

# Urban Applications of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support:

## *Critical Issues and Lessons Learned*



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**Abstract:** Researchers and educators have recognized that typical school-wide approaches to discipline and the prevention and management of problem behavior are often insufficient to address the needs of many students in inner-city schools with high base rates of problem behavior. This article outlines critical issues and lessons learned in the planning and implementation of effective and self-sustaining Positive Behavior Support (PBS) efforts in inner-city schools. Among these issues are methods for the facilitation of school–university partnerships, the incorporation of PBS into existing comprehensive school improvement efforts, the maintenance of school-wide PBS efforts, and the formalization of exit strategies and arrangements for subsequent technical assistance. The importance of service integration, family support, youth development, and community development are emphasized in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of school-wide PBS efforts in inner-city settings.

*Kevin is proud of having accomplished his long-standing goal of passing the sixth grade. This is a significant achievement when one considers that he is the first member of his immediate family to do so. While discussing the family's history of economic and social disadvantage, Kevin's mother remarked, "I wouldn't know what to do with a life that wasn't filled with chaos." Living in an inner-city neighborhood surrounded by poverty, violence, crime, drugs, and gang activity, Kevin has proven relatively adaptive. In spite of numerous life challenges and limited opportunities, Kevin carries high hopes of rising above the disadvantages that characterize his community. Some of Kevin's teachers, however, express little sympathy for his life circumstances as they describe the severity and chronicity of his problem behavior at school. "He needs some serious help," they say, "but so do a hundred other kids at this school."*

Cases similar to Kevin's are all too familiar to educators in some urban settings. In inner-city communities characterized by poverty, violence, and disadvantage, schools are met with the challenge of accomplishing their educational goals in the face of many adversities beyond their immediate control. The challenge to schools, as stated by the Car-

negie Council Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1989), appears especially daunting for schools in disadvantaged communities: "School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But where the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge" (p. 61). In recent years, a number of inner-city schools have made efforts to address behavioral challenges that impede the learning process through the school-wide application of positive behavior support (PBS). Through the collaborative efforts of educators, researchers, families, and community partners, a number of valuable lessons have been learned that hold important implications for the planning and implementation of school-wide PBS in inner-city schools. This article reviews these important lessons and examines other critical issues relevant to the ways in which urban schools approach systems-level factors that contribute to problem behavior.

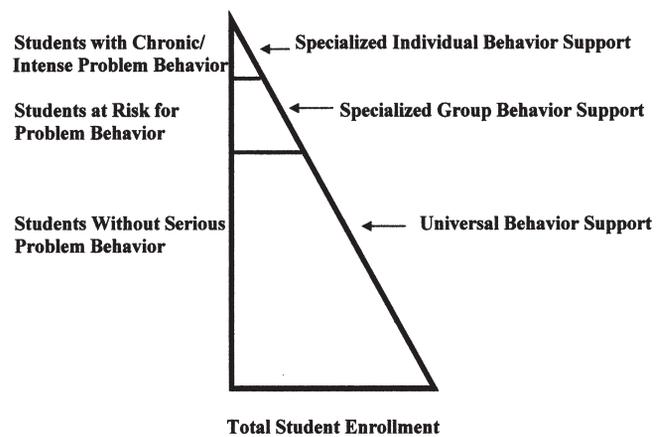
Positive behavior support includes a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behavior. PBS is intended to enhance quality of life and minimize/prevent problem behavior through the rational integration of (a) valued outcomes, (b) behavioral

and biomedical science, (c) empirically supported procedures, and (d) systems change (Carr et al., 2002). School-wide PBS interventions are employed at a number of levels to address the continuum of support required by all students. Universal interventions are used on a school-wide level (i.e., all students participate), whereas specialized interventions are employed for targeted groups and individual students who require more intensive supports (see Figure 1; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Walker et al., 1996).

Universal interventions are geared toward primary prevention by including all students. These supports help promote a positive climate and a culture of competence within the school by shifting the focus from exclusively punitive disciplinary approaches to more positive approaches that acknowledge appropriate behavior. These approaches are tailored to the needs and strengths of school systems but typically share a number of core components, including the establishment of a team to guide the school's PBS efforts; the definition of school-wide expectations; the provision of direct instruction to students on behavioral expectations; the establishment of effective systems to acknowledge appropriate behavior and address problem behavior; and the regular use of data to plan, monitor, and evaluate interventions (Colvin, 1991; Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993; Cotton, 1990; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999). For schools in which the majority of students demonstrate mild or no problem behavior, universal approaches are typically successful in achieving significant decreases in overall problem behavior within the school and reinforcing a positive school climate (Colvin et al., 1993; Lewis et al., 1998; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). These improvements in turn provide opportunities for increased attention to students with more chronic and severe problem behavior.

Group interventions (secondary prevention) may subsequently be designed for students at risk for problem behavior and for whom universal supports are insufficient. These interventions are often conducted in individual classroom settings or in other specific settings in the school where a need for improved behavior has been identified (e.g., lunchroom, hallways). These may include more specialized instruction and practice of school expectations as they apply to the setting in question, specific skills training for students, modification of group contingencies, or other interventions based on the patterns of problem behavior observed (Hawken & Horner, 2001; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Lewis et al., 1998).

