Defining and Describing Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support

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Schools have two important goals: maximize the academic achievement and social competence of all learners. To achieve these goals, schools must focus on the specific skills of individual students, but increasingly we are learning that they must also focus on the overall social culture of a school. The social culture of a school can vary from highly controlled and rule governed to loosely structured and spontaneous. However, successful learning environments most often are characterized as preventive, predictable, positive, instructional, safe, and responsive for all students and staff across all school settings and activities.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe those characteristics of schoolwide positive behavior support (SW-PBS) practices and systems that establish and maintain an effective, efficient, and relevant social culture in which teaching and learning are maximized. This chapter leads this section of the handbook because SW-PBS serves as the foundation or basis for successful implementation of a full continuum of academic and social behavior supports occurring school- and classroomwide, for example, individual behavior supports (e.g., function-based supports, wraparound), academic programming, data-based decision making and evaluation, discipline, family and community participation, and early intervention.

The SW-PBS content of this chapter is organized into three main sections: (a) historical influences and theoretical foundations, (b) defining practices, and (c) implementation processes and guidelines.
Maximizing academic achievement and preparing a skilled and knowledgeable citizenry have been primary education goals since the beginning of the first American public school system. However, as families, communities, and cultures have matured and become more complex over generations, the curricular responsibilities of schools have become boarder, larger, and more sophisticated (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). One area of increased recent attention has been the school’s role in affecting the social development of children and youth. Over the years, this attention has manifested itself in the form of different school social initiatives, for example, values and character education, safe and drug-free schools, citizenship and civil responsibility, and sex and family education.

Need for SW-PBS

Classroom behavior management and schoolwide discipline in particular have sustained high levels of concern, controversy, and discussion. To illustrate, both the general public and educators have rated behavior related issues in the top three concerns facing the public schools over the last 35 years in the “36th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitude Toward the Public Schools” (Rose & Gallup, 2007). Attention to the behavior and social development of all students has become a priority in recent major national legislative acts (e.g., Individuals With Disabilities Act [IDEA], No Child Left Behind).

Despite this long-time concern and increased attention, a curriculum for the social development of children and youth in schools has not been formally and widely embraced (Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2008). First, debate about whether the social development of children should be the primary responsibility of the family, community, or school remains unresolved. Second, as rates and kinds of problem behaviors worsen, the tendency has been to move toward tougher consequence systems to “teach” students that their rule-violating behavior is unacceptable. Third, behavior and classroom management and schoolwide disciplinary practices have not been implemented in a systemic or integrated fashion but instead introduced reactively to individualized problem events or situations. Fourth, the preservice and in-service professional development structures have not formalized or emphasized their behavior-related curricula, instead giving preference and priority to academic curricula and instruction. Fifth, a cohesive continuum of evidence-based behavior support practices has not been established to guide educators to the most appropriate and effective interventions. Finally, attention has focused on adoption of a given behavior practice and not on the accurate and sustained implementation of that practice.

Schoolwide discipline has been of particular interest. When educators experience increased rates and intensities of rule-violating behavior, attention shifts to regaining classroom order, eliminating disruptive and