The Need for Positive Behavior Supports in Schools

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Student misbehavior can be a hindrance to the educational process in a school. Undesirable behavior may distract pupils from a lesson, teachers from instruction, administrators from other duties, and the offender from his or her own learning. Often, a misbehaving student is removed from the classroom or school building. This approach to managing student behavior is not effective in the long term, as studies show individuals do not benefit from exclusion from instruction. Adults in a school building must look into ways to support students in learning how to behave appropriately. In addition to clearly communicated behavioral expectations and consequences, school personnel should provide various support structures to students: beforeand after-school programs, counselors, clubs and activities, social-skills training, educational sanctions, and the like. Additionally, building adults must share a commitment to consistent enforcement of school policy within their respective domains.

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The Need for Positive Behavior Supports in Schools

by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree M.S. Special Education

Supervised by
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St. John Fisher College
April 30, 2010
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Abstract

Student misbehavior can be a hindrance to the educational process in a school. Undesirable behavior may distract pupils from a lesson, teachers from instruction, administrators from other duties, and the offender from his or her own learning. Often, a misbehaving student is removed from the classroom or school building. This approach to managing student behavior is not effective in the long term, as studies show individuals do not benefit from exclusion from instruction. Adults in a school building must look into ways to support students in learning how to behave appropriately. In addition to clearly communicated behavioral expectations and consequences, school personnel should provide various support structures to students: before- and after-school programs, counselors, clubs and activities, social-skills training, educational sanctions, and the like. Additionally, building adults must share a commitment to consistent enforcement of school policy within their respective domains.
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Table of Contents

Abstract…………………………………………………………………………………………1
Table of Contents………………………………………………………………………………2
Introduction…………………………………………………………………………………..3
Literature Review…………………………………………………………………………3
Method…………………………………………………………………………………………17
Research Findings……………………………………………………………………………18
Implications for Future Research…………………………………………………………29
References……………………………………………………………………………………31
The Need for Positive Behavior Supports in Schools

How do you determine what kind of discipline a student needs? In my own experience as a student, the very thought of a teacher reprimanding me during class kept my behavior in check. I used to think that a person made a choice to behave or to misbehave; they were solely responsible for the consequences of their actions. Is that entirely fair? Educators are trained to look for teachable moments in their classroom, making use of a current event or student inquiry for the benefit of the student and class as a whole. But why isn’t misconduct considered as valuable an opportunity? Isn’t as much to be gained through reflection on a student’s behavior as from a student’s inquisitiveness? What is in place in schools to make the best use of student missteps?

Effects of Poor Behavior in Schools

It is no secret that student misbehavior is disruptive to student learning, teacher instruction, and administrative functionality (Finn, Fish, & Scott, 2008). When 805 members of the American Federation of Teachers union were surveyed, “17% of the members reported that they lost 4 hr or more of teaching time each week because of disruptive students” (p. 259). This is troubling because time used to deal with misbehavior causes a loss of focus on running a school. Additionally, significant and consistent poor behavior can change a school community for the worse, causing students and teachers “discomfort or fear” within the school environment (p. 259). Although student misbehavior in general is not a new development, researchers acknowledge that recently trends have moved from “a prevention and correction model to a reactive and punitive model” (Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009, p.1).

As a newspaper reported after a student was sanctioned in-school suspension for
wearing jeans with torn knees, although some state laws direct how districts “should punish students who commit the most serious offenses — felonious behavior, assaults and drug issues, for example — district leaders have a great deal of leeway on how to handle more minor issues, which make up the majority of disciplinary issues” (Holeywell, 2007, p.1). With information available stating that lower achievement rates are directly tied to student suspension rates (Gregory & Ripski, 2008), teachers and administrators need to think twice before sending a student out of the classroom for minor disciplinary reasons.