Finally, students for whom universal and group interventions are insufficient may be referred for increased individual support (tertiary prevention). As with other forms of PBS, the objective of individual support is not only to decrease the frequency of problem behavior but also to improve the overall quality of life of the student and those in-



**Figure 1.** Levels of positive behavior support. *Note.* Adapted from material in "Effective Behavior Support: A Systems Approach to Proactive School-wide Management," by T. J. Lewis and G. Sugai, 1999, *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 31(6), pp. 1–24.

involved in the student's life. Using behavioral assessments to generate and test hypotheses related to the function of problem behavior, individual PBS interventions focus on the development of individualized behavior support plans that attempt to address the multiple factors that contribute to problem behavior (Foster-Johnson & Dunlap, 1993; Horner, O'Neill, & Flannery, 1993; Larson & Maag, 1998; Lewis & Sugai, 1999).

Through the effective use of these three levels of support, we expect that schools will be able to adequately address the range of problem behavior that impedes the learning process and that all students will be provided with the support necessary to succeed in school. School-wide PBS efforts have resulted in decreases in problem behavior in a variety of contexts in both elementary schools (Lewis et al., 1998; Scott, 2001; Todd et al., 1999) and middle schools (Colvin et al., 1993; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). However, few studies have evaluated applications of school-wide PBS in urban schools characterized by severe poverty, community violence, and high base rates of problem behavior. As a result, the bulk of previous research may not adequately take into account the systems-level challenges inherent in some communities that place limitations on the effectiveness of "typical" school-wide PBS interventions.

*Along with his peers, Kevin was introduced to the school's "Steps to Success" program, in which the school's expectations (be responsible, be respectful, be ready to learn, be cooperative, and be safe) were defined and taught to all students. Teachers began systematically acknowledging appropriate behavior through "positive behavior tickets," which were given to students and could be entered into a drawing for special prizes and privileges. Kevin and a small group of other*

students were chosen as case studies for whom intensive individualized supports would be provided, although teachers indicated that a large proportion of students in the school were also in need of intensive support. A functional behavioral assessment was conducted and a behavior support plan was developed for Kevin, and considerable efforts on the part of researchers, school personnel, family members, and community partners were brought to bear in the development of interventions to address problem behavior as well as the quality of life of each of the case study students and their families.

Initial efforts with Kevin were encouraging. Quality-of-life interventions appeared especially relevant in addressing the larger family- and systems-level issues that influenced behavioral outcomes at school. For example, the family had no transportation, no telephone, and no health insurance, and they relied on one adult's minimum-wage income to support four adults and two minors living together in a tiny rental house. In addition to behavioral interventions at school, efforts were aimed at linking the family to resources within the community, and opportunities were made available to secure health insurance, transportation, potential employment, mental health services, and needed material resources. Regrettably, modest improvements in behavior were not maintained, as serious breakdowns in established community supports and severe family stressors seemed to provide continual setbacks. Toward the end of Kevin's eighth-grade year, his home, including all the family's possessions, was destroyed in a fire. Kevin's behavior deteriorated significantly after this catastrophic event, as depression, anger, and social withdrawal increased. Kevin concluded the school year by being suspended for the final weeks of school, failing the eighth-grade, and being socially promoted to high school against his family's wishes.

In most schools, the severe challenges highlighted by this case vignette are fairly rare. In some inner-city schools, they are the rule. Kotlowitz (1998), in describing the disparity between the "two Americas" (suburban vs. inner-city America), used the imagery of a "deep and wide chasm" (p. 4). Similarly, the number and severity of challenges faced by many inner-city schools are very different from schools in more advantaged communities. Youth in the inner city are often raised in stressful and unstable environments where poverty, poor health care, crime, lack of employment opportunities, and fragmented community services can combine to create a culture of chaos and despair (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). For students who face dangers walking through their own neighborhood to get to school, being "ready to learn" as they walk into the classroom is not likely to be a high priority.

These stressors may combine to create a school culture in which noncompliance is the norm and where peer reinforcement leads to students' acceptance and expectation of disruptive behavior in their peers. This pattern is supported by data from inner-city schools with which our team has worked. For example, in the first school in which

