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## Building sustainable schoolwide positive behavior supports in high schools

Jessica M. Overturf  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLWIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR  
SUPPORTS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

Jessica M. Overturf  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2012

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) systems can be successful in high school settings. Chapter 1 will establish the need for SWPBS in high schools and Chapter 2 will provide an overview of and evidence supporting SWPBS. Chapter 3 focuses on what is considered best practice in implementing SWPBS. Chapter 4 discusses the characteristics exclusive to high schools that have been identified as potential barriers in implementing SWPBS efforts, and Chapter 5 provides examples of successful high school SWPBS case studies as well as recommendations for overcoming the aforementioned barriers.

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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Degree of Specialist in Education

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Kerri Clopton, Chair, Thesis Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Barry Wilson, Thesis Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Nicole Skaar, Thesis Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Michael Licari, Dean, Graduate College

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CHAPTER 1  
ESTABLISHING A NEED FOR PREVENTING PROBLEM  
BEHAVIORS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Introduction

Many students enter schools today with the disadvantage of never having learned appropriate social skills (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). In 2008, approximately 1.2 million nonfatal crimes (theft as well as violent crimes) were committed against 12 to 18 year old students while they were at school. One million nonfatal crimes were committed against the same population outside of school (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2010). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 5% of America's students reported that they had not gone to school for at least one day during the last 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school (2010). One quarter of the nation's public schools reported that they had dealt with bullying in their buildings on a daily or weekly basis during the 2007-2008 school year (Robers et al., 2010), and 19.9% of students reported being bullied in the last 12 months (Centers for Disease, 2009).

Students are not the only the only population whose safety and well-being have been threatened at school. During the 2007-2008 school year 11% of schools nationwide reported that they experienced student acts of disrespect towards teachers on a daily or weekly basis, and 6% reported student verbal abuse of teachers (Robers et al., 2010). Additionally, widespread disorder and racial and ethnic tensions in classrooms were reported by 4% of schools while 3% of schools

reported experiencing student sexual harassment towards other students (Robers et al., 2010).

Lewis and Sugai (1999) contend that students enter school with maladaptive social behaviors because their families and the communities in which they live model and reinforce inappropriate social interactions. Once a student enters school, those maladaptive social behaviors are often further reinforced by teacher and peer responses to the maladaptive behavior. Behavior management is, at best, touched upon briefly during teacher preparation programs, and as a result many teachers expect students to inherently know how to behave properly with no behavior instruction (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). This leads to positive reinforcement being underused by teachers in their classrooms (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Rather than teaching and reinforcing pro-social behaviors in the classroom, teachers resort to avoiding problem behaviors from occurring by lowering expectations, ignoring the student, not calling on the student as often, or removing them from the classroom (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993).

#### Problem Behaviors at the High School Level

Problem behaviors typically become more severe and chronic as students grow older and reach high school (Lewis, 2009). A higher percentage of secondary level teachers than elementary teachers report that student misbehavior, student tardiness, and class cutting interfere with their teaching (Robers et al., 2010). Fifty-two percent of middle and high school teachers reported that instances of verbal intimidation, threats, shoving, and harassment

are increasing at a far greater rate than more serious violations such as drug possession, gang involvement, and weapon possession (Robers et al., 2010). Schools have also reported that overall, a lower percentage of secondary teachers and principals enforce school rules when compared to elementary teachers and principals (Robers et al., 2010). The lack of student discipline and behavior control occurring in schools has been one of the most prominent concerns reported by teachers over the last 30 years (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

Problem behaviors as measured by office discipline referrals (ODR's) and attendance have been associated with negative post-secondary outcomes, specifically an increased involvement with the justice system (Bohanon, Flannery, Malloy, & Fenning, 2009). Defiance and tardiness have been associated with a higher probability of dropping out (Bohanon et al., 2009; Gottfredson et al., 1993), and an inverse relationship between academic gains and physically aggressive and hyperactive/inattentive behaviors has been reported (Sugai et al., 2010). The lack of academic gains made by students with physically aggressive, hyperactive, and inattentive behaviors further limit post-secondary opportunities for those students.

High schools continue to respond to problem behaviors by exercising punitive discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion, disregarding evidence that these policies are ineffective in changing anti-social behaviors (Bohanon et al., 2009; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Morrissey, Bohannon, & Flannery, 2010; Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2008). Exclusionary discipline policies can lead to an increase in vandalism, truancy,

tardiness, and aggression (Sugai et al., 2010). These practices reduce teacher and peer tolerance for problem behaviors as well, leading to the student being removed more frequently from instruction and further limiting the student's learning opportunities (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai et al., 2010).

Punitive discipline policies are ineffective because they are reactive in nature and pay no heed to preventing problem behaviors from occurring (Sugai et al., 2010). Supports such as instruction and modeling of appropriate behaviors do not take place and, because of this, punitive discipline policies do not produce long-lasting behavior change (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). As a result school becomes even more negative for those students, possibly leading to more problem behaviors (Sugai et al., 2010).

High rates of anti-social behaviors are associated with the following: punitive disciplinary strategies; lack of clarity about rules, expectations, and consequences; lack of staff support; and failure to consider and accommodate student differences (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). The aforementioned statistics provide a picture of the impact this can have on a school's climate and individual student outcomes. Allowing this cycle to run its course uninterrupted can contribute to the later development of some of the most severe forms of antisocial behaviors such as aggression and violence (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

### Conclusion

Because students' display of problem behaviors become more severe and chronic as they get older, a broader, more proactive approach is necessary to prevent problem behaviors in schools from occurring in the first place (Sugai et

al., 2010). One evidence-based approach is Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) programs. While the number of high schools implementing SWPBS is increasing, specific guidelines for effective implementation are less clearly defined and developed than at the elementary and middle school levels (Flannery & Sugai, 2009; Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Rogers, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to explore SWPBS in high school settings. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of SWPBS and evidence of its effectiveness. Chapter 3 provides an extensive look at best practices in implementing SWPBS programs to improve student outcomes. Chapter 4 describes characteristics exclusive to high schools that have served as barriers in implementing high school SWPBS efforts. Chapter 5 provides case study examples of successful high schools SWPBS programs and how they have overcome the previously mentioned barriers.

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERVIEW OF SCHOOLWIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT SYSTEMS

#### Introduction

SWPBS is a “framework for enhancing adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (Sugai et al., 2010, p. 13). The framework aims to decrease problem behaviors by replacing reactive and punitive disciplinary measures with more preventive measures such as explicitly teaching and reinforcing positive behaviors (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010; Sugai et al., 2008). It was designed to create school environments that promote and support appropriate behavior of all students by identifying and teaching common behavioral expectations (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

#### Structure of SWPBS

SWPBS’s structure is a three-tiered approach that provides different levels of support based on individual student needs (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). The three tiers provide (1) primary supports for 100% of students, (2) secondary supports for the approximately 20% of students who fail to respond to the primary supports alone, and (3) tertiary supports for the approximately 5% of students who fail to respond to primary and secondary supports and require individualized supports (Horner et al., 2005). SWPBS first recognizes the entire student population as the target for service delivery and continuously identifies non-responders through screening and data analysis.

These non-responders are then provided additional interventions through a range of services, which may include services given at the individual level (Horner et al., 2005). The scope of this paper will focus on the primary level of SWPBS programs.