**Criticism of Zero Tolerance Policies**

An example of the detrimental trend in behavioral response is zero tolerance, which has been defined as “school-wide or district-wide policies that mandate typically harsh consequences or punishments such as suspensions and expulsions for a wide range of rule violations” (Evenson et al., 2009). Such an approach, as researched by Gorman and Pauken (2003), to safety and accountability cannot always be effective. During the 1990s, as occurrences of serious school violence rose, public and media outcry influenced legislation resulting in “zero tolerance” (p. 25) to become a household phrase. However, according to Gorman and Pauken, “the zero tolerance mentality does not allow school officials much flexibility in making decisions with the spirit that honest school discipline intends—decisions that benefit the individual student and benefit the student body and school community” (p. 26). It was suggested that a zero tolerance approach does not address a student’s developmental needs. In one example, the authors ask if all students found in possession of a gun should receive the same punishment. What if one student had fearfully hidden a gun in his or her locker after successfully diffusing a friend’s
suicide attempt? Another student’s gun had been intercepted before an elaborate plan of intentional harm to peers was realized. A no-exceptions policy would fail to address the partial heroism of the first student, and may even fail to tend to the root of the latter student’s problem. A fearful society and a conflicted administration beg the question: “how should moral decision-making and personal values become a part of the development and execution of school policy and the school discipline code of conduct” (p. 25)?

In the research by Evenson et al. (2009), it was reported that they had “found zero tolerance policies to be largely ineffective and cause more problems than they solve” (p. 1). Evenson et al. offers this list as evidence against implementing such policies in schools: “elevated rates of school dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school discipline practices” (p. 1). Still interested in addressing dangerous student behavior, these researchers do acknowledge that egregious behavior such as engaging in violence, possession of weapons, and substance abuse should not be tolerated in the schools, and may call for temporary and conditional expulsion. However, Evenson et al. brings to our attention

Despite alarming suspension rates nationwide, which lead many to believe that violence in schools is on the rise, research demonstrated that about 90% of schools nationwide specify that no serious violent crimes were committed in a school year and that 99% of students do not commit serious crimes while in school. (p. 1)

Evenson et al.s’ statistics highlight a concerning issue in today’s schools: many suspensions are not sanctioned as a result of severe behavior; students are being sent out of school for a host of shocking reasons (pp. 1-2). For example, The New York Times ran
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

an article on April 7, 2009 detailing the arrest of a six year old Florida student. “When 6-year-old Desre’e threw a tantrum in her kindergarten class…she could not have known that…she would be carted off by the police as a felon,” wrote journalist Bob Herbert (Herbert, 2009). Documentation surrounding the incident detailed Deser’e’s actions as “upset and crying and wailing and would not leave the classroom” (p. 1). The child’s disruption caused her removal from the classroom, but she continued to flail her arms about and kick her legs. Upon police arrival, 6-year-old Desre’e hid under a table where she could not be reached by teachers. Eventually the responding officers retrieved her and handcuffed her. Herbert contested that the child “should have been placed in the care of competent, comforting professionals rather than being hauled off to jail” (p. 1) and was disturbed by the “outlandish trend of criminalizing very young children” (p. 1). It may be fair to consider what good—for both student and teachers—came from calling the authorities to arrest an upset child.

Research Opposing Classroom Removal

According to Evenson et al. (2009),

Research studies verify that upon removal from school, students appear to become more likely to engage in or become victims of violent crimes. The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education evaluated the 2003-2004 school year and the following data were published: Rates of serious violent crimes against school-aged youth including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault are more than twice as high outside of the school as they are inside of the school. With this evidence in mind, schools are doing students a disservice by removing them for minor infractions that are neither violent nor illegal. (p. 2)
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Brown (2007) contributes the idea that “Most researchers agree that exclusion, rightly or wrongly, punish students” (p. 435). Many concerned members of the educational field believe that suspension causes more problems down the line because although a quick fix, it “offers students no help in addressing the behaviors that got them into trouble” (p. 436). There is push in the field to suppress liberal use of suspension and expulsions. Those responses would be replaced with “other strategies that stress prevention, early response, and behavioral and academic support for students at risk for disciplinary action” (436). As Brown says,

Herein lies the tragic irony, when the interventions aimed at students’ troubles actually compound them. As they are ‘intended primarily to punish the offender’, suspension and expulsion as disciplinary actions are strategies for sanctioning ‘problem’ students, not alleviating students’ problems. As such, this study found that among students surveyed, school exclusion precipitated a variety of conditions that were extremely detrimental to their schooling experiences. (p. 449)

