.

To establish this new initiative, Hawaii educators recognized a number of challenges: (1) a diverse population of students with high rates of problem behavior and office discipline referrals; (2) low rates of academic achievement; (3) low staff morale; and, (4) multiple overlapping school improvement initiatives. With these conditions in mind, educators sought to establish the following goals for EBS implementation:

- Create and sustain a continuum of positive behavioral supports
- Establish accountability standards for school-wide discipline and student conduct that relate to state standards
- Maximize academic achievement opportunities
- Enhance student and family access to basic proactive management practices
  
- Improve the capacity of Hawaii educators to sustain a continuum of positive behavior supports

## **HEBS Implementation Guidelines**

Beginning with eight public schools in 1996, by 1998 a total of 52 schools volunteered to establish a five-year plan of operation for improving the behavioral and social needs of all students, especially those with significant behavioral challenges.

The first step is to establish a school-based leadership team composed of staff members and administrators. This team is committed to training and development in EBS for a minimum of three years. Administrative participation and endorsement are required, and priority is given to the establishment and demonstration of school district/complex participation.

Central to the success of the EBS implementation effort, schools must collect and use data, such as office discipline referral data (ODR), to guide decision making. Compiled at regular intervals, summaries of the number of office discipline referrals per day, per month, by problem behavior type, and by location, for example, provide an indication of EBS progress and identify and define areas that need to be addressed.

In addition, each year a cadre of individuals who have served on EBS school teams is trained to serve as coaches and to provide direct and indirect implementation support and technical assistance to EBS school teams. Coaches also are prepared to assist school teams to conduct parent-training events.

The third element of implementation is trainer training. Each year, 2 ñ 5 individuals who have served as EBS team members and coaches are chosen to become EBS trainers. These individuals are responsible for training new EBS school cadres, and to work with pre-service and in-service programs with affected groups, such as parents, school psychologists, and administrators.

## **Results of EBS Implementation: Effective Practices**

The benefits of EBS implementation directly relate to its reliance on data to identify the sources, locations, and characteristics of chronic behavioral problems within the school. The following examples of effective practices came from schools that are exemplars of the 5 principles of EBS.

The Five Principles of EBS:

- 1) "Working smarter" means working more efficiently and requires ongoing data collection, analysis and monitoring to affect systematic changes.
- 2) Data-based decision-making is essential for team based problem solving.
- 3) All manner of school-wide interventions must be supported by data.

4) Supports for students with severe problem behaviors are possible only if an effective school-wide system is in place.

5) Proactive school-wide discipline planning serves as an instrument to further the goals of instruction and learning.

### **Effective Practice at Elementary School, Example #1**

A review of the office referral data shows little improvement in the number of referrals per day, per month, despite several support incentive programs already in effect. Significantly, the data reveals that 48% of the total behavioral problems are harassment related; 54% of these occurred on the playground, peaking before and after lunch.

Based on the evidence, the school-based EBS team decides to implement a school-wide social skills training program with training efforts focused on playground supervisors to provide acknowledgements and incentives for positive behavior. (The previous plan was focused only on the classroom.) The team follows up by reviewing ODR data monthly to monitor and improve its effort.

Result: Reduced behavioral problems school-wide through precision of data analysis and administrative response. By concentrating its school-wide implementation plan on playground situations, the school was able to address the problem at its source.

"Big Idea": Performance information compiled at regular intervals must be used to make efficient and effective behavior support decisions.

### **Effective Practice at Elementary School, Example #2**

The school-based EBS team learns 81% of students never received an office discipline referral. The same data displays an increase in incidents involving aggression and fighting on the playground. The team institutes a reinforcement plan that acknowledges good playground behavior. It includes a parent-child poster contest, student broadcasts, and other school-wide incentives. To cope with aggressive students, an EBS committee is formed to combine the functions of the school safety committee with student support referral procedures. This body becomes the main problem-solving mechanism of the school and uses ODR data to guide its activities.

The committee produces a school-wide Expected Behaviors Handbook, an Emergency Procedures booklet, school posters and a CSSS referral process description. It shares these items with staff and families for communicating with the students.

Result: Since the beginning of the school year, the referral average has ranged from .86 to 3.7 per day, per month. Although figures for the previous years are not available, this reflects an improved consistency among school staff to recognize classroom-managed

versus office managed discipline referrals to support positive behaviors.

"Big Idea": A proactive instructional approach that reaches students in the classroom and at home is required to realize meaningful and sustainable improvements in the school climate.