Many environments within schools are addressed through SWPBS programs, including classroom settings, hallways, restrooms, lunchrooms, and auditoriums (McIntosh et al., 2010). An effective SWPBS program integrates (a) evidence-based practices that may be modified based on the context and the needs of the school, (b) practices that have been informed by data and have been evaluated in the light of outcomes, and (c) systems put in place that support school personnel in implementing these practices in both classroom and non-classroom settings (McIntosh et al., 2010). These components serve as the foundation for every SWPBS program (Sugai et al., 2010).

### Features of SWPBS

#### Preventive

SWPBS is a preventive approach that focuses on removing factors that have been identified as preceding problem behaviors while increasing factors that precede students' display of appropriate behaviors (Sugai et al., 2010). Similarly, SWPBS removes consequences that maintain or strengthen problem behaviors while increasing consequences that maintain and encourage appropriate behaviors. Modifying factors that lead to and strengthen problem behaviors maximizes students' opportunities to learn and practice appropriate

behaviors while preventing problem behaviors from occurring (Horner et al., 2005; Turnbull et al., 2002).

### Functional

SWPBS is a functional approach based largely upon behavioral theory, applied behavior analysis, and positive behavior support foundations (Horner et al., 2005). These approaches emphasize monitoring observable behaviors to form testable hypotheses about the causal relationship between problem behaviors and environmental antecedents and consequence stimuli (Sugai et al., 2008). Intervention components are then implemented by considering the abovementioned relationship between problem behaviors and those variables surrounding the behavior. By coupling the alteration of identified antecedent conditions and consequence stimuli with teaching pro-social alternative behaviors, problem behaviors can be prevented and social skills can be gained (Horner et al., 2005; Sugai et al., 2008; Turnbull et al., 2002).

### Instructional

SWPBS focuses on teaching pro-social behavior skills to students in the same manner that academic skills are taught—through direct instruction. Students are explicitly taught alternative behaviors that are appropriate and allow them access to the same result that engaging in the problem behavior gives them (Horner et al., 2005; Sugai et al., 2008). SWPBS teaches students pro-social behavior skills and encourages all students to display these behavior skills across all settings (Horner et al., 2005; Turnbull et al., 2002).

### SWPBS as an Evidence-Based Practice

Horner, Sugai, and Anderson (2010) examined the evidence base of SWPBS and results were promising. At least two randomized control trial research studies have been conducted resulting in improved outcomes for students (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009). Bradshaw and colleagues (2010) reported data across a 5-year longitudinal study from 37 elementary schools that demonstrated that the schools had implemented SWPBS with high fidelity, thereby reducing not only the number of office discipline referrals associated with problem behaviors but the proportion of students receive out-of-school suspensions as well. Similarly, Horner and colleagues (2009) conducted a randomized control trial across 63 elementary schools implementing SWPBS in Illinois and Hawaii and the School Safety Survey (SSS) was used. The SSS Risk Factor Score for targeted schools was not different from control schools during Pretest but was statistically different at Posttest, indicating a Time X Condition interaction [ $(-.064)$ ,  $t(35) = -2.55$ ,  $p = .0154$ ] with a large effect size ( $d = -.86$ ; Horner et al., 2009).

### Conclusion

SWPBS can lead to improvements in academic achievement and social competence and can create safe learning and teaching environments (Horner et al., 2005). Instruction time is increased as well because the need for teachers to interrupt instruction to address problem behaviors is minimized (Scott & Barrett, 2004). The following section provides an overview of best practices for implementing components essential to successful SWPBS programs.

## CHAPTER 3

### BEST PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTING SCHOOLWIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

#### Introduction

Effective SWPBS programs require certain components being implemented with integrity. These components include the establishment of behavior expectations, the provision of behavior instruction to students, acknowledgement systems for reinforcing desired behaviors, and consequence systems for eliminating problem behaviors. Additionally, SWPBS involves data based decision making to occur around both student outcome data and implementation integrity data. Each of these will now be discussed in further detail.

#### Establishing and Defining Expectations

The first component of successful SWPBS programs is establishing and defining behavioral expectations, and this should occur at three different levels (Sugai et al., 2010; Turnbull et al., 2002). The first level in establishing and defining these expectations is creating a statement of purpose that describes the schools' overall approach to teaching and learning (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). The statement of purpose should be brief, written in a positive tone, and should be applicable to all students, staff, and settings. The statement of purpose should also touch upon both academic and behavioral outcome goals for the school's students (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

The second level of establishing and defining expectations is creating three to five succinct schoolwide expectations for behaviors that apply to all school settings, both academic and non-academic. The behavioral expectations should be brief, memorable, and capture major social values of the school (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2010). A school motto or acronym should also be established to reflect these behavioral expectations. An example of this is an Iowa school adopting the motto "RAMS Way." Not only does the motto align with their school mascot, but also each letter in "RAMS" represents one of their established behavioral expectations (Respect, Always Responsible, Manners, Safety).

The third level of establishing and defining behavioral expectations involves creating more specific examples of the 3-5 schoolwide behavior expectations that correspond to specific areas of the school. This task can be facilitated through the use of a matrix that lists the schoolwide behavior expectations on one axis and the different locations in the school on the other axis. In completing the boxes in the matrix, schools identify typical problem behaviors specific to each setting, and fill in examples of the replacement behavior in positive, observable terms for each setting (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). The corresponding examples for each setting should be visually represented and posted in 80% of public places throughout the school setting (Sugai et al., 2010).

The schoolwide expectations and examples of those expectations should always be stated positively to reflect what students *should* do rather than

negatively focusing on what they *should not* do (Sugai et al., 2010). It is impossible to create a rule for each behavioral infraction students may demonstrate. When broadly worded positive expectations are used, all problem behaviors become non-examples of students following those few positive expectations. Furthermore, this shifts the focus to teaching and developing three to five simple positive behaviors rather than suppressing an infinite number of undesirable behaviors (Sugai et al., 2010).

### Teaching Behavioral Expectation to Students

Once the behavioral expectations have been established and defined, schools must focus on explicitly teaching those behavioral expectations to students (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2010; Turnbull et al., 2002). The matrix discussed in the previous section can be used to facilitate teaching because it provides teachers an idea of where to direct their instruction (Sugai et al., 2010). Teachers' methods of delivery should always be matched to the targeted students' developmental level (McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Regardless of the method of delivery, lesson plans for teaching expected behaviors should begin by explicitly telling students the expectation (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2010). This can be achieved by connecting new information to students' background knowledge, providing examples and non-examples of the expected behaviors, and asking the students for additional examples and non-examples. Teachers should also explicitly show students what the skills do and do not look like through modeling and role-

playing those examples and non-examples. Thinking strategies should be presented overtly through self-talk during modeling of the expected behavior (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). It is also important that teachers allow students to practice expected behaviors through role playing and in-vivo situations (Sugai et al., 2010). This allows students to be provided with immediate corrective feedback during practice (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

To increase the likelihood of students appropriately using the pro-social behaviors being taught, teaching procedures should include practicing the behaviors across multiple settings and with a variety of people (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). These opportunities will build the students' fluency in displaying expected behaviors, and students will become more likely to generalize these skills to other settings. Instruction should be scheduled across multiple school days with booster sessions later to review what has been previously taught (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

#### Acknowledging Desired Behaviors

Students not only need to be explicitly taught desired behaviors but also need to be reinforced for displaying the desired behaviors. Another essential component of SWPBS is an acknowledgement system that involves "catching" students engaging in desired behaviors and rewarding them for displaying these behaviors (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Students are given tickets or some other token throughout the day that can be traded in later to earn prizes. The acknowledgement system must be easy to implement for all staff

members, including teachers, non-certified staff members such as custodians, and even school volunteers (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Proactively determining the type and frequency of rewards available to students will foster an easy and efficient system for teachers to use. Students should also be consulted to help determine age-appropriate rewards (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Ideas for different rewards may include preferred activities, preferred tangibles, social recognition, being entered into drawings for bigger prizes, and special privileges. These rewards can be earned at the individual, group, classroom, grade, and school levels (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

