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# Positive Behavior Support in an Urban Middle School

Schoolwide commitment is the key to a successful PBS program.

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Successful middle grades schools provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. Educators know that for the most part, punitive measures such as silent lunches and in- and out-of-

school suspensions (ISS and OSS) do not contribute to this positive atmosphere. What *does* contribute, however, is a school-wide positive behavior program, supported by teachers and administrators,

that fosters a productive learning environment for all students.

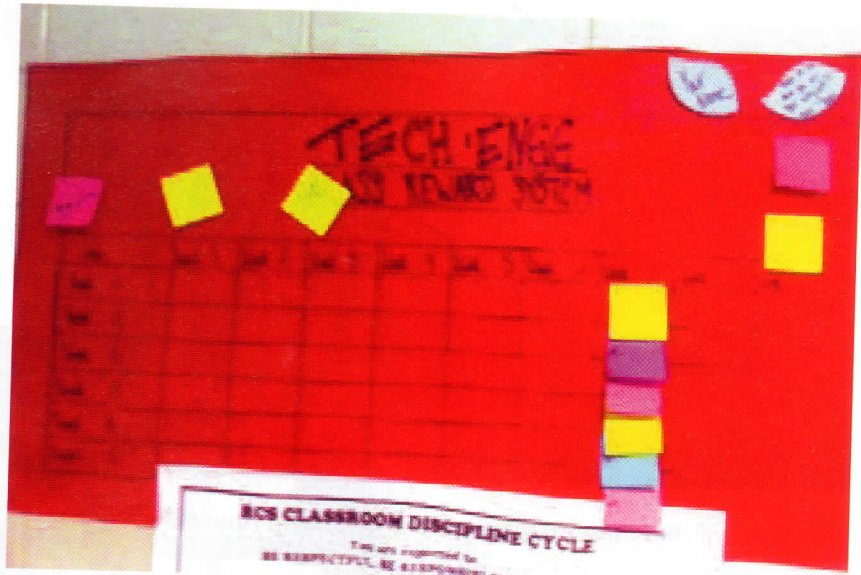
Consider the example of an urban middle school located in the southeastern United States. The grades 6–8 school serves about

900 students; just over half qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. During the 2008–2009 school year, educators were concerned that students were missing so many instructional days due to discipline referrals, including in-school and out-of-school suspension. After investigating several behavior management programs and eliciting the assistance of a consultant to assess the true scope of the discipline problems, administrators and teachers decided that a positive behavior support (PBS) program best fit the culture of their school.

PBS programs focus on reinforcing and rewarding positive student behavior rather than focusing on negative behavior and punitive consequences.

A committee to develop and guide implementation of the PBS program the following school year helped educate the middle school teachers in the program using a train-the-trainer model. Teams implemented rewards and consequences and used “time out” sessions with written reflections for students who needed intervention. In essence, the program was a system of Strike One: Warning, Strike Two: Second Warning, Strike Three: Leave the room and be assigned a consequence.

As is the case with most change, the PBS program was implemented with varied success. The consultant provided additional support to teachers who struggled with classroom management and discipline, but the PBS program was not fully integrated into the school because there was not a continuous commitment by all teachers for training and positive reinforcement, and the standards of behavior were not emphasized.



Grade-level bulletin boards highlight the PBS program.

Photos courtesy of Kathleen Oesterlein McCaffrey.

After three years, teachers began to question the value of the PBS program. They saw few positive outcomes—in fact, there were almost 1,000 disciplinary actions during that time. Some teachers described the students as “out of control.”

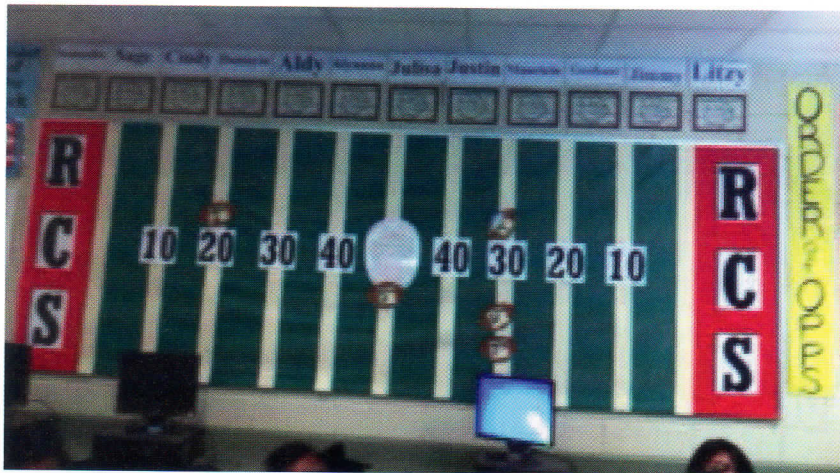
### A Revitalized PBS Effort

During the 2011–2012 school year, the school’s new administrator asked teachers for their feedback about the PBS program and for recommendations to address student misbehavior. Based on that feedback, and with the help of a committed PBS committee, she supported the implementation of an incentive system that rewarded students for exemplary behavior on a daily basis.

Working with a PBS consultant during the summer prior to the start of the 2012–2013 school year, the committee of teachers fleshed out the program, created the guidelines and the PBS-related documents, such as Good Behavior tickets, and announced the initiative on the school’s grade-

level bulletin boards. Here are the basics of the program:

- Teachers recognized students for positive behavior by writing their names on a ticket and putting the tickets in a box.
- Every Monday, each grade-level assistant principal pulled a ticket out of the box and that student received a free ice cream as a special reward. The students’ names were also displayed on the grade-level bulletin boards.
- Teachers who submitted “good conduct” names could choose a day to wear jeans. This established some buy-in among the staff.
- Every week, each teacher chose a student who modeled positive behavior and awarded that student a certificate. Each teacher also identified a Student of the Month.
- The program’s buddy system provided each teacher with a colleague to whom they could send a student who needed “time out” for reflection.