**Teaching Social-behavioral Skills in Schools**

If quick-draw suspensions and expulsions are not the answer, what might be? Luckily, this question was asked and answered by researchers in the field, especially Sailor, Stowe, Turnbull III, and Kleinhammer-Tramill (2007). All agreed that “zero tolerance policies are largely ineffective in addressing safety issues or preventing problem behavior” (p. 367), adding that such policies are in part responsible for high expulsion rates. In favor of individualized support for students, the abovementioned scholars were interested in behavior response practices that focus on why behavior occurred, not solely the fact that it did occur. They contended that the educational system
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

should be responsible for teaching social-behavioral skills in addition to academic skills. They proposed a program entitled the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), which is enriched through extension across the school building, as well as the home and larger community. It is also argued that SWPBS follows guidelines set up within the least restrictive environment mandates in it’s consideration for “least drastic means” (p. 370) when addressing student disciplinary concerns. Sailor and colleagues called for increased school resources, allowing for teacher preparedness in implementation of SWPBS programs.

These SWPBS programs intend to create environments where students learn how to behave through clear rules and expectations, good role-modeling, and social skill development. What does that type of approach look like in action? Two North Carolina educators, Cope and Hundley, were given the opportunity to test out an alternative approach to discipline: positive discipline (Strahan, Cope, Hundley, & Faircloth, 2005). They operated under the notion that positive student connection to school increases student success within school. The plan was to allow struggling students opportunities to increase connectivity to school by choosing to respond “to students as individuals, using disruptions as teachable moments and opportunities to model self-discipline” (p. 26). This practice would ultimately teach students how to learn from mistakes. An important component to Cope and Hundley’s plan was to forgo a too-specific conduct plan, acknowledging that their students “have lives that are more complex than a traditional middle schooler’s and so it does not help to spend time giving demerits because they’re chewing gum or because they have a cap on” (p. 27). Instead, they focused on real-life applications of behavioral lessons. While on a class walk, a spontaneous reward for well-
done work, the instructors presented students with hypothetical situations to generate discussion and reflection. One such question was “what will happen if some of our neighbors hear us shouting names at each other or see us running up and down the street” (p. 27). This and other opportunities were created to engage students in pre-decision reflection. The teachers also employed students in discussions of conflict management, allowing the class to generate ideas that might work for them better than those imposed by adults. By the end of the trial period, it was reported that students gained ownership of the choices they made, after working with teachers to understand the impact of their decisions. As a result, it was suggested that educators should not forget that “students often exceed our expectations when their teachers respond to them as individuals” (p. 29).

**Teacher-student Relational Approaches**

In addition to providing students with opportunities to learn favorable behavior skills, a teacher must assess his or her own philosophies toward discipline and reflect on the relationship he or she builds with students. One professional sat down with students to gain more insight on how teacher-student relationships affect behavior (Thorson, 2005). Thorson spent time in a high school Saturday detention, conversing with students about their views of why they were in detention, and if the punishment would have any effect on their behavior. Thorson stated that although many would agree adolescence is a time for “rebellious, antisocial behavior” (p. 2), punishment does not always have the desired effect. In fact, sometimes punitive responses may increase poor behavior. Each time a student acts up, the teacher must consider the individual’s home and social life, academic struggles, personal strengths, and motivation levels to better understand a given
situation. Therefore, each student who found his or herself in a Saturday detention would have different expectations of the benefits from serving the detention. For some study subjects, Thorson found the annoyance of the wasted time enough to deter a repeat offense. In sharp contrast, some students reported no amount of punishment would correct their actions; if they wanted to stop, they would stop on their own volition.