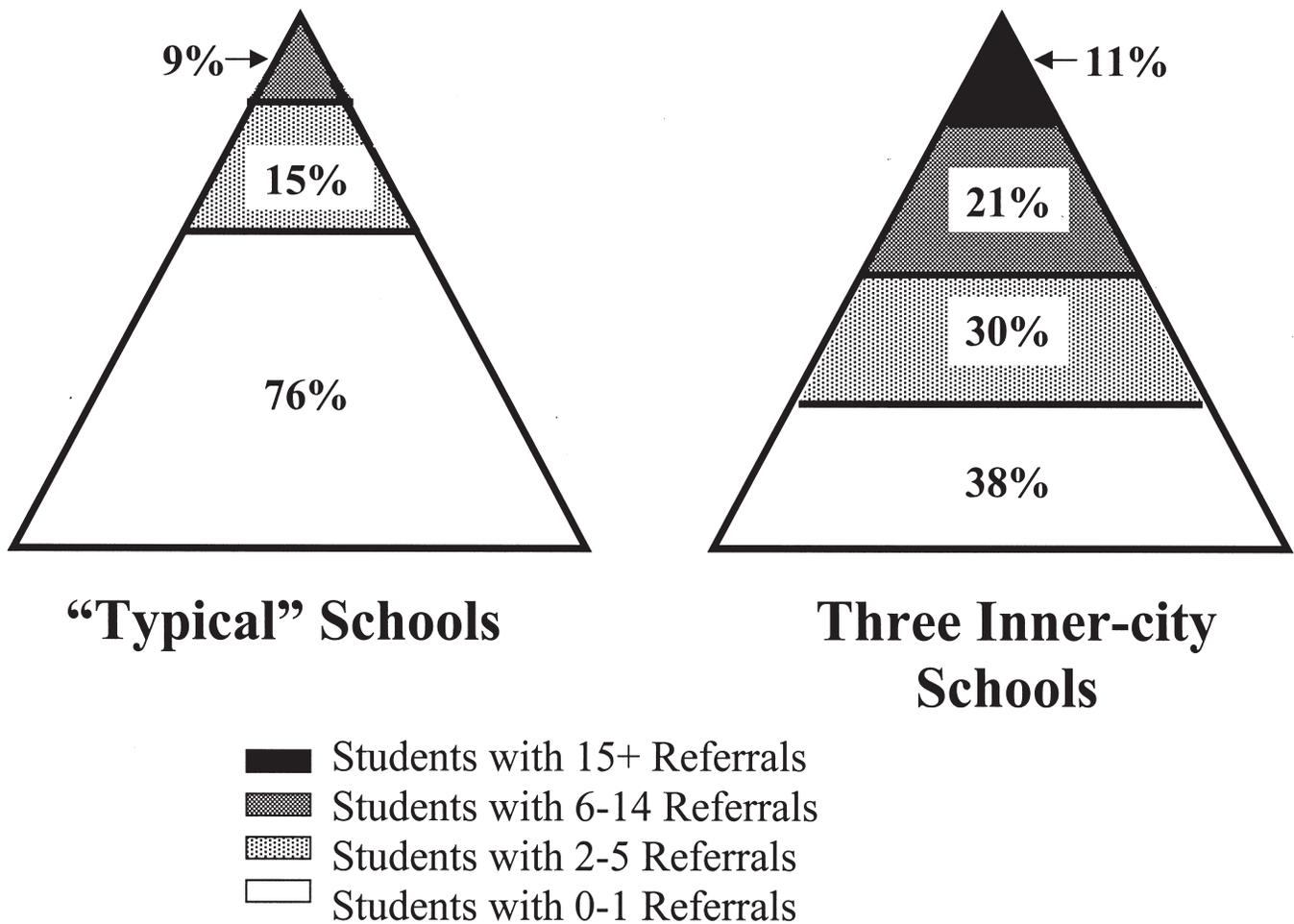
we intervened, 42% of the student body had received at least five office discipline referrals for problem behavior during the previous year, and 81% had received at least one discipline referral during the previous year (Warren et al., in press). These data suggest that the proportions of students with varying levels of problem behavior in inner-city schools may differ significantly from estimates in the "triangle" model previously proposed (Sugai & Horner, 1999). For example, data provided by Horner and colleagues at the University of Oregon (R. H. Horner, personal communication, June 12, 2001) indicated that for 26 middle schools (15,713 students) in which data were being collected, 76% of students received zero or one office discipline referrals during the school year (students without serious problem behavior), 15% received from two to five office referrals (at-risk students), and 9% received six or more office referrals (students with chronic/intense problem behavior; see Figure 2).

In contrast, data collected from the three inner-city middle schools (1,971 students) with which our team has worked yield very different proportions. In these inner-city middle schools, 38% of students received 0 or 1 office discipline referrals, 30% received from 2 to 5 office referrals, 21% received from 6 to 14 office referrals, and 11% received 15 or more office referrals. These data support the notion that inner-city schools differ from most schools not only in the severity of problem behavior in students but also in the frequency with which it occurs.

Through observing firsthand the severe challenges facing the students and families for whom we provided individualized supports and recognizing the intensity and frequency of problem behavior in the school as a whole, we began to appreciate the monumental task facing inner-city schools in their primary mission to educate students. The realization that hundreds of students in each inner-city school likely required the level of individualized support that we were then providing to a handful of students was sobering. Naturally, we do not expect inner-city schools to be responsible for resolving poverty, crime, unemployment, fragmented community supports, and other problems in their communities. Nevertheless, our team's experiences with PBS approaches in inner-city schools in recent years have yielded a number of valuable lessons that are applicable to future school-wide PBS efforts in urban settings. The following pages highlight some of our experiences with the school-wide implementation of PBS in inner-city schools, provide insight into potential reasons for the disparity between suburban and inner-city schools, and present a discussion of lessons learned and suggestions for future research in urban applications of school-wide PBS.

