

We've Got PBS—How 'Bout You??

We were drowning in data. Test data. Behavior data. Attendance data. And the bottom line was our staff was working harder than ever, but we didn't make Adequate Yearly Progress according to the new federal guidelines. However, we did make ABC guidelines according to the state of North Carolina. This caused us great distress because we failed to make AYP two years in a row, which meant that we were in Title I School Improvement according to the federal government. Parents of our students could request that their children could leave our wonderful elementary school and go to a neighboring school because their test scores were higher than ours. Our discipline referrals also equaled approximately one per student if they were averaged. We needed to do something more than we were doing. Academically, we were doing absolutely everything we could possibly do for students. Behaviorally we needed a different plan. But what? We had used all of the tools in our toolboxes.

After a Principal's Meeting, my principal asked me if I thought we wanted to apply to be a pilot school for our district for its new Positive Behavior Support initiative. I jumped up and practically hugged her! She and I had been talking about this program for a couple of years and its positive impact on students and staff, but had not had the wherewithal to institute a complete plan of our own at our school. We had begun with the "Fish Philosophy" staff development training from our central office one year, and then an administrative intern had put up a fish compliments bulletin board in the staff lounge a little later, but that was as far as we had gotten other than the thinking and talking stages. Now we might really have our chance if we were accepted as a part of the program.

I waited with bated breath to see if we were accepted for the following year's program as I continued to spend the majority of my time closing out the school year with a constant stream of students in and out of my office for discipline, either from the classroom or the bus. And our suspensions continued to increase. School is where these students needed to be, but not at the expense of the remainder of the class. My dilemma was that we just were not getting through to them, and many were "repeat offenders" with a long list of prior referrals. I knew there had to be a better way, but again, we were drowning.

Very close to the last day of school, we received word that we were one of the 14 schools (in a district of 100+ schools) that had been accepted as a pilot school. I was ecstatic, to say the least. As always happens with me, my mind began running a million miles a minute about the possibilities of what we could do with this new program at our school. I started my list, ran it by my principal, later asked her if I could take it on as my next year's major focus for my professional growth plan (a little backwards in order), and started to move right down the list. One suggestion I have would be to get approval from your

principal before you get too far down the road. My principal and I have worked together for many years now, and she delegates a number of large projects to me, so I knew this would be fine with her, but you may not have that type of relationship, so ask for permission and/or guidance until you are certain.

Now the fun began. I began thinking of staff members who would be representative of every area in our building and who would possibly be willing to devote their time and efforts to the PBS Team. One of the first recommendations we were given was that an administrator needed to be totally in favor of the program, attend all trainings, and all meetings. We had that covered with me as the assistant principal, but I asked my principal if she were willing to make that commitment, and she agreed that she was also willing. I spoke to her about the team members I had thought about, and asked her opinion. She agreed with my choices and added a few more. Our team became very large, but was an extremely diverse group within our building. I then personally talked with each staff member to invite him or her to join the PBS Team. Each one readily agreed after I explained the level of commitment. We had our team and they went home for the summer!

Intense staff development for the entire team was held the first year, with four two-day sessions spread throughout the school year. Monthly meetings at the school were held to work on action plans from the training, and the school continued to move forward. The team revised the office discipline referral to simplify it for staff members from a narrative sheet to a check sheet. We had also been given a subscription to the SWIS[©] Data Management System as a part of the pilot program, and the office referral coincides with this system. The team decided that as a school we needed a positive office referral system for students to "catch them doing good things." Since we had already had the "Fish Philosophy" training for staff and had our own bulletin board up in the staff lounge, we simply carried that theme over to the students.

When a student does something noteworthy, a staff member uses a specially designed "Positive Office Referral" that is printed on neon paper so the student can be recognized. That referral is turned in to the office, the student is called to the office to receive a certificate that says specifically what he or she did to receive the referral, and receives a fish cut-out with his or her name and the date on it to place in the cafeteria on the window under the appropriate grade level for the entire school to see. These are removed monthly for students to take home. The assistant principal or the principal then calls home to let the parents know their child received a Positive Office Referral. During our first year of the program, 700 of these referrals were awarded in a school of 550 students. These are messages on the answering machines our students no longer erase!

We have expanded this program to include buses for Positive Office Referrals for our bus drivers to award with an abbreviated form. They simply fill out the form and hand it to our staff members on bus duty, and we do the rest. The bus referral bulletin board is in the front lobby of the school and in full view of all visitors.

In order to keep our staff members informed of statistical data, during the first staff meeting of every month I now share the live SWIS© data for the preceding month, as well as the number of Positive Office Referrals that were awarded. Interestingly enough, it seems that when there are many office referrals, there are not as many Positive Office Referrals, and the opposite is generally true, but that is still speculation on my part at this point.

Additionally, to keep parents informed of PBS happenings, I produce a PBS monthly newsletter that is sent home via their students' weekly folder. It gives the same statistical data that is provided for staff members as well as information about what the PBS Team has been accomplishing and our current focus and direction. We are in our second year of PBS, and up to this point, all of our comments from parents have been completely in favor of the program and the positive changes they have seen in our building and in the students.

One extremely important facet of the program is that each school is assigned a PBS Coach. Our coach attends all our meetings, and is always available for any type of behavior consultation within the school, either for individual students, entire classes, or entire grade levels. He also provides staff development of a wide variety and tailors it to our school. He has worked with different grade levels, teacher assistants, and bus drivers to encourage positive behavior standards. He is a SWIS© Data Manager Guru and can manipulate the data in amazing ways to figure out where we need to work on improving behavior. And at the beginning of this school year, he was our motivational speaker at our first annual Beginning of the Year PBS Assembly.

Now back to data. As I said previously, we were drowning in it. Our teachers were working themselves into the ground and working all hours of the day and night. Our teacher assistants became instructional rather than clerical. The principal and I read every assessment card and report card. We have quarterly reviews to assist teachers with ideas for struggling students. We have an extremely active Student Support Team. We provide educational evaluations for students who need them, and placements when necessary. We have benchmarks for everything. And we still were not making AYP. And then we started PBS. Here is some really good data:

Positive Office Referrals	Almost 700
Regular Office Referrals	Decreased by 50%

Suspensions	Decreased by 66%
Overall Reading Scores (grades 3-5)	Increased by 8 points
Overall Math Scores (grades 3-5)	Scores were .5 point higher than the district's during a year when scores were renormed
Writing Scores (grade 4)	Below district average by 9 points; (we have to have somewhere to improve!)

We are out of Title I School Improvement. We think that what changed in addition to what we were already doing is that students were in class rather than sitting in the office waiting to be seen for an office referral. Parents were happier when we called, students were happier, staff members were happier, the office staff was happier, and that might just be why it's called Positive Behavior Support!