Another student attributed her Spanish teacher’s rapid instructional pace to her disinterest in class. She was given a detention after failing to complete class work, assignments which she did not understand. The teacher never asked why she was not completing her assignments. A young male study participant suggested that his requests for extra work were denied by his teacher, who did not believe in homework. The student’s boredom led to his egregious behaviors in the classroom. Important conclusions were drawn from Thorson’s research. The first was that many students were indeed aware of, and valued, teacher support. Secondly, students did become upset when others’ demonstrated disrespect toward an adult, and when that adult did little about it. Perhaps most importantly, all students interviewed said “if they were in charge, they would talk to students who break rules” (p. 10), be sure to listen to both sides of the issue, and then consider appropriate means by which to address the problem. The students were cognizant of the impact of lost instruction time when a student has been removed from the classroom. Detentions and suspensions would be considered as last resorts only.

Scholars Gregory and Ripinski (2008) have made contributions to this concept. They explain that “Teachers were once thought of as moral authorities who upheld cultural standards and societal norms. In the past 25 years, however, blanket assumptions that students perceive all teachers as legitimate authority figures have been challenged”
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

(p. 338). They continue to explain that “A relational approach may earn student cooperation via students’ impressions of their teachers as trustworthy and legitimate authority figures” (p. 338). Although often unsuccessfully, many educational systems try to teach students that teachers are automatic authority figures whom deserve respect. The reality is that many students believe respect must be mutual and negotiated.

Connecting Students to School

Positive relationships with adults not only encourage better behavior, but helps students cope with problems when they arise (Hair, Moore, Ling, McPhee-Baker, Brown, & Brett, 2009). Children with a consistent adult support network exhibit stronger signs of resiliency. “Resilient children take an active approach to solving problems, perceive even negative experiences constructively, have an ability to gain positive attention from others, and tend to draw on their faith to maintain a positive outlook on life,” explains Hair et al. (pp. 2-3). These skills support both academic performance and self-esteem. Unfortunately, it is reality that all students do not come from stable or supportive homes, and do not build strong relationships with teachers. To fill in this gap, Hair et al. suggests promoting student connectivity to the school in other ways.

Hair et al. state “The transition to adulthood can be a turbulent time. To succeed in this transition, adolescents…must advance in several areas of development, such as education, work, financial autonomy, romantic relationships, peer involvement, citizenship, and avoidance of destructive health behaviors” (p. 1). In addition to clearly stating the school’s expectations for behavior and the coinciding consequences, and in addition to building trusting teacher-student relationships, after-school programs are necessary in schools. Such programs allow for students to feel further connected to the
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

educational system. They also create opportunities to socialize and problem-solve under the guidance of adults and other student leaders. Research by Hair et al. shows that “more than 5 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 (15 percent of the total youth population) were not in school or in the workforce in 2001” (p. 1). Later in life these individuals are likely to have mental health issues, live with poverty, engage in substance abuse, participate in or experience violent behavior, and deal with teen pregnancy.

Marin and Brown (2008) add,

The support of peers and teachers at school can have important consequences for student well-being. Adolescents who feel that there are people who care about them at school and feel connected to the school are more likely to be academically motivated and less likely to engage in a variety of negative behaviors including drug use, violence and sexual activity. (p. 6)

They suggest that teachers should support students in many ways, including “caring, having rules that are perceived as clear and fair, and allowing for age-appropriate autonomy in decision-making” (p. 6). Students who feel valuable are more likely to “learn, participate more in class, or engage in other behavior related to academic achievement. In addition, teacher support may help students psychologically” (p. 6). Students who feel connected to a teacher are often self-described as having more self-esteem. Marin and Brown also content that

Teens who are civically engaged are less likely to use drugs or become pregnant.

High school students’ participation in community programs is associated with positive outcomes for many educational measures such as school attendance, grade
point average, self-esteem, and academic motivation. Civic engagement during adolescence is associated with an increased likelihood of voting and volunteering in the future, as well as a stronger work ethic as an adult. (p. 7)