### School-Wide PBS in Wyandotte County

Although the issues presented in this article come from our experience working in several middle schools in Wyandotte County, Kansas, the following case study describes



**Figure 2.** Proportion of students with varying numbers of office discipline referrals in “typical” versus inner-city middle schools.

some of our experiences in the first school in which we worked.

**UNIVERSITY/SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP**

The research reported here began with funding from the University of Kansas (KU) portion of the national Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) awarded to the University of South Florida. The Kansas research proposed a partnership between the Beach Center on Families and Disability at KU with the Unified School District (USD) 500 in Kansas City and Wyandotte County. The partnership agreement solicited the participation of four middle schools in the district over a 5-year period of project funding (now in Year 4). Support for the ongoing KU/USD 500 partnership to establish school-wide PBS has now expanded to include elementary schools and is funded from a variety of federal, state, and local sources.

**SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS**

We begin with a case study of an inner-city middle school, the first school with which we began our research partner-

ship. As reported by Edmonson (2000), the average yearly enrollment for the school (Grades 6–8) was 724 (1997–1999 school years). Ethnic representation of students in the school was reported as 40% African American, 32% Hispanic, 20% White, 8% Asian or Pacific Islander, and .001% Native American. As a comparison, data indicate that for the state as a whole, approximately 81% of students are White, 8% Hispanic, 6% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% African American, and 3% Native American (based on the average of 1997–2000). In addition, 90% of the students at this school qualified for free or reduced lunch, whereas the state’s percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch was 31%.

**ESTABLISHING “BUY-IN”**

Although administrators had agreed to allow our team to work with the school, our attempts to begin school-wide PBS efforts were initially met with skepticism or were generally ignored by many teachers. We learned that approximately 42 programs were already in place in the school that related to student behavior in some manner. Given the

large number of initiatives already underway at the school, teachers' initial negative reaction to PBS as "one more thing" was not surprising. As a result, teacher "buy-in" had to be earned incrementally in a number of ways. As a whole, teachers and administrators became more receptive to implementing universal and group supports after our team spent nearly a year building rapport and becoming more familiar with the school's unique culture and, most important, after we achieved positive results with several students for whom individual supports were being provided. Later, the three major components of PBS (universal, group, and individual supports) were used as a framework for understanding what the school already had in place and how efforts could be streamlined. This approach served to increase coordination of resources and decrease duplication of efforts and allowed teachers to see how a PBS perspective served to make their jobs easier, resulting in increased teacher buy-in.

#### PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

A crucial component of assuring the sustainability of the intervention was the securing of resources for the school to implement the PBS model. Resources that were identified included staff development for teachers; release time for planning and gathering and organizing data; and coordinating services. The funding for these activities came from several sources. Staff development dollars were identified for providing training and release time for teachers and staff members. The local mental health agency provided "in-kind" coordination of services as a part of a grant that was already in operation. The district's prevention services provided funding for teacher coverage. Some funds were directed from Title I school improvement for this effort. A local business partner also contributed.

Another strategy for improving the likelihood that the school would maintain the intervention was the attempt to incorporate PBS strategies into their plans and requirements for accreditation. As "citizenship" had previously been chosen as one of the school improvement goals, school-wide PBS (called "Steps to Success" by school personnel) was incorporated into the school improvement plan. This was an important milestone in embedding PBS strategies into the school, as the citizenship goal provided the objectives, strategies, resources, and evaluation components necessary to systematically internalize the initial stages of school-wide behavior support. This report and associated data subsequently became the major portion of the school's accreditation report under "school climate."

#### COMMUNITY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

An important component of any school improvement plan is to have the participation of stakeholders from the community. It seemed apparent that interventions at this

level would be most effective in dealing with factors outside of school that contributed to students' success or failure. Both the comprehensive school improvement plan and the state's school improvement guidelines called for increased parent participation. The participation of parents was considered extremely important but was found lacking. The school improvement team, therefore, began to invite parents to their meetings simply to share data and review their input about what was going on in the school that affected their children. The team's next question was, "Who else would benefit from the improvement of behavioral and academic outcomes for students in our school's feeder pattern?" This list grew as time progressed and included, among other participants, local business owners, residents of the community, the federal district's congressman, local religious organizations and churches, school district personnel, regional prevention services personnel, and representatives from the local juvenile justice programs. Representatives from the other 41 programs onsite at the school were also invited.

The purpose of these meetings was to (a) review current data, (b) identify other data sources that were needed, and (c) identify and solidify members of the support team. In this case, the unit of analysis was the entire school community. The data that were selected were those that could be considered setting events for problems at school (Horner et al., 1993). Through partnerships with the regional prevention services agency, other relevant data were also identified, including the results of surveys given to sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders throughout the county (Graves & Schalansky, 1999). Data were aggregated to identify both protective and risk factors for citizens of the county. For Fiscal Year 1999, the number one risk factor for the county was community disorganization. Conversely, opportunities for involvement in the community were identified as the number one protective factor. This led to the convergence of three interrelated areas: comprehensive positive behavior support, school improvement, and a "community school" approach to community setting events (Lawson & Sailor, 2000).

The next stages involved the development of small-group problem-solving teams in the three target areas, identified through summarization of data covering extended day services for students, mentoring, and community support. Each of these target areas addressed the major setting events that seemed to contribute to the most frequent behavior problems at school.