Teachers created their own classroom goals and rewards systems.

- Monthly PBS celebration parties honored every student who did not have an ISS/OSS infraction or a “time out” for reflection. Students were able to attend a 15-minute dance held in the hallway and to eat lunch at a park located next to the school. Students who had been assigned ISS/OSS or who had experienced a “time out” ate in a silent lunch setting during the celebration time.

The teachers determined how they would administer rewards within their own classroom by designated point keeping systems for each class period. When the goal was met, the students received rewards such as 10 minutes of electronics usage or 10 minutes of time on the sports field. Teachers reasoned that the improved class time on task over a 10- to 14-day period was well worth the 10 minutes of reward time for good class behavior.

### The Second Time Around

The middle school’s PBS program was successful the second time because it was based on an individual, a class, and a school-wide system carried through with fidelity. A core group of

teachers on the PBS team was able to foster goodwill among their colleagues. The grade-level PBS representatives continually asked teachers questions such as, “How is the program working with our students?”

When the new PBS program was initiated, teachers modeled the expected behavior. For example, during the first week of school, teachers showed students how to conduct themselves in the hallways during class changes. Teachers revisited and continually

modeled how students should behave.

Teachers also displayed their behavior expectations in their classrooms. Expectations included “be on time,” “come prepared to work,” “complete your warm-up activity,” and “bring your textbook.” The constant reinforcement made a dramatic difference in the school’s discipline referrals.

The guiding principle of the school-wide PBS program was to make a conscious effort to reward good behavior. When a student repeated inappropriate behavior, the teacher called the parent about the issue and explained that the student had been given a chance for correction and reflection. The teacher then completed a reflection spreadsheet with the behavior noted. The PBS team looked at the spreadsheet to identify measures that might help the student.

Now that the PBS program has the support to be fully implemented, not only are specific behaviors identified as focused targets for correction, but the needs of particular students are



Teachers recognized good behavior with student of the week and student of the month certificates.

identified for a targeted “check-in and check-out” program.

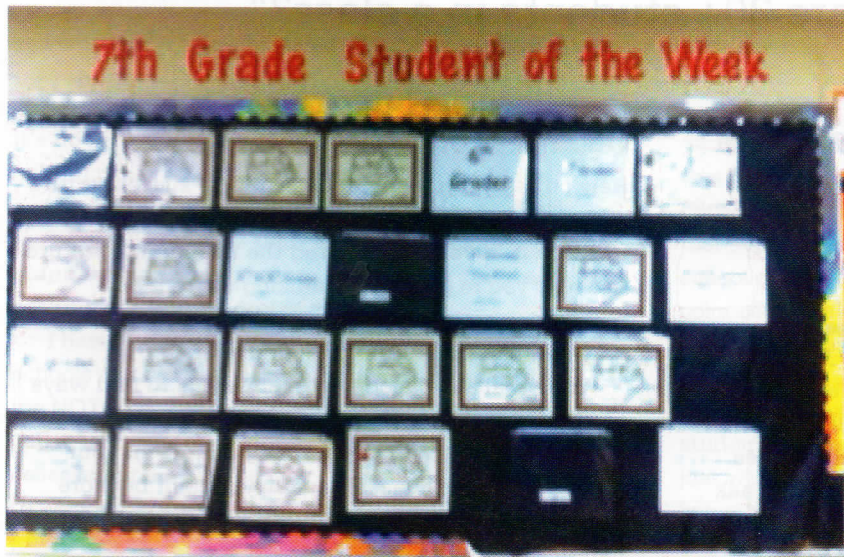
Within check-in and check-out, teacher mentor checks in with each intensive-need student on a bi-weekly if not daily basis. These intensive-need students are repeat offenders within the

The second implementation of the PBS program was successful because it focused on changing the culture of the middle school and a new community was formed in the process. During this cultural change, teachers stated their behavior expectations,

valuable insight regarding student behavior such as bullying, cafeteria interactions, and hallway transitions that teachers might not see.

- Work with colleagues at feeder schools to establish a PBS program there. That way, incoming students would be used to a school-wide PBS program's expectations prior to their arrival at middle school.
- Engage parental and community support. Solicit feedback from parents. Publicize opportunities to celebrate.
- Work with the school or district's behavior specialist to provide a different perspective of data.
- Continue to train new teachers to provide consistent professional development in the school's PBS methods.

No one person can build and sustain a successful school-wide PBS initiative. Positive outcomes are contingent on strong faculty/staff investment, supportive and transforming leadership, and an overall culture that is healthy, flexible, and open to change. **AM**



Grade-level bulletin boards honored students of the week throughout the year.

PBS system who need additional support and do not seem to be responding to positive rewards. The educators hope these students can be individually coached and encouraged to be more successful in the school setting.

The grade-level teams record their data daily and their observations weekly. The PBS team meets monthly. Moreover, the PBS team continues to welcome new members and to seek guidance as they become increasingly more responsive and data driven; they realize that their continued commitment is necessary to impact sustainable change.

administrators supported the instructors' efforts, a PBS team provided the supportive structure necessary for success, and students strived to perform according to the norms of the new culture. The PBS program has fulfilled its promise to reduce the number of days students were assigned to ISS/OSS—from 1,527 in 2011–2012 to 1,292 in 2012–2013.

### Conclusion

When establishing or continuing a successful school-wide PBS program, consider some of these recommendations:

- Include a student on the PBS team. This student could provide

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