### **Effective Practice at Intermediate School, Example #3**

The school is composed of a culturally diverse student population of 482. It is involved in a multitude of support programs involving accreditation, discipline, safe schools, character education, and community youth programs. However, increasingly high rates of problem behavior and discipline referrals, low rates of academic achievement, and low staff morale are inhibiting education in the school.

The school-based EBS team's review of ODR data reveals 74% of office referrals come from classroom settings; 25% are related to insubordination, 19% to harassment. The majority of referrals are 7th graders with chronic or intense behaviors.

The team responds by consolidating various school initiatives with overlapping purposes. A review of the character education, safe schools and discipline committee's objectives reveals that improving the social behavior of all students is a priority. A resolution is reached that implementing and sustaining individualized initiatives for chronic students will not be effective without a school-wide program. Programming for chronic kids is linked to a school-wide intervention system. At the same time, a review of school-wide interventions is conducted to ensure a solid foundation of support for a social skills program for behavioral problem students.

Result: Linking chronic student initiatives to the school-wide intervention system establishes a clear continuum of behavior support for all students.

"Big Idea": Supporting and educating students with severe problem behaviors is possible if effective and efficient school-wide systems are in place.

### **Effective Practice at Intermediate/High School, Example #4**

A review of ODR data from the previous year reveals that the average number of referrals per day, per month, was 21.09 in a school with a population of 880 students. 56% were from cutting class, 15% from tardy arrival.

The school-based EBS team adopts the "work smarter, not harder" approach to problem solve the issue. It decides to make a school-wide effort to improve attendance and punctuality by linking it to the state mandated school accreditation plan.

The team focuses on the relationship between academic achievement and attendance,

punctuality and appropriate behavior. With the help of the faculty, they develop a teaching matrix to illustrate specific behavioral expectations required in each school setting. The matrix follows a year-long teaching schedule that emphasizes different expectations each quarter. The team supports the effort by developing and demonstrating sample lesson plans and strategies for use by school faculty. They also coach their colleagues in each department. (The coaching involves Q & A, training, and improving and reinforcing EBS implementation.) Special emphasis is placed on improving attendance and punctuality, and minimizing the interference of malcontents.

Result: Data reflects that instruction and learning improve school-wide with a decline in behavioral problems. (This is supported by the decline in the school's total number of referrals from 5,500 in 1998-1999, to 2,551 in 1999-2000).

"Big Idea": Behavioral and instructional management systems compliment each other and must be integrated.

SET: The Evaluation Instrument for HEBS SET, the School-wide Evaluation Tool, is a research-validated instrument designed to assess and evaluate critical features of EBS across the academic year and to provide a general measure of school climate. Eight measurement areas are examined:

- Expectations defined
- Expectations taught
- Expectations reviewed
- Response to problem behavior
- Monitoring/evaluation
- Administrative leadership
- District level support

SET Evaluations were completed on a sample of 7 of 36 schools in September of 1998 and May of 1999. In general, all schools showed improvement over the previous year. (See Graph 1.) Overall, the number of office discipline referrals per day, per month remained steady, or decreased from the 1998-1999 to 1999-2000 school years indicating the effectiveness of EBS implementation. (See Graph 2.)

## **Summary**

In effect for two years, the HEBS has effectively emphasized:

- Establishment and maintenance of an instructional approach to teaching appropriate behavioral expectations
- Prevention of problem behavior
- A systems approach that emphasizes school-wide interventions
- Employment of a team-based approach to leadership and problem-solving
- Utilization of data to guide decision-making procedures

## **Contact Information**

This brief is based on the article, "Data-Based Decision Making in Hawaii's Behavior Support Effort" by Jean Nakasato appearing in the Fall 2000 issue of the Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions (Vol. 2, Number 4, pp. 247 ñ 251).

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SIG was funded to improve systems providing early intervention, educational, and transitional services, through an innovative personnel development program supported by coordinated policy, procedure and practice interventions. Ultimately, the Department of Education (DOE) believes that this strategy will lead to significant gains in in-school and post-school outcomes for children with disabilities. The State Improvement Plan is an integral part of the overall DOE system improvement efforts and the vision of the State Board of Education for meeting the needs of all children so that they attain high performance standards. The Hawaii State Improvement Grant is a collaborative effort of the Hawaii State Department of Education and the Center on Disability Studies/UAP at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, along with numerous other partners concerned with the education of children with disabilities in the State of Hawaii.