Via school-wide surveys, teachers identified that most problem behaviors in the school were maintained by attention and avoidance of difficult academic tasks. As a result, the group believed that increased access to mentoring adults would "fill the tank" for students who were low on much needed positive attention. Concurrently, extended day programs would provide the opportunity for academic needs to be addressed in more targeted programs. These

extended day services would be tied to the resources of the school (e.g., diagnostic reading programs, teacher expertise).

Community support team members addressed the need for increased access to community resources and activities. For instance, it was pointed out that if students wanted to go swimming during the summer, they would have to drive to the adjacent county (considerably more affluent). This team began to focus on increasing students' access to activities that would improve their quality of life. In all, the community support meetings offered the opportunity for discussing school and community goals, examining data from which a variety of interventions would be based, bringing together diverse groups and agencies from the community to address needs of the school (and needs of the community that affect the school), and reinforcing the sense of shared responsibility to the community by every member present.

Although the strategies described (establishing buy-in, planning for sustainability, facilitating community supports) are inherent to PBS as applied in any setting, these aspects of the intervention were judged to be particularly critical for achieving lasting positive change in this case study. The increased importance of these strategies was underscored by many of the challenges inherent in this inner-city school (i.e., school personnel already feeling overwhelmed with previous initiatives, high rates of staff turnover, high base rates of problem behavior, very little perceived support from parents and community members), which are likely to be shared by schools in many urban settings.

### STUDY OUTCOMES

As reported by Warren et al. (in press), the school witnessed a number of encouraging outcomes during the 1st year of full school-wide PBS implementation (Year 2 of the study). For example, the total number of office discipline referrals decreased by 20% from Year 1 to Year 2, "time-outs" decreased by 23%, and, most notable, short-term suspensions decreased by 57%. Reports from teachers and administrators confirmed that the combination of universal, group, and individual supports made a positive impact on the school climate and student behavior in general (Warren et al., in press).

Although these data were very encouraging, several negative trends began to appear the following year (Year 3), when our team began the transition from a direct intervention role to a more consultative role. During several months of Year 3, disciplinary referrals exceeded the reduction in Year 2, and at least 2 months exceeded baseline. For example, in the 3rd year, office referrals were up 32% from October of the 2nd year (602 and 469, respectively). Also, the number of disciplinary referrals for the month of October was 20% higher during the 3rd year than during baseline (613 and 493, respectively).

We identified two primary reasons for the increase in office referrals: the school's implementation of another intervention involving increased punishment and inconsistency in the application of universal supports. As reported earlier, there were at least 42 other programs in place at the time of initial intervention, with more to follow. One programmatic addition, which was implemented by the school outside of the PBS framework, came in the form of required school uniforms starting in Year 3 of our involvement. Students who frequently did not wear their uniform would earn an office referral. At least 15% of the office referrals for Year 3, from August to March, were a direct result of students' not wearing uniforms. Teachers and administrators also reported that the actual number of referrals that could be attributed to the uniforms could be higher. For example, staff reported that when students were out of uniform, they were more likely to be noncompliant and/or disruptive during class. Some of the staff members also reported that conflict regarding uniform compliance led to additional power struggles and subsequent disciplinary referrals. Staff members were in the process of revising their dress-code policies during the latter part of the 3rd year as a result of these data.

A second area of concern reflected a management issue. One of the vice principals requested to be responsible for the school-wide daily drawings for prizes. Unfortunately, the increase in problems associated with school uniforms and other management-related issues took time away from her ability to make sure the daily drawings occurred. As a result, students had less frequent access to identified reinforcers and positive attention from peers and adults from these daily drawings than had previously been provided.

## Critical Issues and Lessons Learned

### STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL-WIDE PBS

Except for full-service schools and community schools (Lawson & Sailor, 2000), most schools have no formal structures for linking their mission and functions with families and with community service systems. School-wide PBS applications offer the opportunity to begin to establish this expanded structural arrangement by recruiting and implementing a school/family/community oversight committee to offer advice on the process of, and provide an overall sense of direction for, implementation as it affects the three groupings of stakeholders.

It is our opinion that the early establishment of an oversight committee dedicated to the success of the implementation effort will help anticipate and provide a buffer against the "winds of change" that constantly blow across urban schools and that can interact negatively with PBS outcomes. It is important that such oversight committees be ethnically diverse and representative of the patterns of

students that make up the population of the school. Diversity on the oversight committee provides the added value of helping ensure that PBS applications are carried out in culturally competent and sensitive ways and that special attention is paid to diverse language backgrounds where needed.

### SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

The typical relationships that exist between inner-city schools and universities are likely to be insufficient to sustain interventions of the scope and magnitude of school-wide PBS. A substantive systems-change effort of that level requires developing a relationship and joint planning time prior to developing a formal partnership agreement.

Traditional university-school relationships advance because schools have a need for university resources: personnel training and staff development, research-to-practice information, and access to course credit and certification for personnel. Likewise, universities typically need practicum training sites for students and access for research investigations. However, even when schools do take advantage of university resources, efforts at systems-change are often met with considerable resistance by some school personnel. For example, implementing school-wide PBS is likely to imply a change in the culture of the school. Such a change is unlikely to be realized in the absence of significant support from a large sector of the professional and administrative staff of the school.