It is important for teachers to understand that a critical element of any incentive program is not necessarily the ticket or token being given but the social acknowledgement between students and the school (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). When giving tickets or tokens, adults should give students an explanation of why they are receiving reward and incorporate the school rule to which they were adhering. This ensures that students are being provided positive pro-social interactions with adults as well, fostering positive relationships between teachers and students (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

With any acknowledgement system, the ultimate goal should be to shift reinforcements from tangible, external, frequent, and predictable to social, internal, infrequent, and unpredictable (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). This is why SWPBS emphasizes the acknowledgement sequence discussed previously in which the provision of a ticket or token to earn prize is always paired with the recognition of student behavior through adult approval as well as access to

privileges (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Schools should develop a plan to fade the use of tickets or tokens while verbal feedback and natural positive consequences continue to reinforce positive behaviors. A continuum of reinforcement strategies should be created with the ultimate goal being to fade external school incentives (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). While no example of an entire school successfully fading their acknowledgement system exists in the literature, research supports that external incentives can be removed without affecting student behavior at the individual level (Akin-Little & Little, 2004). A token reinforcement system was implemented in a classroom to explore the effects on students' compliance with classroom rules after that system had been removed. Results indicated that the removal of the token reinforcement system had no detrimental effects on students' display of compliant behaviors and the students maintained their level of compliance in both the Baseline 2 period as well as the Follow-Up period (Akin-Little & Little, 2004).

### Developing a Consequence System

While the majority of students will respond to explicit behavior instruction and acknowledgement systems reinforcing the display of desired behaviors, some will demonstrate additional behavior concerns (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Thus, the development of an appropriate and systematic consequence system is important to discouraging the reoccurrence of problem behaviors. The purpose of any consequence system is to maintain the safety of all students, prevent behaviors from escalating further, and prevent inappropriate behaviors from being reinforced (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Consequence systems

also allow instruction to continue and move forward with minimal disruptions and, if at all possible, should not involve removing the student from instruction (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Schools must ensure that the consequence system is implemented consistently schoolwide (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). To achieve this, specific steps have to be taken. First, schools must clearly define and provide examples of each rule-violating behavior. Once the identified rule-violating behaviors have been defined, schools should assign specific consequences for those problem behaviors (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Behaviors should be leveled according to the severity of the concern, which also help school personnel differentiate between behaviors to be managed in the classroom and more severe behaviors to be managed by administrators. Consequences for different levels of behaviors should always be matched to the severity of the behavior (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

McKevitt and Braaksma (2008) provide an example of what this leveled consequence system can look like. In this example, behaviors such as non-compliance, disruption of instruction, overt disrespect, and minor destruction of property were considered Level One behaviors. Consequences for these behaviors included nonverbal redirects, proximity to the student, student conferences, verbal warning, timeouts, parent contact, behavior contracts, loss of recess, loss of other privileges, an apology, and overcorrection of the misbehavior.

When students demonstrated their first Level 1 behavior, it was managed in the classroom (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Upon the second occurrence of a

Level 1 behavior, the consequence was handled in the classroom but an office referral form was also completed. Once a student received three office referral forms, they were sent to the office for the administration to provide consequences (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Level 2 behaviors identified by McKevitt and Braaksma (2008) included physical aggression, harassment, and abusive language. Consequences for Level 2 behaviors involved the Level 1 consequences but included more serious consequences such as in-school suspension and bus suspensions. When students displayed a Level 2 behavior, consequences were given in the classroom but students automatically received an office referral (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

McKevitt and Braaksma (2008) designated behaviors such as major destruction of property, theft, consumption of drugs and/or alcohol, and bringing weapons to school as Level 3 behaviors. In addition to Level 1 and 2 consequences, additional consequences included out of school suspension, expulsion, and involvement of law enforcement. Level 3 consequences for these behaviors were provided by administrators and in some cases, law enforcement (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

When students are being taught behavior expectations, they should also be taught the consequences for different levels of behaviors (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai et al., 2010). Each incidence of inappropriate behavior should be followed by an appropriate consequence and a booster instructional lesson (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Students should be reminded of the expectation and, if necessary, be re-taught the expectation through providing

examples and non-examples, modeling appropriate behaviors, and providing the student an opportunity to practice the expectation to increase fluency in demonstrating that behavior (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

### Data-Based Decision Making

SWPBS programs are most impactful when schools focus on continuous regeneration, which is the ongoing assessment of both student outcomes and implementation integrity in order to enhance and sustain SWPBS implementation and adaptation (Sugai et al., 2010). In order for schools to engage in continuous regeneration, systematic procedures for data collection need to be in place allowing ongoing assessment of student outcomes and implementation integrity. The following sections will provide information on what these procedures can look like.

### Monitoring Student Outcomes

Ongoing assessment of student outcomes is a fundamental component of SWPBS because it gives insight into students' responsiveness to intervention (RtI; Sugai et al., 2010). RtI is defined as "an approach for establishing and redesigning teaching and learning environments so that they are effective, efficient, relevant, and durable for all students, families, and educators" (Sugai et al., 2010, p. 46). SWPBS is an example of an RtI approach that focuses on improving schoolwide social behavior curricula. Data becomes very important because it provides information that directly reflects student progress based on measurable outcomes (Sugai et al., 2010). These data allow schools to make

informed decisions regarding instructional effectiveness, student responsiveness, and the need for intervention adaptations and modifications (Sugai et al., 2010).

Determination of next steps in supporting behavioral needs is only possible if schools are thoroughly documenting incidences of misbehavior. Creating a standardized office discipline referral (ODR) form is recommended to ensure that all relevant information is being documented (George & Kincaid, 2008; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2010). Relevant information includes (a) the name and grade of the student, (b) the date and time of the behavior, (c) the student's classroom or homeroom teacher, (d) the name of the person making the referral, (e) the location of the incident, (f) the consequence(s) given for the behavior, and (g) the hypothesized function that the behavior served (McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2010).

Organizing and disaggregating this data in various ways can help identify trends and patterns in student behaviors. Data can be disaggregated by (a) the number of office referrals per day in a month, (b) number of office referrals by type of rule violation, (c) number of office referrals by location, (d) number of office referrals by individual students, and (e) number of office referrals by consequence (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Disaggregating data to identify trends and patterns in the data guide schools in developing appropriate setting-specific, problem-specific, or student-specific lesson plans and instructional strategies accordingly (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

Other data sources to use when making decisions include attendance rates, suspension and expulsion rates, and drop-out data (George & Kincaid, 2008;

Turnbull et al., 2002). Additionally, student grades and grade point averages can be used to explore the impact of SWPBS programs on academic achievement (George & Kincaid, 2008; Turnbull et al., 2002). Information from these data sources should be used formatively and should be entered into a data system on a regular basis to assist with ongoing analysis (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008). ODR data collection systems such as the School-wide Information System (SWIS) have been created to assist in collecting and organizing data (McKeivitt & Braaksma, 2008).

ODR data collection systems as an indicator of student behavior pose many advantages. They make data easily available to school personnel; they are more efficient than other time-consuming data collection means such as direct observation; and they can be easily utilized to make wide ranges of decisions at both the school and the individual level (McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Zumbo, 2009). While a growing body of evidence supports the validity and utility of ODR data collection systems in decision-making, the use of these systems also have certain limitations (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; McIntosh et al., 2009).