Theories in Action

One may ask how applicable this research is to the everyday school environment. Cope and Hundley were granted the freedom to test their theories on a small group of students. What about the millions of typical teachers dealing with well over one hundred students a day? How do they give each student due diligence in dealing with behavioral problems? In a featured article in School Psychology Review (as cited in Gregory & Ripski, 2008), a research sampling of students and teachers were interviewed on their opinions of classroom behavior management. Study coordinators were systematic in participant selection. Students were selected because they had been referred to in-school suspension for insubordination in the classroom. Teachers were selected based on referral rates, and a comparison group of teachers without any record of discipline referrals were also included. Surveys and loosely structured conversation were used to collect information. Two of the most telling student survey responses were drawn from the following questions: “I can trust the way this teacher uses his or her power and authority,” and “my classmates and I should obey this teacher even if it goes against what we want to do” (p. 343). Students responded more favorably to these prompts when considering teachers pre-determined to have the lowest, or non-existent, referral rates. According to the teachers with the lowest referral rates, they made a point of building a relationship with each student, and to utilize a constructivist approach to behavior management. The study found that students performed better in classes where teachers
“focused on building relationships to reduce discipline problems” (p. 345). This was largely because student cooperation was elicited when they trusted their teacher to care about them and act in their best interest. Students may not know the philosophy by name, but can pick up on a teacher’s intentions. The study states that “it is well established that when adolescents read hostile intent into another’s actions, they are more likely to react aggressively” (p. 346).

According to Johnson and Smith (2008), well-intended discipline, and explicitly clear expectations are non-negotiable for today’s students. “Well-documented, research-based interventions are available for middle school students, but one problem that limits their effective implementation is the lack of a school-wide process through which to do so” (p. 46). A random and uncoordinated approach to behavior correction is largely ineffective. Additionally, teacher responses to bad behavior should always focus on individual needs. This is difficult without a research-based, all-school supported discipline plan.

Results of Implementation

School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) “is currently being practiced in more than 4,000 schools across the United States, and that number is expected to double in the next few years,” (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007). Reports have been published from some of these districts, including a New Hampshire district study (Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008). These scholars’ research presented a clear view of the effectiveness of implementing a SWPBS, detailing the initial concerns of participating educators, as well as their final opinions of the experience.

Regarding the program’s initial implementation, one teacher expressed her
concern: “I was very skeptical about this program at first. I thought, here we go again—another initiative. But I can honestly say that teaching is much easier with [SWPBS] in place—I am now sold on this approach” (p. 192). Another educator from the same school questioned whether “[SWPBS] schools supported with training and technical assistance … can implement and sustain a universal schoolwide system of discipline with fidelity” (p. 194). The satisfied teacher later reported:

I can’t begin to describe the incredible differences [SWPBS] has made at Horne Street School. I have been teaching and working with students for 25 years. The [SWPBS] system has helped me to integrate my training and experience to design and implement effective behavioral supports on a school-wide, classroom, small group, and individual basis. Every year the program gets better and better. (p. 194)

A third participant wondered if the new discipline system would really lower instances of referrals and suspensions. Her concern was laid to rest when she observed a “strong framework that helps us create classrooms that are consistent in their approach to challenging behaviors, and it has given our staff the support they need. The data has [sic] shown us that the frequency of those behaviors has decreased” (p. 197). In addition to these teacher findings, it was reported that students were present for more instructional time, teachers were able to devote more time to teaching, and administrators were able to focus on more progressive tasks of overseeing a school. What were the long-term effects of the SWPBS implementation? Because the students found consistent behavioral expectations, consequences and supports as they progressed through grade levels, they “are able to self-monitor their behaviors and work out many of the conflicts that previously required so much teacher time” (p. 199). Lastly, at the beginning of the study,
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

a U.S. state senator asked, do schools that have “implemented [SWPBS] with fidelity associated increases in academic achievement?” (p. 201). His final response: “Unquestionably, student achievement increases in a positive school climate” (p. 201).

Finally, an administrator from the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services shared his opinion of the new system. The administrator said, “We see [SWPBS] as the keystone, the link between children’s mental health services and schools to create school and community environments where all students can succeed” (p. 203).

