

School-Wide Behavior Support Through District-Level System Change



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Among the most important and exciting advances for education in the past decade is the emergence of school-wide discipline systems. Dangerous and destructive behaviors are not just a major national concern; they poison the climate of a school and interfere with academic and social development of all children. School-wide efforts to build effective behavior support are a practical and effective response to the threat from destabilizing disruptive behavior. Articles by Lohrmann-O'Rourke et al. (this issue), Taylor-Greene et al. (1997), and Todd, Horner, Sugai, and Sprague (1999) provide excellent examples of the impact that school-wide behavior support can have within individual schools. Eugene School District has chosen to focus this article on the central role that *school districts* must play if the impressive gains we see reported by individual schools are to become the standard for the nation.

The Eugene School District educates 18,437 students across 50 schools. We were introduced to the principles of school-wide behavior support by George Sugai and his colleagues in the early 1990s, and have moved gradually from implementation by individual schools to active and targeted district coordination and implementation. The purpose of this article is to describe what we have learned about the role that school districts can play in the coordination, implementation, and evaluation of school-wide behavior support efforts.

School-wide behavior support efforts in Eugene began when five school teams self-selected to receive university-based training and support. The effects of that effort were clear within a year. Students and staff were better prepared

to be active contributors to their school climate. The staff agreed on school rules and behavioral expectations, along with procedures for teaching, acknowledging, correcting, and monitoring student performance across academic and social areas, resulting in a more respectful social climate within each school. Most compelling was that designing school discipline with a focus on teaching appropriate behaviors resulted in changes that students liked as much as the staff and administration. The successes and challenges of these five schools resulted in a shift in district goals to make this process available to all schools within our district. This shift moved the training and support from university personnel to a district-managed coordinating council.

The basic administrative message we can give is that school districts bear a direct and immediate responsibility to make new systems and technology available to schools. We did this through the following steps. A district-level coordinating council was established to manage any and all initiatives dealing with behavior support. The council meets monthly and is led by a staff member with dedicated time to the coordination and development of effective behavior support across schools. The council developed a training curriculum and incentive structure for schools that were willing to allocate time, effort, and priority toward the development of school-wide behavior support. The coordinating council defined a list of requirements that a school needed in order to receive district support. These requirements included (a) school-wide behavior support as one its top three school improvement goals for

the year; (b) a representative team, including active administrator participation; (c) attendance at three to four team-based training events; and (d) collection of data on the impact of the effort. The incentive structure included (a) \$2,000 per school per year, (b) coordinated training events, (c) release time for the team members to attend the training events, (d) technical support and facilitation from the district coordinating council, and (e) access to free or reduced-fee professional development credit through the University of Oregon or the school district. The training events included skill building, systems development, and team meetings. An overview of the training curriculum can be obtained by contacting the first author at the Eugene school district.

By district design, the effort was kept small during the first years and expanded as schools demonstrated success. During the first year of this effort (1996–1997), five schools participated in school-wide behavior support efforts. During the second year (1997–1998), these five schools were joined by an additional six schools. During the third year (1998–1999), seven more schools were included, and in the 1999–2000 academic year, there were a total of 20 schools actively implementing school-wide behavior support systems with up to seven schools preparing for the 2000–2001 school year. A satisfying result of the process has been the durability of change. Schools require 2 to 3 years of district-level support to establish school-wide discipline systems. As a result, 7 of the 20 schools have been focusing on the “sustainability” of their efforts during the 1999–2000 school year. These seven schools attend to all school events during the year and continue to receive technical assistance and support from the coordinating council.

While it has been encouraging to see the emergence of an effort that now has district-level impact, an important question is whether this effort has resulted in real change in the behavior support systems and positive outcomes for students and staff within participating schools. To address this, the district has worked in collaboration with evaluators from the University of Oregon to develop and assess an instrument, the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET). The SET (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 1999) is a direct observation instrument that measures the degree to which features of school-wide behavior support systems have been implemented. University personnel collect data at the school by observing the physical setting, examining the written policies, interviewing teachers and students, and examining outcome data. The result is a score of the percentage of school-wide features implemented with fidelity. The more features implemented for school-wide effective behavior support, the higher the SET score.

Figure 1 provides the mean SET score for 15 schools collected in the fall of 1998 and for 20 schools in the fall of 1999. Schools A through E are preparing to implement EBS and provide a “preintervention” picture of school

behavior support systems. Schools F through T illustrate scores for fall 1998 and fall 1999. In fall 1998, schools F through L were preintervention schools with a mean of 42% implementation; their 1999 scores reflect postintervention outcomes of a mean of 65%. The scores for schools M through T are postintervention scores for both 1998 (mean of 79%) and 1999 (mean of 88%) and illustrate the durability of the efforts over time. These eight schools (M through T) have continued to develop targeted interventions while maintaining their school-wide efforts. The scores for these eight schools measure maintenance and systems change efforts.

The SET scores indicate that (a) schools just beginning the school-wide process have lower SET scores than schools that have been implementing for a year or more, (b) schools participating in the district training process produce substantive change in their behavior support systems, and (c) as the team from a school completes the district-level training curriculum, they are successful at maintaining substantive change.

As we search to define exactly what we have learned during the past 4 years, three areas of emphasis appear critical to ensure that the EBS program makes a difference for students and staff: management, support, and evaluation. *Management* includes (a) funding for a coordinator, (b) coordinating a council of representatives from the schools including stakeholders in other district prevention and intervention programs, and (c) planning for next fall in early winter. *Support* includes (a) organized support for building-based EBS team facilitators and (b) development of team-based support and technical assistance to schools. *Evaluation* includes the (a) development of data summary tools that teams can use for decision making and (b) implementation of accountability measures for teams.