Inner-city schools are very likely to have site as well as central office administrators who are highly motivated to incorporate evidence-based practices into their schools, particularly when there is evidence that such practices have a high probability of increasing pupil scores on standardized tests of literacy and math skills. Teachers, however, will be less enthusiastic and may even be resistant to adopting new practices if those practices are perceived to be adding "one more thing" to their workloads. The partnership development must confront teacher perception of workload requirements from the outset.

The premise of school-wide PBS is a change of school culture, moving away from coercion as a means of managing difficult and off-task behavior and toward building positive relationships and teaching appropriate responses to school and classroom expectations. As such, it represents a shift from exclusionary practices to inclusionary practices. For example, teachers who are accustomed to referring students out of class for disruptive behavior would, under school-wide PBS, be expected to manage these problems in the classroom. If teachers perceive this change as removing from them their only source of control over students (referral) rather than discarding one practice in favor of a better one, then the enterprise will likely fail for lack of teacher acceptance.

One reason teachers may choose to support PBS is that keeping their students in the classroom can lead to increased student achievement. Student progress as measured by standardized achievement tests is one of the most frequently used measures of the effectiveness of teachers and school resources. One of the best predictors of pupil progress is actual time in instruction. If teachers can manage students' behavior with inclusionary practices, their efforts are likely to be rewarded with improved evidence of pupil progress. If teachers agree at the outset with the premise and are willing to be trained in inclusionary practices, then the basis for a formal partnership is greatly increased. University personnel may need to present skeptical teachers (many inner-city teachers will tell you they've "seen it all") with evidence of school-wide PBS efficacy in schools like theirs. Published reports, videotapes, and CDs are helpful, but our experience has shown us that the most successful initial professional development activity has been to feature presentations by teachers and administrators from similar schools that have undergone school-wide PBS and have become inclusionary school cultures. Inner-city teachers and administrators trust those whom they perceive to be operating under circumstances similar to their own. This usually does not include university faculty.

School-wide PBS implies not only a partnership between the university and the school but also a partnership among the school, its families, and its community service-provider systems. Traditional school-university arrangements do not include important stakeholders such as parents and members of community after-school programs. Teachers and parents may initially feel uncomfortable learning new practices in the company of each other. In inner-city areas, where exclusionary practices have been the norm, family members may feel alienated from the school. Sometimes schools make families feel that they have failed as parents because their children have failed academically or socially. School-wide PBS, however, implies that school personnel, community agency staff, and families can engage in conjoint problem-solving efforts where needed, with each member bringing valuable knowledge and experience to the table. Arranging initial professional development activities to include family and community members from the outset, and to the maximum extent possible, is likely to build a stronger foundation for a formal partnership.

The basis for a formal school-university partnership to achieve school-wide PBS as the outcome is in place when (a) a school, as well as the involved families and community services, is motivated and all or most of the relevant stakeholders understand and believe in the required practices and procedures and (b) a qualified and respected team from the university is willing provide requisite professional development activities to achieve valued outcomes. The formalized partnership's agreement can be written at that point and should include each party's rele-

vant expectations. These expectations are likely to include (a) persons responsible for the coordination of professional development from both the school and the university, (b) the means of implementing professional development activities, (c) the overall length of time of the partnership agreement, (d) the evaluative measures against which the partnership will assess its progress, and (e) the process by which decisions will be made to implement the partnership agreement over time.

At one of our school–university partnership sites, an assistant principal was selected to be the school’s coordinator. The university team selected a doctoral student in special education to be its coordinator. The two coordinators worked closely to carry out the terms of the partnership agreement. This school–university agreement took place over a 2-year period. Professional development activities included school-wide inservice days as well as in-school and in-classroom exercises conducted over time. Team members from the university worked within the school team structures and used actual student “cases” selected by the teams, both to engage in joint problem solving and to teach methods of functional behavioral assessment and PBS plan development to team members.

#### **PBS IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM**

Urban schools are targets of opportunity for entrepreneurs, reformers, grant-getters and government experts, all of whom have ideas for improving student progress. In one of our urban partnership schools, a district administrator explained that we would be under the constraint of making sure that our evaluative data on the application of school-wide PBS would not in any way “interact with or contaminate” the ongoing evaluative database of the district’s comprehensive school improvement (CSI) model. This model, which was financed by a local philanthropic foundation as well as the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, had a vested interest in positive results reflected in its ongoing internal and external evaluation studies. We elected to seek permission to be nested within the overall CSI treatment model, as a part of the school-wide discipline program at our partnership schools.

By becoming a component of the CSI program, we allowed the CSI developer, an out-of-state education professor, to take credit for any positive increments in the CSI evaluations that might be traceable to our partnership efforts. We also agreed that any negative results would lead to our early departure. We concurred, as a local university, that it was in our own best interest to assist the overall efforts of the CSI developer in our local urban district. In fact, we had confidence in the model and were committed to helping it succeed. If we had chosen to work outside of the CSI model, it is unlikely that the partnership would

have succeeded. We would have been regarded by the schools either as in competition with a program to which they were committed or as adding one more thing to a full plate.

#### **INTERACTION OF PBS AND OTHER INTERVENTIONS**

Results from school-wide PBS are likely to be highly interactive with other comprehensive interventions undertaken by the school after PBS has been initiated. For example, as mentioned earlier, one of our partnership schools undertook a major new dress-code policy midway through the term of the school–university partnership. Under the new policy, all students were required to wear uniforms. The authority for and guidelines under which the new policy was implemented, in its 1st year, were undertaken outside of the infrastructure for school-wide PBS. The interactive result was to produce a neat reversal in an otherwise negative (i.e., downward sloping) trend in indicators for exclusionary practices resulting from PBS. Dress-code infractions were treated under policy guidelines as grounds for exclusion from the classroom until the infraction could be corrected. In retrospect, the partnership implementers should have taken steps to ensure that dress-code violations were treated with PBS measures rather than constituting exceptions to the school-wide application.

The administration of another partnership school decided to put into place a novel procedure that one of the administrators had learned about at a conference. This procedure called for the operation of a “reflection room,” where classroom teachers could send students to reflect on the reasons that they were excluded from the classroom. Some school personnel felt that this new measure would be consistent with PBS practices because the student would in effect be engaging in a self-conducted functional behavioral assessment and PBS plan development activity while in the reflection room. However, the practice served to suppress the otherwise downward trend of measures of exclusionary practices.

These examples also help illustrate the importance of helping schools truly adopt a PBS mentality in which any number of initiatives can be coordinated to achieve identified goals. Ideally, in these examples, administrators’ decisions to implement new strategies should have been made under a PBS framework in which the strategies were adopted by the school as a whole, developed in response to an identified problem, and systematically evaluated. Regrettably, some administrators and teachers in one school continued to view PBS as just one more initiative, rather than a system that incorporates and enhances all behavioral efforts within the school. Schools must be trained and supported in such a way that they understand that multiple interventions need not be viewed as competing against each other when they are implemented within the PBS system.

### NO QUICK FIXES

School-wide PBS applied to inner-city, urban schools through university–school partnerships is a long-term commitment for everyone involved. The systems-change element of moving a school culture from coercion to support requires a significant investment in time and resources. We initially estimated that a minimum of 1 year of intensive on-site support would be required to begin to initiate the longitudinal momentum to sustain school-wide PBS as the basis for an inclusionary culture of support for students. However, given the complex systemic challenges facing some inner-city schools, a multiyear plan may be necessary in order to ensure an effective transition.

Our key strategies have been to work within the school site's team structures; to provide ongoing staff and professional development activities in a longitudinal fashion; to share and extend knowledge and practices through an oversight committee; to assist schools in effectively responding to the school site's data summaries on a regular basis in making short- and long-term policy decisions; and to use individual and targeted group supports as teaching vehicles to extend PBS practices across the entire school. The benefit to the university from these sustained partnership efforts is significant. Putting together the mosaic of individual, group, and universal support strategies provides many opportunities for interdisciplinary research and for teacher and other interprofessional training experiences.

When the intensive intervention phase of the partnership activity has ended, it is important that the university not be seen as abandoning its commitment to the process. There is a long history of university students and faculty using urban schools to gather data for various research projects and then disseminating the results in the higher education community, with no information on the studies finding its way back to the schools. University students often use inner-city schools as training sites and then seek and take jobs in more well-financed areas of the city, leaving inner-city schools with vacancies for certified personnel.

Our partnership model emphasizes an intervention phase at each site that is set to run for a predetermined length of time. In our studies, this period has lasted from 1 to 1½ years, but a longer period may be required in some schools to ensure that the PBS approach becomes solidly embedded within the school's philosophy of discipline. Following the intervention phase, there should be a second technical assistance phase of involvement, also set for a predetermined length of time. Both phases of activity are spelled out in a written agreement delineating the terms and expectations of the work of the partnership from the outset. For the university, this provides a clearly defined and agreed-upon exit strategy so that resources are not drained at a single site when there are multiple site requests. For the schools, the agreement helps focus person-

nel on the constraints imposed by the passage of time and keeps progress on a steady track.

### ROLE OF THE DISTRICT CENTRAL OFFICE

Whatever is done at a single school through an urban school–university partnership arrangement will reverberate through, and have repercussions for, all schools in that region of the district, and perhaps throughout the district. There is heavy competition for scarce resources, and many turf battles are underway in urban districts at any given time. If a partnership arrangement at one site is perceived as a significant resource that other sites are not being offered, then requests to extend similar arrangements to other schools will soon be forthcoming. This is particularly the case when word gets out in the district that partnership efforts are leading to demonstrably improved pupil progress and reduced student social problems. The question then arises as to a rational basis for “going to scale.”

Because most universities have limited resources with which to implement partnerships to accomplish school-wide PBS, careful thought will need to be given to a plan for expansion within the district. School-wide PBS applications can result in immediate positive outcomes, even in early stages of implementation. In many inner-city schools, positive recognition by school personnel for small increments of social and academic progress by students often turns out to be just about the only positive self-esteem building experience those students receive. Many will respond in dramatic ways. From the outset, university and district personnel should plan how to proceed when things go well at initial sites. From the initial perspective of district administrators, it is likely that school-wide PBS is just one more intervention that may or may not make a difference. District administrators are supportive of efforts to test new, promising programs as long as these are consistent with district and/or state initiatives for which they are held responsible (e.g., CSI models).

We approached the scale issue by responding to a district request to get involved with a particular school that was considered to be at risk for low performance. Through this willingness to engage district priorities, we were able to secure approval for an orderly sequence of interventions over time at multiple school sites through a prearranged site intervention plan. We were also able to secure a state commitment to help support the long-range strategy through use of Title I funding from the state to establish a service center for math and literacy curriculum enhancement, as a part of the broader university–district partnership arrangement.

The most recent piece of the broader puzzle, which is under development as this is being written, is a partnership with the state to develop a mechanism to enable the use of Medicaid dollars to fund school-wide PBS efforts throughout the state. This mechanism, which will be pilot tested in

an urban partnership, will enable the university–school partnership to tap federal health-care financing to offset the costs of implementation of school-wide PBS. This partnership will allow PBS applications to be reimbursable as a school health service expense under state Medicaid regulations.

## Recommendations

In our experience, the unique challenges faced by many inner-city schools often result in a level of problem behavior for which “typical” school-wide PBS strategies may be insufficient. Although these strategies are vital to making significant improvements in school climate and student discipline, often progress must be made in improving systemic factors before school-wide PBS strategies can be expected to maintain success. The combination of universal, group, and individual supports may only scratch the surface of addressing problem behavior in some schools. With this problem in mind, Turnbull, Allen, and Nelson (2001) recommend the following vital systemic approaches that may help set the stage for successful school-wide PBS implementation in school settings where levels of problem behavior may at first appear insurmountable:

1. Effective service integration must become a reality in schools (Lawson & Sailor, 2000; Sailor, 1996). By providing truly coordinated and/or co-located services for education, mental health, public health, transportation, childcare, social services, recreation, and other community services, families will have greater access to needed supports. In addition, service integration will provide a greater opportunity for service providers to work together to provide a coordinated constellation of supports that best meets the needs of the family.
2. Coordinated efforts for family support must be increased to ensure that resources, services, and information are provided in family-friendly ways. Schools can provide increased support to families by building on family strengths, honoring family preferences, and considering the whole family as the unit of support rather than the individual student.
3. School–family–community partnerships must provide an increased focus on youth development by including young people as partners in the decision-making process, developing their assets and talents in settings both outside and inside the school, and providing opportunities for youth to serve as resources to their communities.

4. Students, families, schools, and other partners must accept a joint responsibility for community development. Naturally, schools are more successful when the communities in which they are located are successful, and vice versa. All partners must focus on strengthening the social networks, economic viability, and physical infrastructure of the community, which will subsequently influence behavioral and educational outcomes in students both directly and indirectly.

As noted by Turnbull et al. (2001), the concepts of service integration, family support, youth development, and community development are not new by any means but have yet to be effectively integrated together in a community setting. Truly, the educational and behavioral outcomes of the effective implementation of these systems-level components has yet to be realized, but the effect is likely to be great. At the very least, it is anticipated that increased attention to these components will lead to school-wide PBS interventions that are more successful and sustainable in inner-city communities.

*Kevin remains enrolled in high school at the present time, although his attendance is sporadic and his problem behavior has resulted in numerous suspensions from his new school. Individual supports continue to be offered by university personnel, but his teachers, whose patience with Kevin is apparently exhausted, have been extremely reluctant to invest time and effort in PBS strategies that have proven successful in previous settings. Requests have been made of the school to screen Kevin for special education eligibility, but these requests have essentially been refused, with the explanation that Kevin must first attend class regularly (and not get kicked out) for teachers to evaluate his educational needs and learning style.*

*The lessons outlined in this article, when effectively applied, could hold many positive implications for Kevin, his family, and ultimately all residents of this inner-city community. For example, the issue of establishing teacher buy-in will be essential in working with those who are currently reluctant to implement PBS strategies with Kevin. This may require strengthening the school–university partnership, providing examples of other teachers who have “been there” to show the usefulness of PBS approaches to skeptics, and helping the school better understand the relationship between behavior and academic outcomes. In addition, a truly integrated system of services would be extremely beneficial to addressing many of the social service needs required by Kevin and his family and would decrease the negative impact of economic, social, and psychological factors that prevent Kevin from coming to school “ready to learn.” In contrast to actions by the school system that have served to alienate the family (such as the decision to promote Kevin to high school against*

his family's wishes), improved family support efforts would provide Kevin's family with increased incentive for cooperating with the school and not seeing teachers as "the enemy." Likewise, increased attention to youth and community development would result in increases in individual and community pride and improvements in Kevin's overall quality of life. The task of addressing many of these issues may appear daunting. However, it is clear that for Kevin, and many others like him, the positive impact of PBS strategies will not be sustainable unless important systemic factors are also addressed.

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#### AUTHORS' NOTES

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