Implications for Future Research

Once students leave the school system, and enter adult society, they will be expected to function as adults. It does not make sense to inflict strictly punitive reprimands on our students for 18 years, and then expect them to have a good sense of personal accountability, and self-modification skills once in the real world. The findings of researchers like those included in this literature review, and the evidence of successful SWPBS implementation like in New Hampshire, should charge educators to closely examine classroom and building-wide behavior processes. Further, educators should critically consider if those procedures in place are doing more harm than good; if solutions are effective temporary or effective in the long-term. I would be interested in research on the individual teacher perspective. Specifically, do teachers have defined behavior philosophies? Does the school or district create philosophies for teachers? How many educators in the same school building support the discipline policies of colleagues or of administrators? Are the adopted philosophies being consistently practiced in the classroom?
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Method

A significant component to successfully managing student behavior in my research was consistency of expectations communicated to the student body, and consistent implementation of consequences by school building adults. When I received my field placement, I quickly heard rumors from peers about the behavioral problems in that school building. It was a secondary school in an urban district. I was interested in beginning my field placement and immersing myself within this school environment. I anticipated it would be a useful setting to observe student behavior and teacher and administrator response. I would evaluate these components considering my literature research.

After entering the field placement, I assessed that a survey would be the best way to collect research data. It was a large school divided into three smaller schools within one building. The school I was working with had 40 teachers. My schedule in the building did not allow me time to introduce myself to teachers I did not regularly see. I only came into regular contact with four teachers.

I was instructed by both my graduate program and my school-based educator to seek approval of my research method with a building administrator. I spoke with such an individual and explained what I wanted to do. He asked me to create an electronic survey because he was concerned with teachers considering a paper survey as paperwork beyond what their union contracts would allow. He asked to be sent my survey so he could review my questions. I complied and he reviewed my electronic survey, created using Qualtrics. The administrator had one request: that I eliminate, or change to multiple-choice, any open-ended questions. When I asked why, he stated that he did not want the
teachers to make disparaging statements about any administrators or the district. I thought that comment spoke volumes about any behavioral problems within the school. My initial assumption was that he did not want his teachers’ responses to air any of the school’s dirty laundry.

When crafting my survey, I sought to hit a few main ideas: did teachers know if the school had an established code of conduct, did teachers perceive there to be a discipline problem in the school, how did teachers respond to student misbehavior, and were the teachers satisfied with the building-wide response to student misbehavior. These points were things I could measure through my own observation, as I could inquire as to the existence of a code of conduct, I could observe student behavior in the classroom, and I could observe teacher response to student behavior.

Once I gained final approval of my survey from the administrator, he distributed my survey link through his school e-mail account to the teachers in the school. The Qualtics program allowed me to keep track of responses as they accrued. My survey had been open for 2 ½ weeks with 12 responses when I asked the administrator to resend my link. Two days later I closed my survey with 22 responses. Of the 22 participants who had begun the survey, 19 completed all questions. That was a 43% response rate.

Research

My first question, “Does your school have an established Student Code of Conduct (or other statement of school rules endorsed by the school),” came back with a 100% response of ‘yes.”
I was interested in what the results of this question would be, because as a field observer I had looked for signs of a code of conduct. The only related material I could find was a posting created by the school district. There were several of these laminated posters in the hallways. They had bullet points mentioning dress code, weapons, attendance, and gang association. There was not information about specific behavioral standards, nor information about consequences. Before creating my survey I had asked my school-based educator if the school had a code of conduct. After looking for her copy, she gave me the 20-page Student Handbook. In addition to information about the school calendar, administration contact information, a grading system, and graduation requirements, there were ten pages of policies and procedures. Embedded within these items was a code of conduct covering areas of student expectations, dress code, prohibited behavior, and discipline policy. During my time in the classrooms, I had never heard a student or adult mention or refer to the student handbook.

The next survey question yielded a mixture of results. The question was “Are there general themes or an underlying focus in your school’s code of conduct (i.e.
personal accountability, community well-being, striving for excellent, etc.)?” Just over half of the respondents said “yes,” 37% said “I don’t know,” and 11% said “no.”

I’m not sure what these results indicate. It could demonstrate the teacher’s lack of knowledge of the code and its purpose. It could mean teachers interpret the code differently, and possibly implement it inconsistently.

In an effort to learn how accountable the school might hold its students, parents, teachers, and administrators to the code, I asked how accessible the student handbook was to the school community. The majority of respondents said the handbook was easily
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

accessible to the aforementioned four groups of people.