One major limitation of ODR data collection systems is that they only monitor students' display observable, or externalizing, behaviors (Reinke, Herman, & Tucker, 2006). Internalizing behaviors such as depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and social neglect can result in poor grades and lack of school involvement, but these behaviors are not captured with ODR's because they do not disrupt learning. Students displaying internalizing behaviors are consequently often overlooked and are not identified as requiring additional behavior

supports (Reinke et al., 2006). The lack of monitoring of internalizing behaviors leads some to argue that schools need to use an additional, multi-gate screening system, such as the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders, to screen for internalizing behaviors because these behaviors can impact student learning as well (McIntosh et al., 2010).

Data collection systems such as the SWIS can be biased based on the subjectivity of teachers making the referrals (McIntosh et al., 2009). Some teachers may fill out more ODR forms if they believe that it can lead to the student receiving additional services for behavior. Oppositely, some teachers may fill out less ODR forms if the building principal attributes multiple office referrals as poor teaching (McIntosh et al., 2009). Some schools emphasize lowering ODR's over accurate data, and this can lead also lead to staff decreasing the number of referrals they make in an effort to give the appearance of improvement (McIntosh et al., 2009). A school's level of supervision may also impact the rates at which teachers make referrals (McIntosh et al., 2009).

Another criticism of ODR data collection systems is that the evidence regarding sound psychometric properties of these systems is limited to a very small number of studies, and the data entry systems themselves can serve as a source of error if data is entered and/or analyzed inconsistently (McIntosh et al., 2009). Furthermore, SWPBS schools using only ODR data do not always have a complete picture of how well their school is functioning because they fail to monitor all student outcomes that SWPBS seeks to impact (Lassen et al., 2006). Outcomes not monitored by data collection systems include successful

community functioning, academic achievement, and overall climate of the school (Lassen et al., 2006).

### Monitoring Implementation Integrity

A growing body of evidence suggests that treatment integrity of school-based interventions is directly related to intervention outcomes (Fiske, 2008). Because of this, data collection procedures need to be in place to monitor treatment integrity during all phases of implementation. This includes collecting data regarding teachers' needs for additional support prior to implementation, regularly monitoring implementation integrity during implementation, and to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation at the end of each school year (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Establishing needs. Data sources such as teacher interviews and climate survey data can be used prior to and during initial implementation of SWPBS to identify additional supports needed for teachers (Bohanon et al., 2009; Lewis & Sugai, 1999, Turnbull et al., 2002). This helps establish what teachers are currently implementing, the trainings or other supports needed to improved SWPBS efforts, and the priorities of the teachers. Once this initial data has been gathered the SWPBS team should meet to analyze it and establish an action plan to ensure that those additional needs are being met (Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

The District Readiness Checklist was created by the Florida Positive Behavior Supports (FLPBS) Project to facilitate planning SWPBS efforts by assessing the preliminary capacity of a district to implement SWPBS (George & Kincaid, 2008). It can also be used to communicate prerequisites for districts

looking into participating in SWPBS training activities. The District Readiness Checklist covers many features discussed in the Positive Behavior Supports Blueprint and provides measurable objectives to assess schools' current capacity for supporting SWPBS (George & Kincaid, 2008). The Checklist should be reviewed and assessed each school year SWPBS implementation is occurring to guide decisions regarding expansion of SWPBS efforts (George & Kincaid, 2008). The FLPBS Project created additional checklists available to facilitate initial SWPBS implementation including the Training Readiness Checklist and School-wide Information System Checklist (George & Kincaid, 2008).

Ongoing assessment of implementation integrity. Data used to establish SWPBS implementation integrity should be gathered on an ongoing basis to evaluate the effectiveness of SWPBS programs (Bohanon et al., 2009; Bohanon et al., 2006; Horner et al., 2005; Lane et al., 2007). Gathering this data permits analysis of implementation fidelity to occur frequently, allowing changes in implementation to be made as soon as a need arises. Ongoing analysis of ODR's can also reflect the functioning and effectiveness of the SWPBS components by assisting in determining whether implementation had an impact on outcome data variables such as attendance and behavior referrals (George & Kincaid, 2008; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

The Effective Behavior Survey (EBS) was developed as an action-planning document to gain an understanding of teachers' views of SWPBS efforts (Safran, 2006). It is composed of 43 items divided into four sections (schoolwide systems, non-classroom settings systems, classroom setting systems, individual student

systems). Respondents are asked to complete two ratings per item: the current status of the support (in place, partially in place, not in place) and priority for improvement (high, medium, low; Safran, 2006). The EBS helps determine staff perception of SWPBS components already in place as well as their perception of prioritized needs for changes to be made to implementation efforts (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

The Team Implementation Checklist (TIC) was created for SWPBS teams to use at least quarterly to rate different steps of implementation as “achieved,” “in progress,” or “not started” (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). The goal is to rate at least 80% of the steps as achieved, which is an indication that the SWPBS is appropriately in place and functioning. Based on these ratings, the team also modifies the action plan to address any steps rated as “not started” (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

Evaluating effectiveness. Student outcome data such as attendance, office referrals, detentions, suspensions and expulsions, and drop out rates can be analyzed summatively to gauge the overall impact of a SWPBS program over the course of a school year (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). This summative information can be compared from school year to school year to determine whether components of SWPBS have been sustained across years and across different student groups. In addition to these data sources, the following tools can be used to evaluate SWPBS effectiveness for each year (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

The Schoolwide Evaluation Tool (SET) was created to assess the implementation integrity of primary prevention practices in SWPBS schools (Horner et al., 2004). The instrument is comprised of 28 items organized into seven subscales which directly align with the seven key features of SWPBS as set forth by Sugai and colleagues (2008). The items are scored according to a Likert scale with the values 0, 1, 2 (0=not implemented, 1= partially implemented, 2= fully implemented). Seven subscale scores are created, and an overall summary score is produced based on the mean of the seven subscale scores. A score of 80% implementation or higher is required for a school to be considered effectively implementing SWPBS programming (Horner et al., 2004).

The Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ) was created as a self-evaluation tool to monitor the degree of fidelity to which schools are implementing SWPBS. It lists more than 50 benchmarks for SWPBS implementation for which schools should strive (George & Kincaid, 2008). The BoQ allows teams to review progress towards implementation of critical SWPBS elements identified in Lewis and Sugai (1999; Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007). The BoQ includes a Coach Scoring Form, Scoring Guide, and a Team Member Rating Form. The BoQ has been found to have moderate correlations with SET because they measure very similar features; however, BoQ measures many areas with more specificity than the SET and includes sections such as Faculty Buy-In, Lesson Plans, Crisis Plans, and Evaluation that SET does not (Cohen et al., 2007).

Minimal training is required to accurately use the BoQ due to protocols and scoring criteria being very organized and precise. The wider range of scores

on the BoQ help discriminate relative fidelity of implementation more than the SET (Cohen et al., 2007). While showing promising results, small sample sizes serves as a limitation in the use of the BoQ, and an analysis of several hundred comparisons to SET scores will be necessary to increase the BoQ's use as an effective tool for monitoring SWPBS implementation (Cohen et al., 2007).

### Conclusion

This chapter has provided information on the major evidence-based practices that need to be in place in order to build successful SWPBS programs. While SWPBS is growing in popularity in the literature, information regarding SWPBS programs specifically at the high school level continues to be sparse. Many researchers have explored the challenges that high schools face that attribute to the lack of SWPBS programs in high school settings. The next chapter will provide a discussion of some of the most prevalent challenges to implementing SWPBS in high schools.