At the district level, Eugene has focused on several features for establishing and maintaining district-wide EBS, including (a) active central office and school board support and participation, (b) integration of EBS with other district initiatives (e.g., safe schools, First Step to Success, Second Step Violence Prevention), (c) a continuous district-level commitment, (d) a district-level person with designated EBS coordination responsibilities, (e) district-level ownership of EBS management and training, (f) participation of and commitment from individual school administrators, (g) partnerships developed with outside resources (the University of Oregon grants and courses, the Oregon Department of Education grants), and (h) a commitment to research-validated educational practices and data-based decision making.

The EBS program in Eugene has continued to grow not only in the number of participating schools but also in terms of its ongoing priority and solid support within the district at the highest levels of administration despite decreasing resources. The organizational structure provides the foundation for systems change over time. The training

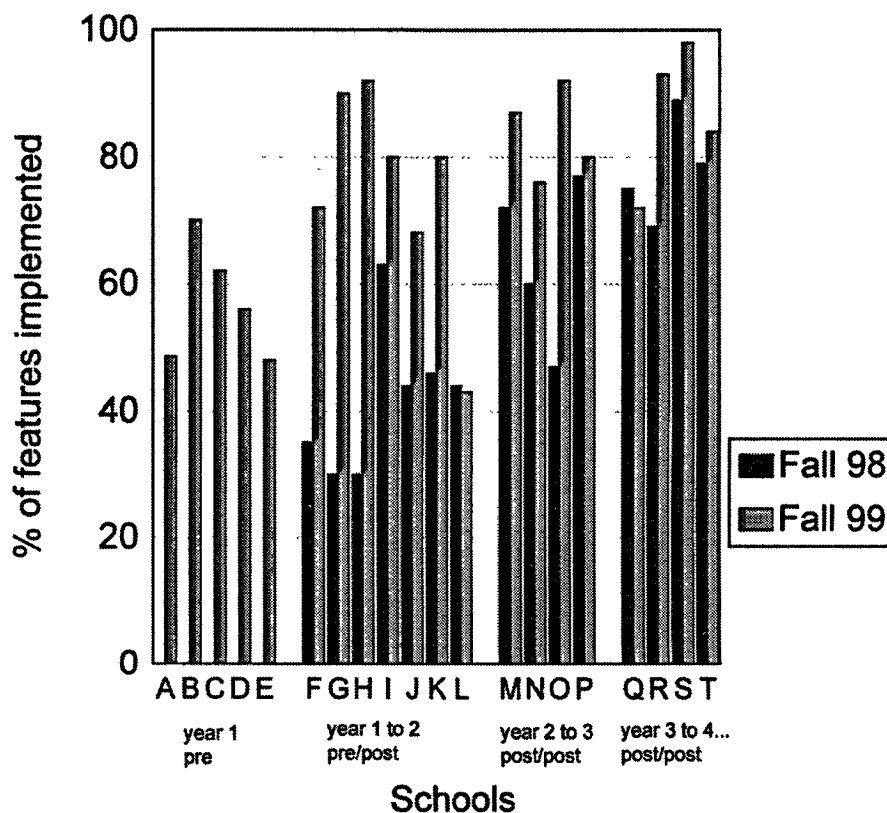


Figure 1. Mean School-Wide Evaluation Tool scores for 15 Eugene schools (F-T) in the Fall of 1998 and 20 schools (A-T) in the Fall of 1999.

and management structure for EBS has become established and is part of a district manual. The positive outcomes combine to form the basis for ensuring the longevity of EBS within the district. These include (a) growth in the number of participating schools, (b) growth in district level priority and support, (c) a manual that specifies training and management procedures, and (d) a continual increase in the level of implementation of systems change. In the Eugene schools, as in any other district, priorities and interests vary and change with changing mandates, resources, and demographics. However, EBS has provided a unifying, systemic structure whereby schools have gained confidence that a proactive, functional, instruction-based approach to behavior support is both effective and feasible.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Data-Based Decision Making in Hawaii's Behavior Support Effort



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This article summarizes the importance of data-based decision making for the Hawaii Effective Behavior Support (HEBS) effort. The HEBS began with eight schools in 1996, seven more schools in 1997, and 36 additional schools in 1998. Emphasis is on the importance of effective communication feedback loops and data-based decision making. The need for an effective behavior support (EBS) approach, the features of a practical feedback and communications loop, and three school examples are presented in this summary.

Need for Effective Behavior Support in Hawaii

Hawaii educators have long recognized the need to establish a continuum of effective behavioral support for all students. However, presented with educating an increasingly heterogeneous population of students, high rates of problem behavior and office discipline referrals, low rates of academic achievement, low staff morale, and multiple school improvement initiatives, Hawaii educators sought to establish a systematic and sustainable process to create more positive school climates, establish accountability stan-

dards, improve academic achievement, and enhance student and family access to effective behavioral supports.

The 52 schools that volunteered to participate in the HEBS project were committed to establishing and sustaining a proactive systems approach to improving the behavioral and social needs of all students, especially those with significant behavioral challenges. On the basis of individualized action planning and implementation activities developed by school leadership teams, these schools learned the importance and implementation of (a) a continuous data-based approach to decision making and school improvement; (b) a "systems-practices-data" integrated framework for operationalizing student support initiatives; (c) strategies to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, and focus of multiple initiatives in their schools; (d) formalized team-based problem solving; (e) the establishment of local (within school) behavioral capacity; and (f) a long-term commitment and high priority to proactive school improvement and staff development efforts.

The implementation of the HEBS effort emphasized the use of data to guide decision making. However, because schools were not fluent with the data management techniques, a practical training and feedback loop was needed to assist each school.