I thought this result was interesting. When I had inquired about a code of conduct, my school-based educator retreated to her classroom, spent a few minutes searching for her copy, and eventually satisfied my request. I wondered just how many copies of the document were lying around the school building. Were they sent to families each year? Do student receive copies? These questions led into my next question, “How is the Code of Conduct communicated to employees and students? Please choose all that apply.”

This question returned a muddy response. Of the six options, only one was never chosen. That choice was “There is no such communication.” That told me the code of conduct was communicated in some way, but of the responses that were selected were inconsistent.
Some teachers said that students and teachers received paper copies. A few less teachers said that copies of the document were available to teachers and students upon request. Fewer teachers said the code of conduct was posted in the building, and even fewer said the information was presented to the school body during assemblies. My concern with these responses is that they are inconsistent among teachers. Why didn’t all teachers agree that the information was covered at school assemblies? Why didn’t they all know that students and teachers receive paper copies? Was there a lack of awareness by the teachers? Was the communication poor?

Moving on, I wanted to know how teachers felt about student behavior. I had obtained information on how behavior expectations were communicated to the school, and now wanted to know if behavior was an issue. The question “As a teacher, do you feel that student misbehavior is an issue in your classroom” was answered by 89% of respondents with a “yes.” The remaining two teachers said “no.”
These results did not surprise me. In my time as an observer, I noticed constant student misbehavior. I would estimate any teacher I had observed would acknowledge student misbehavior at least one time every five minutes. I use the word acknowledge because the teacher response to undesirable behavior ran the whole spectrum from mentioning the behavior to punishing the student in some way. At the very least, the teacher would verbally acknowledge that a student was doing something wrong every five minutes.

The next question was about behavior outside the classroom. “Do you feel that negative student behavior is an issue in the school environment outside your classroom (i.e. in hallways, during lunch, after school, etc.)” was returned with 100% selection of “yes.”

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This was more difficult for me to compare against my own observations. Although I did
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

spend time in the hallways when I was entering and exiting the school, it was not extended exposure. What I did see during my time in the hallways was mostly students lingering instead of going to assigned classes. In the beginning of time at the school, a new late policy was implemented. Any student not in his or her class by the bell was turned away from the class and sent to the new late room. This was supposed to keep students out of the hallways and contain all late students in one location. General teacher evaluation to this new policy (information obtained from my observations, not from this survey) has been unfavorable. The hallways do have fewer students in between classes, but the late policy has not cut down on students who are late to class.

The next part of my survey was focused on how teachers address student misbehavior in their classrooms. This was one question where I had intended to allow teachers an open-ended response. However, as per the approving administrator’s request, I had to provide a selection of options. In response to “What actions are taken against a student who is a continual or constant disruption in his or her classes? Choose all that apply,” these were the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There are not consequences for student misbehavior.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student is given verbal warnings in the classroom.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student is sent out of the classroom to sit in the hallway.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student is removed from the classroom and sent to a building administrator.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student is send to an in-school detention or</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### My analysis of these responses is drawn directly from my observations, and well as my literature review. During my time in the school I was exposed to many informal conversations among some teachers. They often mentioned the district’s superintendent’s policy of no expulsions. From the teacher perspective, the policy gave student freedom to behave as they wanted, because the student knew the consequences could not be too great. That is why the 42% selection of “There are not consequences for student misbehavior” did not surprise me. Many teachers feel that their efforts to manage behavior are futile in a district where policy does not support expulsion of constantly misbehaving students. The second choose in the table matched my own observations, as I frequently saw teachers verbally address student misbehavior. According to this survey question, it is the most frequently used way to address behavior, yet in my observations it was ineffective. I had also heard about a few parents being called in response to a student’s actions. Additionally, when students were sent out of the classroom, they often made their way to the late room, the receptacle for students in violation of the late policy. From what I had heard from teachers, when a student was sent specifically to an administrator, the student was usually lectured and returned to the classroom. Whether sent to the late room, or to an administrator’s office, those students lose instruction time.
Most of the research I reviewed insisted that loss of class time is an extreme detriment and should be avoided if necessary.