## CHAPTER 4

### BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL HIGH SCHOOL SWPBS IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

According to Lane and colleagues (2007), as of 2005 only 14 studies focusing on primary level SWPBS efforts had been conducted in secondary settings, and only one of the fourteen studies reported outcomes (decreased suspension rates) from a high school SWPBS program. Of those few that have been conducted at the high school level, many have been non-descriptive and non-experimental designs (Lane et al., 2007). Large student populations, student academic achievement taking precedence over other outcomes, the prominence of exclusionary practices, the hierarchical structure of administration, the inconsistency of teaching and reinforcing behaviors, peer influence, and ineffective acknowledgement systems have all been identified as barriers to high school SWPBS implementation efforts. These barriers will now be discussed in more detail.

#### Larger School Populations

One barrier to successful SWPBS implementation in high schools is the larger size of high schools and the number of students they serve (Bohanon et al., 2006; Bohanon et al., 2009; Lewis, 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Multiple elementary and middle schools typically feed into one high school, creating a larger, more diverse compilation of students and teachers. High school teachers are then expected to teach a larger number of students with a larger array of

skills deficits needing to be supported (Lewis, 2009). The increase in class size coupled with students traveling to different classes for each subject does little to foster positive relationships between teachers and their students (Bohanon et al., 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). The larger number of students in high schools also prevents a sense of shared responsibility between teachers and students, leading teachers expect students to be more autonomous and self-directed accordingly (Kalberg, Lane, Driscoll, & Wehby, 2011).

### Departmental Structure

The large size and physical layout of high schools create a culture of independent activity of faculty by department, which can serve as a barrier to SWPBS implementation as well (Bohanon et al., 2006). High schools are frequently structured in a manner in which one main hall leads off to other hallways, and these hallways house content-specific departments. This organizational structure diminishes interactions and communication amongst teachers across content areas, leading to inconsistencies in expectations across classes and departments. It also hinders the creation of a shared vision for improving overall school environment held by all school personnel (Bohanon et al., 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

### Administrative Structures

High schools' complex administrative structures also serve as barrier to SWPBS implementation (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Elementary and middle schools typically have one principal serving as an instructional leader with a focus on pedagogy and student achievement (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). In

contrast, high schools typically have a hierarchy of administrators with one principal overseeing the delegation of responsibilities to the rest of the administration team. Administration teams are comprised of assistant principals, deans of students, and department chairs who are given specific responsibilities such as discipline, curriculum, and athletics. This can lead to fragmentation in standards and expectations between administrators and can also lead to individual administrative members having very distorted or limited views of the conditions of the school (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

### Academic Focus

Another barrier exclusive to high school SWPBS implementation is the increased emphasis on academic achievement (Lewis, 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). School districts typically shift their focus to preparing their students for the job market and post-secondary education when they reach the high school level. This shift then puts a larger emphasis on content mastery than on teaching pro-social behaviors to improve the schools' behavior climate (Lewis, 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Rather than student-centered, curricula becomes teacher- and content-centered and students are expected to adapt (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

High school staff members' view of their responsibilities concerning discipline and teaching pro-social skills also changes because teachers are held more accountable for student's academic outcomes than students' pro-social and behavioral outcomes (Lewis, 2009; Putnam et al., 2009). In response to policies such as No Child Left Behind, schools feel more pressure to produce academic

outcomes than to improve overall behavior climate, drop-out rates, and disciplinary outcomes. Furthermore, teachers are not reinforced for improving behavior climate outcomes as highly as they are for improving academic achievement outcomes (Lewis, 2009). High school teachers consequently struggle to buy into SWPBS practices because teaching academic content takes precedence over explicitly teaching pro-social skills in high school settings (Putnam et al., 2009).

With academic achievement as the focus, high school teachers assume that their students know how to exhibit appropriate behaviors in school. Students are expected to manage their own learning and behavior regardless of whether they have these skills in their repertoire, eliminating the use of differentiated instruction when students aren't mastering content from core instruction alone (Lewis, 2009; Putnam et al., 2009). Teachers perceive their job responsibility as solely teaching academics, disregarding evidence of a strong correlation existing between academic performance and social skills (Scott, 2002).

### Inconsistent Implementation

SWPBS components being inconsistently implemented in high schools can also serve as a barrier to sustaining high school SWPBS programs (Bohanon et al., 2006; Sugai et al., 2010). The larger number of teachers and staff in high schools and the difficulty in aligning priorities and practices of 100+ school personnel has contributed to this inconsistency (Sugai et al., 2010). In looking at specific SWPBS components, the consistency of (a) explicit behavior instruction being provided, (b) positive reinforcement being given for students' display of

appropriate behaviors, and (c) responses to problem behaviors have been identified as especially challenging to monitor in high school settings (Bohanon et al., 2006). For example, some teachers claim that acknowledgement systems are “childish” and can do more harm than good, ignoring data indicating that high school students have responded well to acknowledgement systems put in place (Bohanon et al., 2006; Kincaid, Childs, Blase, & Wallace, 2007). Additionally, teacher and administrator responses to problem behaviors are often inconsistent and create frustration between teachers and administration (Bohanon et al., 2006).

### Exclusionary Practices

High schools’ use of exclusionary practices serves as a barrier to SWPBS implementation as well (Lewis, 2009). When high school students struggle academically or display problem behaviors, high schools typically have structures in place to address these challenges outside of the classroom (Lewis, 2009). They also have more alternative setting options for students presenting on-going challenging behaviors such as at-risk classrooms, alternative schools, and facilities that house students on short-term and long-term suspensions or expulsions (Putnam et al., 2009). Constantly removing students from the classroom gives teachers no incentives to build preventive supports in their classroom, reinforcing their lack of accountability for their students’ behaviors (Lewis, 2009). Eventually, many of these students with ongoing behavior and academic concerns may eventually exclude themselves from the general education setting when they reach the legal age necessary to drop out of school altogether (Lewis, 2009).

### Peer Influence

Another barrier to high school SWPBS implementation is the increased influence of peer groups on student behaviors (Bohanon et al., 2009). High school students spend their four years looking for a way to fit in with a social norm group, and the acceptance into one of these groups is far more influential than the approval of teachers and other adults in the buildings (Bohanon et al., 2009). Peer attention becomes much more reinforcing than the reinforcements that teachers can provide for positive behaviors, especially when students are given strong positive attention for displaying negative behaviors (Bohanon et al., 2009).

### Conclusion

The barriers previously discussed serve as barriers to successful high school SWPBS implementation. However, a select few high schools have been able to overcome these barriers by adjusting or “tweaking” implementation components. Through these adjustments, these high schools have been able to improve student outcomes. This next chapter will provide a quick overview of the high schools that have overcome the barriers and provide recommendations for adjusting SWPBS practice to fit the high school setting.

CHAPTER 5  
OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE  
HIGH SCHOOL SWPBS PROGRAMS

Introduction

The limited amount of research available focusing on high school SWPBS programs may be a direct result of the abovementioned barriers. The task of monitoring treatment fidelity also becomes much more challenging as schools increase in size and complexity (Cohen et al., 2007; Lane et al., 2007). While high school settings do indeed face many challenges that are not present in elementary and middle schools settings, examples of successful high school SWPBS programs overcoming these challenges do exist. The following section provides an overview of successful high school SWPBS programs.

Overview of Successful High School SWPBS Programs

Chicago Public School District

Bohanon and colleagues (2006) conducted a 3-year study in a high school in the Chicago Public School District serving approximately 1,800 students. The study aimed to determine the impact that a SWPBS program could have at the high school level and the modifications to the SWPBS model necessary in meeting the needs of a high school. After three years of SWPBS implementation with modifications to address some of the above barriers, the high school experienced a 20% decrease in average monthly office referrals, namely those given for dress code violations and serious disobedience of authority. Between the second and third year of implementation, the percentage of students

receiving 0 to 1 ODR's increased from 46% to 59% while the percentage of students receiving 2 to 5 referrals decreased from 32% to 25%. The percentage of students receiving 6 or more referrals also decreased from 21% to 16% between the second and third year (Bohanon et al., 2006). A Pearson's chi-square indicated that these percentage changes were more than what would have been expected by chance alone (Bohanon et al., 2006).

More recently, Morrissey and colleagues (2010) conducted a study in a Chicago Public High School to explore the effects of SWPBS implementation. Qualitative results indicated the need for high schools to employ simple but effective strategies for managing student behavior. While quantitative data collected was limited, it was reported that a significantly smaller number of students received multiple ODR's (Morrissey et al., 2010). Anecdotal data in the form of teacher and student interviews also indicated positive results from SWPBS implementation (Morrissey et al., 2010).

### High School Monograph

In 2009, a panel of SWPBS experts including Brigid Flannery, Ron Horner, Lucille Eber, Steve Romano, and George Sugai collected and described current best practices in implementing SWPBS at the high school level. The panel selected high schools implementing SWPBS successfully based on the following criteria: (a) Implementation of SWPBS for at least one year as indicated by scores from Schoolwide Evaluation Tool (SET), Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), and/or the Team Implementation Checklist (TIC); (b) initial planning for implementation of secondary/tertiary systems as evidenced in an active action

plan; (c) at least one year of student outcome measures (ODR's, graduation, grades, attendance, etc.); (d) schedule of completed SWPBS team meetings occurring at least quarterly in presence of administrator as evidenced by meeting minutes and notes; and (e) the adoption and use of unique practices, features, processes in implementing SWPBS as evidenced in action plans and outcome data (Flannery & Sugai, 2009). Two team members from each of the identified schools were then asked to assist in writing a monograph about high school SWPBS implementation.

Mountain View High School (MVHS) in Colorado implemented a SWPBS program and in three years had decreased ODR's by 30% and out of school suspensions by 38% (Lewis, 2009). Mountain View High School has also gone from being on the Schools In Need of Assistance (SINA) list to being the only high school in its district showing typical academic growth. Similarly, Triton High School (THS) in New Hampshire piloted SWPBS implementation with their freshman class and saw suspensions decrease by 70%, lost instructional time decrease from 700 hours to 200 hours, suspension rates decrease to 59% below the county average, and test scores increase by 10% (Lewis, 2009). Fruita Monument High School (FMHS) in Colorado experienced a 10% decrease in referrals for minor behavior infractions and a 20% decrease in referrals for major behaviors after implementing SWPBS (Putnam et al., 2009). While no specific quantitative data were provided, Addison Trails High School (ATHS) in Illinois was also identified as an exemplar for high school SWPBS implementation, and the strategies utilized were provided.

### Tennessee School District

Lane and colleagues (2007) implemented a SWPBS program in a Tennessee high school to examine how different types of students respond to SWPBS implementation. A 5 x 2 (Group x Time) repeated-measures model was conducted, and students were assigned to the following groups according to the type of problem behaviors they exhibited: internalizing behaviors, externalizing behaviors, co-morbid behaviors (both internalizing and externalizing behaviors), typical behaviors, and students in special education. GPA's, attendance, suspensions, and discipline referral data of the students in each group were examined pre- and post-implementation (Lane et al., 2007). While the multivariate procedures did not reveal statistically significant differences in how different groups responded to SWPBS over time, all groups showed a significant decrease in their rates of suspension. The "typical behavior" group showed a decrease in the number of disciplinary referral data, and the "externalizing behavior," "internalizing behavior," and "typical behavior" groups' average GPA's increased (Lane et al., 2007). With the exception of the co-morbid groups, all groups also decreased in unexcused absences (Lane et al., 2007).

### Los Angeles Unified School District

Barnhart, Franklin, and Alleman (2008) supported a high school SWPBS program in the Los Angeles Unified School District in response to concerns surrounding the district's suspension rates. Analysis of suspension data illustrated that while the overall suspension rate for the district was 6.5%, this number almost doubled to 11.4% at the middle school and high school levels.

Additionally, disparities in suspension rates existed based on ethnicity, gender, age, and special education status. Students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended as their nondisabled peers. This jump at the middle and high school levels indicated that discipline practices being used were inadequate in supporting the behavioral needs of students (Barnhart et al., 2008).

In looking more closely at the district suspension data, it became clear that overall discipline policies were often applied inconsistently throughout the schools and those policies were often punitive in nature. After 5 years of implementing SWPBS in two targeted high schools, suspension rates had decreased from 22% to 16% while non-targeted high schools had stayed constant at a 16% suspension rate. The suspension of students with disabilities also decreased from 15% to 9% in the two target high schools (Barnhart et al., 2008).

SWPBS implementation faces many unique challenges at the high school level; however, results from the abovementioned case studies indicate that SWPBS programs can be successful in high school settings. The following section will provide suggestions from case studies that can help counter the identified barriers and lead to successful high school SWPBS implementation.

### Overcoming Barriers to High School SWPBS

#### Large School Sizes

While the larger size of high schools can serve as a challenge to SWPBS implementation, schools can introduce policies that can compensate for this. One such policy is breaking large student populations into smaller school programs within the larger school. Creating smaller school programs can foster positive

teacher-student relationships and allows struggling students be identified the individualized supports they need. Mountain View High School created four smaller learning communities in their school, and each of these served 250-300 students and consisted of their own classrooms, central office, office secretary, administrator, counselor, and interdisciplinary faculty and staff (Lewis, 2009).

All freshman students at Mountain View High School were placed in the learning community referred to as the Freshman Academy Center for their first year. Prior to their sophomore year they were each assigned to one of the three remaining learning communities based on whether they anticipated (a) directly moving into the work force, (b) enrolling in a vocational and/or technology training program, or (c) pursuing a 4 year college degree. Students from all learning communities took classes together but their learning centers were considered their "home base" and where their lockers were located. The counselor's knowledge and linkages directly aligned with the path of the respective students he or she served (Lewis, 2009).

Triton High School piloted a similar program called the Freshman Academy. The Freshman Academy consisted of three separate teams to promote a positive start for all incoming freshman while allowing staff to identify and intervene early with those identified as at-risk students (Lewis, 2009). The Freshman Academy was housed in a separate part of the building and students attended a lunch separate from upper-classmen, thus creating a smaller learning community within a larger school (Lewis, 2009).

In order to ensure that students were being provided with appropriate academic instruction, all students were given Math and Reading assessments during their eighth grade year and freshman instruction materials were directly matched to students' performance on the assessment (Lewis, 2009). For example, students displaying difficulty in reading were put in a yearlong strategic reading class, which increased students' reading skills by an average of 2.5 grades levels. All students were required to take a freshman seminar in which basic social and behavioral skills, study skills, time management skills, and conflict resolution skills were taught (Lewis, 2009).

Each student in the Freshman Academy was also provided common planning times to meet with staff for individual supports and was assigned an advisor to assist with any problems that arose throughout their four years in high school. Conferences were held every 6 weeks between the student, their parents, and their advisor. This time was spent discussing grades and overall progress in high school so far, and additional needs were identified if the student was struggling (Lewis, 2009).

In addition to the creation of smaller school communities within a larger high school, principals can also introduce policies that allow teachers and students to interact outside of the classroom to promote positive relationships (Lewis, 2009). For example, teachers can be encouraged or required to stand in the hallways before and after school as well as during transitions to greet and interact with students walking by (Lewis, 2009). They can also be encouraged to

get involved with and sponsor a variety of extra-curricular activities (Lewis, 2009).

### Departmental Structures

The fragmentation in content-specific departments can also be overcome by recruiting a teacher from each department to join the SWPBS team (Bohanon et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). The role of the SWPBS team is to work together “to assess school needs, develop and operationalize behavior expectations, train staff to implement positive behavior strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts by reviewing student data regularly” (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008, p. 737). Recruiting at least one teacher from each department ensures that all departments are represented and actively involved in decision-making and collaboration efforts with other departments.

Those selected as leaders for SWPBS implementation should show an interest in working towards positive behavioral climate, should have experience in behavior and resource management, should focus on prevention rather than reaction, should value collaboration, and should have effective communication skills (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Regular team meetings should be held at least once every two weeks and the team should work together to establish a standard system of communication amongst members (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Sugai et al., 2008).

### Administrative Structures

The designation of one administrator (assistant principal, dean of students, etc.) as the liaison between the SWPBS team and the administration team can

help overcome complex administrative structures as a barrier to high school SWPBS implementation (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Disseminating ongoing data indicative of the current conditions of the behavioral climate of the school to the team can be one component of the designated administrator's responsibility through the use of multiple data sources such as office referrals, suspensions, dropout rates, tardiness, and academic performance (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). The administrator should encourage all administration team members to acknowledge and promote all SWPBS efforts as well (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

In addition to disseminating data indicative of current conditions, the designated administrators should work with the rest of the administrative team to create a vision for the school's future (Putnam et al., 2009). This vision can then be presented to school staff accompanied by a concrete pathway or plan for achieving this vision, and SWPBS can be introduced as a method for achieving the set forth vision (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Presenting an overview of pre- and post- data from other schools successfully implementing SWPBS programs has been found to be effective in creating a pathway and a vision for the future (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

The designated administrators should be clear that all school staff are expected to participate in SWPBS efforts and can support this expectation by creating a strong SWPBS team, allowing ample time for this team to meet, attending meetings, allowing professional development trainings to occur during teachers' regular contract days, being an active member in decision and policy-making procedures, and making relevant, comprehensive, and accurate data

available to the team in a timely manner (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009; Putnam et al., 2009). Ensuring that structures such as these are in place communicates to teachers that the administrators value SWPBS efforts and maximize the impact that SWPBS can have (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). These structures can also increase staff participation in and commitment to SWPBS efforts (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

Some schools have increased administrative involvement in SWPBS even further by appointing a district-wide SWPBS coordinator to collaborate with the building SWPBS administrator and the SWPBS team (George & Kincaid, 2008). The SWPBS coordinator is most effective when released from other job responsibilities to oversee day-to-day SWPBS activities, to attend building-level SWPBS team meetings, to schedule teacher SWPBS trainings, to collaborate with building administrators to implement evaluation procedures, and to share building level data and progress with the district's central office (George & Kincaid, 2008; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). The coordinator can also oversee SWPBS funding by managing the budget and connecting with parents and the community to secure additional funding to support SWPBS efforts (George & Kincaid, 2008). Finally, district coordinators can serve as the liaison between the school and the community by releasing factual reports regarding the progress of SWPBS (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

The district in which Addison Trails High School resides shifted from a hierarchical, vertical management structure to a flattened structure in which the assistant superintendent was assigned to work directly with the high school

principal and the SWPBS team (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). The assistant superintendent provided initial SWPBS trainings, attended all team meetings, and assisted in analyzing and making decisions based on student data collected. His direct involvement at the building level also eliminated layers of management, therefore opening channels of communication between the school and the district stakeholders as well as allowing for more immediate access to district resources when needed (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

### Academic Focus

In order to prevent high schools' emphasis on academic achievement from hindering successful SWPBS implementation, SWPBS efforts need to be explicitly connected to the positive impact they can have on academic achievement outcomes (Flannery & Sugai, 2009; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Graduation rates, drop-out rates, and post-secondary and career planning are academic outcomes teachers value that can all be positively impacted by implementing SWPBS (Flannery & Sugai, 2009). SWPBS practices influence students' academic performance because they decrease problem behaviors during instruction, thereby increasing instruction time (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

Improving the quality of instruction can further decrease problem behaviors, and this can be achieved by shifting the focus from content-centered instruction to student-centered instruction (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Differentiating instruction based on ability and need is one strategy teachers can use to provide more student-centered instruction. Asking frequent questions, assigning specific tasks during instruction, and providing

small group and individual supports with individual students' ability levels in mind are examples of how to differentiate instruction in the classroom (Lewis, 2009). Differentiating instruction makes the content more relevant to all students because it ensures that teachers are teaching to the many different ability levels of their students (Lewis, 2009).

Providing supports for those students needing additional supplemental supports outside of classroom time can decrease problem behaviors during instruction as well (Lewis, 2009). Examples of this additional support include matching struggling students with student or teacher tutors and creating homework drop-in systems where students have the opportunity to ask teachers questions (Lewis, 2009). For those students who are behind on credits and are at a risk of dropping out, schools can schedule coursework and make-up times to work towards gaining credits. Credit recovery courses can be provided at night, on weekends, or during summer break. Online coursework that can be completed during or outside of the school day can also facilitate credit completion for those struggling students who at-risk of dropping out (Lewis, 2009).

Sugai and colleagues (2008) recommend having a minimum of 80% of staff members willing to implement PBIS. While this can be difficult to achieve, strategies have been identified in encouraging teachers to buy into SWPBS practices (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). One suggestion is to ensure that administrators and the SWPBS are very knowledgeable about the components of and the research supporting SWPBS (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Sharing

student data with teachers frequently and consistently in a way that is visually easy to read can increase staff participation as well (Putnam et al., 2009). Creating incentive programs for staff that are putting effort into implementing SWPBS efforts and streamlining school initiatives to eliminate overlap of efforts can also increase teacher buy in (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Putnam et al., 2009).

Regular and ongoing faculty updates being provided during whole staff and departmental meetings, open communication, and sharing personal stories about SWPBS successes that occur in the building can be very powerful in increasing teacher buy in to SWPBS as well (Putnam et al., 2009).

### Inconsistent Implementation

School administrators and SWPBS teams can overcome inconsistencies in SWPBS implementation by working together to create high quality professional development trainings for teachers (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). The first training should provide an overview of and research behind the aforementioned SWPBS components (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Following the training, informal individualized consultation with the SWPBS team should be given to all teachers, allowing staff to engage in clarifying conversations about SWPBS and thereby increasing teacher buy-in (Newcomer & Barrett, 2009). Additional professional development trainings should be scheduled to explore certain SWPBS components further, including the provision of quality behavior instruction, the power acknowledgement systems, and the importance of consistency in responding to problem behavior (Lewis, 2009; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Newcomer & Barrett, 2009).

Ensuring consistent instruction. To make certain that all teachers have the tools they need to provide high quality behavior instruction, trainings should focus on how to explicitly teach behavior expectations (Lewis, 2009). Strategies for explicitly teaching academic-related skills such as note taking, organizing books and materials, and seeking assistance should also be provided (Lewis, 2009). Examples of lesson plans and templates that are highly engaging and encourage differentiated instruction should be used to supplement behavior instruction trainings, and teachers should be permitted to visit the classrooms of SWPBS team members to observe the strategies that were covered in the training in action (Lewis, 2009). Ongoing mentorship for teachers needing additional supports should be supplied as well (Lewis, 2009).

Consistent acknowledgement systems. Many high school teachers choose not to use acknowledgement systems because they believe that motivating students by awarding external prizes can be harmful (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). To overcome this point of view, the SWPBS team should acknowledge these concerns and provide evidence to refute these claims (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Research maintains that reward systems have no negative effects on student motivation or performance (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008). Rewarding students for positive behaviors actually facilitates performance of desirable behaviors in later context, and a far greater danger exists in creating school environments in which students receive low rates of positive feedback (Sugai et al., 2010). Furthermore, students are at greater risk of being under-rewarded than over-rewarded (Sugai et al., 2010). Using evidence from

publications to counter this point of view can alleviate teacher concerns, and teachers that continue to be resistant should be provided booster-training sessions focusing on SWPBS efforts and its effectiveness (Scott, 2002).

Using high school students' input to prevent acknowledgement systems from being viewed as childish has also been effective in building sustainable high school SWPBS programs (Bohanon et al., 2006; Lane et al., 2007; Lewis, 2009). Students have suggested developmentally appropriate rewards such as money to spend in the schools' food cantina, movie tickets, payment into school dances, preferred parking spaces, sports passes, homecoming/prom packages, half-price admission to school events, permission to leave campus early, and homework passes (Bohanon et al., 2006; Lane et al., 2007; Lewis, 2009). While tickets may seem childish to some, they are effective if the rewards earned are reinforcing enough. The use of Hawks' Bucks as an acknowledgement system was so powerful for Triton High School that the school began implementing a similar acknowledgement system for the upper classmen the following year (Lewis, 2009).

Consistency in responding to problem behaviors. Increasing teachers' use of classroom rules and routines that overlap with SWPBS practices can help build consistency in responding to problem behaviors (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Providing schoolwide trainings focusing on classroom management strategies that align with SWPBS will guide teachers to use similar strategies, increasing the consistency with which behavior is handled across classroom settings. This consistency also eases transitions for students when they switch classrooms

because expectations are explicit and consistent across settings (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Including students' input in the creation of classroom expectations can lead to more of a sense of ownership of the expectations, making them more likely to follow them (Lewis, 2009; Putnam et al., 2009).

Trainings should provide teachers with explicit strategies for dealing with problem behaviors (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). One such strategy is diverting attention from the problem behavior by engaging with other students and ignoring the student displaying the problem behavior. Providing positive reinforcements for those students ignoring the problem behavior can also help reduce problem behaviors as well, and physical proximity and non-verbal prompts can be used during class to redirect the student with minimal attention given and without instruction being interrupted (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Providing training on strategies to all school staff can increase the consistency in responding to problem behavior schoolwide while eliminating the need to remove students from instruction.

### Decreasing the Need for Exclusionary Practices

High schools can maximize instructional time by creating systems that decrease the need for exclusionary practices (Putnam et al., 2009). Rather than sending students out of classroom during instruction at the time of the behavior infraction, schools should instill consequences such as before school, after school, and lunch detention that do not result in a loss of instruction time (Lewis, 2009). Triton High School implemented a detention program in which students were required to work on homework and missed assignments during these detention

times. If they were caught up in schoolwork then they were provided with social skills worksheets pertaining to the behavior infraction that led to the detention (Lewis, 2009). If students' behaviors are serious enough to warrant removal from the classroom to an alternative setting, schools should create re-entry plans to reintroduce the student to the classroom as quickly as is appropriate for that student (Lewis, 2009).

### Capitalizing on Peer Influence

Schools have found ways to capitalize on peer influence in high schools by directly involving students in SWPBS efforts. Bohanon and colleagues (2009) maintain that high school students want a voice in policy decisions that concern them and schools need to look for creative ways to involve them. The creation of a student advisory group is one way to ensure that students' voices are heard (Bohanon et al., 2009). These students should collaborate with the SWPBS team and provide information from the student perspective. They can assist in developing relevant expectations and lesson plans, ensuring the acknowledge systems in place are relevant, and providing suggestions for changes to increase the relevance and effectiveness of SWPBS programs (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Putnam et al., 2009). Students should be recognized for their leadership regularly and publicly through assemblies, publications, and/or community activities (Putnam et al., 2009).

Somersworth High School increased student involvement in establishing the schools needs by identifying a team of 40 students who were diverse in grade level, academic achievement, socioeconomic status, race, and gender (Putnam et

al., 2009). These 40 students and the entire school staff were given a Safe Measures Survey designed to explore teacher and student perceptions on school climate. After the survey had been administered, the SWPBS team met and discussed the similarities and differences between staff and student perception, and the team worked with the 40 students and teachers to identify and prioritize the top three concerns with school climate (Putnam et al., 2009).

Student involvement can also be increased by assisting in the creation of age appropriate teaching strategies (Morrissey et al., 2010; Putnam et al., 2009). FMHS chose students to create videos of behavior expectations, and these videos were shown in large group settings. Following the video, students were broken into smaller groups during which teachers explicitly taught behavior expectations using lesson plans created by the SWPBS team (Putnam et al., 2009). Similarly, teachers used humor to teach behavior expectations to eliminate “babyish” conversations at CPHS at the suggestion of their high school students (Morrissey et al., 2010), and SHS students even performed skits during an assembly to depict examples and non-examples of behavior expectations in a humorous way (Putnam et al., 2009).

### Conclusion

Many students enter today’s schools unprepared to learn due to their display of maladaptive behaviors that have been learned and reinforced by their families and communities in which they live. Schools further reinforce these behaviors by lowering expectations and instilling exclusionary discipline policies. The display of maladaptive behaviors becomes more concerning at the high

school level because it can severely limit post-secondary opportunities for those students. Because of the negative impact this can have on students' postsecondary lives, it is important for schools to break this cycle by providing behavior supports before students leave high school.

SWPBS was created as a support system that prevents maladaptive behaviors through teaching and reinforcing pro-social behaviors. These programs can improve both social competence and academic achievement by minimizing problem behaviors and therefore increasing instruction time. By supporting students' behaviors in this fashion, SWPBS has the power to change high schools' behavior climates, creating safer environments that maximize learning and improve student outcomes.

A successful SWPBS program requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, and school personnel willing to lead the efforts in implementing SWPBS components with integrity. Additionally, systems need to be put in place that allow for and support data-based decision making to take place. Ongoing assessment of student outcomes and implementation fidelity drive SWPBS efforts through continuous regeneration. Only with all necessary components in place can SWPBS begin to make changes in student behaviors.

High school SWPBS programs face their own unique challenges in achieving high implementation integrity. A body of evidence exists, however, suggesting that SWPBS programs can be just as successful in high school settings as they are in elementary settings. High schools have started exploring creative

approaches in overcoming these additional challenges, and many have experienced success.

This paper has summarized recommendations from case studies that have helped high schools succeed in SWPBS implementation. Additional research is needed to support SWPBS as an evidence-based practice at the high school level. New and innovative ways to modify implementation to meet the unique needs of high schools need to continue to be explored as well. By thinking outside of the box and making modifications to implementation, successful high school SWPBS programs can be created and student outcomes can be improved.

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