When I asked teachers to consider how closely they followed the guidelines of the code of conduct in their classrooms, that too yielded a mixed response. The choices were “I strictly adhere to the school policies stated in the Student Code of Conduct,” “I do what works for me and my students, regardless of what school policy expects,” and “I am liberal in my classroom enforcement of school conduct policies.”

Most teachers did what “works for me and my students,” which aligns with my observations. In example, on day where a class was reasonably quiet and on task, a teacher would not as fervently address student cell phone use (against school policy) in class. On a day when students were more unruly and off-task, I had seen the same teacher remove cell phone-using students from the classroom. There is a lot that could be discussed about the messages that inconsistently sends, but for this question, it is most important to note how the teacher chooses when to enforce policy in the classroom based on a day’s environment.

Next, I wanted to know if teachers thought they approached classroom behavior
management in the same way as their colleagues, or if they were unaware of how other teachers handled problems in their classes. The question was “Do you find your approach to classroom behavior management to be the same, similar, or different from your colleagues? Here were the responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1  | I identify and respond to student misbehavior the same as my colleagues.| 2        | 11%
| 2  | My identification and response to student misbehavior is similar to my colleagues. | 12       | 63%
| 3  | My identification and response to student misbehavior is very different from my colleagues' approach. | 1        | 5%
| 4  | I am not sure how my colleagues identify or respond to student misbehavior in their classrooms. | 4        | 21%
|    | Total                                                                  | 19       | 100%

After receiving the responses, I wished I had asked teachers how they determined their answer. Were the teachers discussing their specific approaches to management? Were the teachers guessing that their approaches were the same, similar, or different? What kind of communication occurs among teachers in regard to classroom management? What I can tell from these results is that the teachers are not on the same page. According to my literature review, different behavioral expectations from class to class make it difficult for students to know what is expected and to know how to act as expected.
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Another interesting set of responses came from my next question, “Who do you think should have a role in promoting positive behavior in students? Choose all that apply.” For each group listed—students, parents/families, teachers, administrators—each was selected between 58 and 68%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>parents/families</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>administrators</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My literature review has said that all groups have a role in supporting good student behavior. No one group is more important than another.

To continue with this topic, I asked teachers who they observed participating in the promotion of positive student behavior: students, parents/families, teachers, or administrators. This time the results were more distinct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>parents/families</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>administrators</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

89% said “teachers” and 42% said “administrators.” Only a combined 27% said student and parents/families participated in the promotion of positive student behavior. I wondered what accounted for this low number. Was the school not communicating behavioral expectations to students and families? Was inconsistency among school building staff in policy enforcement sending mixed messages to students and families? The gap between the school and home was apparent.
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

The final question’s response would be no surprise. “Do you think your school needs to improve its approach to student misbehavior” was answered by 100% of my survey participants with “yes.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications for future research.

My field research findings were aligned with the academic literature I reviewed. A school building with unclear behavioral expectations, inconsistent enforcement of discipline, and teacher dissatisfaction with—and sequentially their lack of support for—school policies and administration creates a school with significant student behavioral problems.

Considering my literature review and my field research, I have identified a focus for future research. Researchers recommend that teachers commit to holding students accountable to their behavior. Most teachers who participated in my survey made discipline decision based on what they deemed appropriate, regardless of what school policy directed. Most teachers also considered their approach to classroom behavior management to be similar to the approach taken by their colleagues. Teachers I observed in my placement were inconsistent in addressing behavior from one student to another within their own classrooms. For example, one day a teacher sent a student caught text-messaging out of the room, but five minutes later ignored the same behavior by five other
students. An interesting area to research would be teachers’ perceptions of their handle on classroom management evaluated against classroom observations of their actual practices. It might be insightful for educators to learn about behavioral theories, and how their own practices compare. Analyzing how each teacher contributes—negatively and positively—to the school’s behavior culture might awaken some teachers to the need for a consensus of school-wide discipline approach. Just as students would benefit from recognizing how their actions impact the school community, teachers should also be aware of how they contribute to the community as well. The intent should not be to punitively punish students, but to educate and support students toward positive behavior.
THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

References


THE NEED FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS


