CHAPTER 2

Managing Student Behavior with the Positive Behavioral Techniques of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports

A rapidly growing number of schools, an estimated 9,000 in early 2009, have adopted the SWPBS approach to school discipline (Horner, 2009). The growth in SWPBS was sparked by inclusion of the term *positive behavior interventions and supports* in the 1997 and 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The 2004 amendments require that a child's individualized education program (IEP) team *consider* the use of *positive behavioral interventions and supports* in cases in which the behavior of a child with a disability exhibits behavior that impedes the child's learning or the learning of others. *Where appropriate*, such behavioral interventions and supports are to be included in the child's individualized education plan.

Perhaps the greatest impetus for SWPBS, however, was the earmarking of federal funding in IDEA for "training for administrators, teachers, related services personnel, behavioral specialists, and other school staff in positive behavioral interventions and supports, behavioral intervention planning, and classroom and student management techniques" and for "developing or implementing specific curricula, programs, or interventions aimed at addressing behavioral problems." The specific purpose of such training and staff development is "to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address the learning and behavioral needs of such children." With funding for the schoolwide training of staff, and for the purpose of prevention, positive behavior supports (PBS) for individual children with disabilities evolved into SWPBS for *all* children.

Neither PBS nor SWPBS is defined in IDEA. As such, IDEA does not require one specific approach to SWPBS. Common definitions proposed by authorities in the field vary along a continuum from those that emphasize the application of behavior modification or

applied behavioral analysis to those that are very broad, encompassing almost any technique that is "positive." The most popular approach to SWPBS (and it is often stated in the literature that it is the only one) was developed at the University of Oregon by Rob Horner and George Sugai (Horner et al., 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2009) with ample funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. With much less funding and visibility, other approaches to SWPBS (e.g., Project Achieve; Knoff, 2005, 2008) are less well known and have been adopted by far fewer schools. Because of its relative popularity and common use, the Horner and Sugai approach to SWPBS is the one referred to throughout this book whenever the term *SWPBS* (unless otherwise stated) is used.

The SWPBS approach is teacher-centered, its primary aim being to manage, control, or modify student behavior by manipulating the school environment. It is firmly grounded in behavior modification—or, more correctly, applied behavior analysis (Horner et al., 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2009). As noted by Horner (2000), "There is no difference in theory or science between positive behavior support and behavior modification. These are the same approach with different names" (p. 99). In other articles (e.g., Sugai & Horner, 2009), however, it is made clear that SWPBS is grounded more in applied behavior analysis than in behavior modification per se. Although behavior modification and ABA are similar in many respects, applied behavior analysis emphasizes not only the modification of behavior but also the *analysis* of the principles of learning that cause observed changes in behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). From the perspective of ABA, all behavior serves a given function, as discussed later in this chapter. According to the Sugai and Horner approach, an understanding of the functions of behavior is deemed necessary to bring about behavior change most effectively.

From the perspective of SWPBS, the school environment and particularly the actions of teachers and school staff are the primary causes of behavior problems in school.

It is understood that the school environment, and particularly the actions of teachers and school staff, are the primary causes of behavior problems in school. Thus, in order to modify or control student behavior, the school environment and particularly the actions of teachers must be modified. SWPBS entails the process and techniques by which this occurs. The techniques are not new to classroom management (Bear, 2007; Osher et al., 2010). They consist primarily of positive reinforcement, punishment, and direct instruction, but with an emphasis on the first of these. Indeed, the techniques differ little from those in basic textbooks on the behavioral approach to classroom management (e.g., Canter & Canter, 2001) and changing individual behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2006). What is different, however, is applying those techniques *schoolwide*—as opposed to solely with individual students or classes—and the process by which this is done.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SWPBS APPROACH

In addition to being grounded in applied behavior analysis, SWPBS is characterized by five key features, or elements, that are frequently cited in the literature (Horner et al., 2005;

Sugai & Horner, 2009): (1) a three-tiered model of prevention, interventions, and supports; (2) direct instruction; (3) evidence- or research-based behavioral practices; (4) supportive systems; and (5) the ongoing collection and use of data for decision making.

Three-Tiered Model of Prevention, Interventions, and Supports

Perhaps the most widely recognized feature of SWPBS is its three-tier model that offers a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies, techniques, and supports for all children. Adapted from the public mental health model of prevention (Adelman & Taylor, 2006), the three tiers are:

- Tier 1, primary, or universal, prevention, consisting of a system of positive supports provided schoolwide to all children and staff and in all classrooms and other school settings for the purpose of preventing future behavior problems.
- Tier 2, secondary prevention, also called selective prevention, consisting of a system of support for small groups of children at risk of exhibiting serious behavior problems and/or experiencing negative outcomes due to the presence of risk factors. Small-group social skills training receives particular emphasis at this tier.
- Tier 3, tertiary prevention, also frequently referred to as indicated or intensive intervention. This level is designed for individual students who exhibit chronic and serious behavior problems requiring intensive, comprehensive, and individualized interventions and services.

Tier 1, universal prevention, is the focus of this book. The four other key features of SWPBS, as discussed below, are found in each of the three tiers (Horner et al., 2005). Although each feature is generally found in other approaches to schoolwide discipline, the SWPBS approach is clearly reflected in the techniques, procedures, and measures characterizing the next two features, namely, direct instruction and evidence or research-based behavioral practices.

Direct Instruction

Although academic achievement is recognized as an important outcome, social skills receive the greatest attention. Consistent with the principles of applied behavior analysis, social skills are directly taught and are expected to be observable, measurable, and clearly defined. School officials are advised to focus on a small number of behavioral expectations and rules that teachers and staff believe are of greatest importance, to teach specific social skills directly related to those expectations and rules, and to reinforce those skills systematically and positively throughout all classrooms and school settings. Commonly taught social skills are "Follow directions," "Be respectful," and "Be responsible." Typically, being respectful and responsible means following school rules and obeying those in positions of authority; which is seen in the following example of the teaching of responsibility (Horner et al., 2005, p. 369):

In the classroom: Bring books and pencils to class. Do homework.
In gym: Participate. Wear appropriate shoes.
In the hallway: Keep books, belongings, litter off floor.
On the playground: Stay within the recess area.
In the bus area: Keep your books and belongings with you.

Behavioral expectations, such as those cited above, are posted throughout classrooms and other school settings. Student behavior is monitored closely by adults schoolwide throughout the day, with students exhibiting those social skills reinforced with verbal praise and often with tokens exchangeable for tangible rewards or privileges. Positive reinforcement is used much more frequently than punishment to teach social skills and prevent and discourage problem behavior. However, a broad range of clear and fair punitive consequences for inappropriate behavior also is firmly in place for the same purposes.

Evidence- or Research-Based Behavioral Practices

Evidence-based or research-based behavioral practices entail the curriculum, classroom management, instructional procedures, use of rewards and consequences, and an emphasis on the schoolwide application of prevention and positive techniques. Among the behavioral practices most commonly seen in SWPBS schools, the direct teaching of behavioral expectations and social skills and the use of positive reinforcement receive primary attention. As previously noted, at the core of the SWPBS approach is the systematic application of techniques of applied behavior analysis (Sugai & Horner, 1994, 2009; Sugai et al., 2000, 2008). As discussed later in this chapter, techniques of ABA have been found to be quite effective in changing the behavior of individual students, particularly in bringing about short-term changes in their behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Stage & Quiroz, 1997).

Supportive Systems

In emphasizing the importance of systems that support and sustain effective practices, SWPBS recommends that the following be in place: (1) team-based implementation, including the SWPBS team's developing a positive statement of purpose, completing a needs assessment, and implementing an action plan based on the needs assessment and consistent with the positive statement of purpose; (2) administrative leadership (e.g., direct and ongoing participation of the school principal); (3) the documented commitment of at least 80% of school staff members to actively participate and support the SWPBS program; (4) adequate personnel and time; (5) budgeted support; and (6) an adequate information system (e.g., newsletters, meetings).

Ongoing Collection and Use of Data for Decision Making

Recognizing the critical importance of data-based decision making, SWPBS schools collect data on an ongoing basis and use the data to guide decision making. Office disciplinary

referrals provide the most common form of data used in SWPBS schools to assess student outcomes (e.g., Lohrmann-O'Rourke et al., 2000; Luiselli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002; Sadler, 2000; Taylor-Greene & Kartub, 2000). As recommended by Horner et al. (2005), SWPBS schools should organize and analyze disciplinary data "(1) per day and per month, (2) per type of problem behavior, (3) per location in the school, (4) per time of day, and (5) per child" (p. 374). Consistent with the ABA framework, such data are viewed as if one were conducting a functional behavioral assessment, except that a group of students rather than the individual child is the level of analysis (Scott & Caron, 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2002). For example, in understanding why a large number of office referrals tend to result from behavior on school buses, the SWPBS team might hypothesize that misbehavior on the bus serves the function of gaining attention. The team would then brainstorm developing a plan by which students would receive attention for more appropriate behavior on the bus.

KEY FEATURES AS MEASURED BY THE SCHOOLWIDE EVALUATION TOOL

Perhaps the best representation of the key features of the SWPBS approach is seen in the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001). The SET is widely used in both research and practice to document that schools have the key features of the SWPBS approach in place (Horner et al., 2004). The applied behavior analysis perspective of SWPBS is made clear in the following seven practices and systems measured by the 28 items of the SET. Note that each of the items is evaluated during brief individual interviews with students, staff members, and administrators and through a review of manuals, handbooks, and curriculum materials pertaining to schoolwide discipline.

1. *Expectations defined.* Two items assess whether the school has five or fewer "rules/behavioral expectations" that are positively stated and posted throughout the building.

2. *Behavioral expectations taught.* Five items assess the extent to which the rules or behavioral expectations are directly taught. Evidence that this system is in place is to be found in the students and staff being able to cite the school rules or behavioral expectations when interviewed.

3. *System of rewards.* Three items assess the school's "on-going system of rewarding behavioral expectations," which is observable through school materials and revealed that over 50% of students who are interviewed state that they have received a reward other than praise during the preceding 2 months and that 90% of staff members interviewed state that they have given rewards to students for behavior consistent with the school's rules and expectations.

4. *System for correcting behavior.* Four items measure the school's "system for responding to behavioral violations," which consists of a combination of positive and punitive techniques and the school's crisis management plan. Evidence is gleaned from the school's policy manuals.

5. *System for office disciplinary referrals.* Although this four-item section is called "monitoring, evaluating, and decision making," the only type of data addressed consists of office disciplinary referrals. Office disciplinary referral (ODR) forms are to include certain detailed information, and administrators and staff members are to report how ODR data are used. For example, the administrator is expected to "clearly define a system for collecting and summarizing discipline referrals."

6. *System of management.* Eight items target the management process the school uses to organize and oversee student behavior. Evidence that the school has an effective process or system in place should be found in the school's improvement or action plan, and in reports by the school's administrators and members of the PBS team on the composition of the team and how often it meets.

7. *System of district-level support.* Two items focus on budgetary support and whether or not there is a PBS liaison for the district or state.

The Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ; Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007) is another common tool used by many SWPBS programs to evaluate the extent to which key elements, or benchmarks, of SWPBS are in place. Items are very similar to those on the SET, but include a greater number (i.e., 50 benchmarks). Differing from the SET however, the BoQ is designed to be completed by staff within the school, thus not requiring external evaluators.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF SWPBS

Those considering the adoption of any approach to schoolwide discipline, as well as programs, strategies, and techniques associated with it, are wise to reflect upon that approach's strengths and limitations (see Table 2.1).

Strengths

Emphasis on Preventing Problem Behavior and Promoting "Positive" Behavior

SWPBS has a number of strengths. Its greatest strength is offering a variety of evidence-based behavioral techniques for preventing and correcting behavior problems.

For well over a decade now, *preventing*—rather than merely reacting to—various social, emotional, and behavioral problems has been a primary focus of nearly all mental health organizations as well as educational initiatives funded by the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., Safe and Healthy Schools, Character Education, and SWPBS) (Minke & Bear, 2000). SWPBS recognizes that a critical component of schoolwide discipline is the prevention of behavior problems and the promotion of appropriate behavior, which certainly includes teaching social skills. In light of the many shortcomings of the use of punishment (as discussed in Chapter

TABLE 2.1. Summary of Strengths and Limitations of the Horner and Sugai ABA Approach to SWPBS

Strengths

- Emphasis on a process.
- Emphasis on positive reinforcement as opposed to punishment.
- Goals of promoting safety and a positive school climate.
- Emphasis on evidence-based practices.
- Emphasis on collection and analysis of data.
- Behavioral interventions and supports for students who need them.
- A three-tiered approach to supports and services designed to serve all children.

Limitations

- Focus on short-term compliance, not the development of self-discipline.
- An underlying simplistic assumption that the direct teaching of rules and appropriate behavior, using principles of behaviorism, is sufficient for desired behavior.
- Limited perspective on the determinants of behavior.
- Failure to recognize the limitations of the systematic use of tangible rewards when used in a controlling manner.
- Failure to develop social cognitive and emotional competencies shown to foster prosocial behavior and inhibit antisocial behavior.
- Focus on office disciplinary referrals as a measure of effectiveness, with a lack of research demonstrating other important outcomes, including positive school climate, increased prosocial behavior, and lasting changes in behavior.
- Resistance from teachers.

1), a focus on prevention offers a much more effective—and positive—alternative to the zero-tolerance approach.

Focus on the Process of Systems Change

Consistent with research on school reform (e.g., Fullan, 2007), SWPBS clearly recognizes that successfully implementing any schoolwide program entails ongoing systems change. System change is complex, does not simply occur by decree, and rarely happens quickly. It takes time (a minimum of 3–5 years is often suggested) and is not always easy to achieve. A wide range of supports within the school system is necessary for planning, implementing, and sustaining school reform. Such supports include administrative leadership, staff commitment, ongoing staff development and training, time for staff to devote to planning and implementation, financial support, methods of communication, and perhaps most importantly team planning and decision making. Team planning and decision making involve a team of teachers, administrators, and support staff meeting frequently to plan, implement, and evaluate all phases of the program, ranging from developing goals and conducting an initial needs assessment to ensuring fidelity of implementation and evaluating data to improve the program. Largely through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, but also

through private vendors and other agencies, thousands of schools have been provided with resources, materials, and staff training to help guide the systems changes involved in SWPBS.

Inclusion of All Students in a Three-Tiered Model of Prevention, Intervention, and Supports

The three-tier model adopted by SWPBS is certainly not new—or specific to SWPBS. It is commonly seen in mental health programs (Albee & Gullotta, 1997), and for good reasons. Not only does it emphasize the importance of prevention, especially among all students at the universal or Tier 1 level, but also perhaps more important it clearly recognizes that many students need more intensive interventions and supports. Although an estimated 15% of students at Tier 2 are deemed "at risk" and about 5% at Tier 3 have already exhibited serious and chronic behavior problems (Horner et al., 2005), research shows that in many schools, particularly urban schools, those percentages are gross underestimates of need (Wright & Dusek, 1998). Regardless of the specific percentage of students beyond Tier 1 requiring additional services and supports, an attractive feature of SWPBS is that, in emphasizing such services, it provides schools with much guidance in this area. This emphasis is consistent with its roots in special education. Providing such services and supports, including behavioral interventions, should be an important component of any schoolwide discipline program, and while it is frequently lacking in many popular models and approaches (Bear, 2005; Osher et al., 2010), it is a clear strength of SWPBS.

Emphasis on the Role of Environmental, and Alterable, Factors That Influence Student Behavior

Far too often, educators attribute the behavior problems of students to a wide range of student, home, peer, and community factors on which schools have very limited influence. Common among these factors are low ability, ADHD, poor parenting, poverty, poor role models, peer pressure, the influence of electronic media, and a student's history of problem behavior. By focusing on, or blaming, such factors, schools may inadvertently neglect factors influencing students' behavior that they *can* alter. SWPBS targets alterable factors in the school environment that commonly affect student behavior, including the clarity of expectations and rules, the quality of academic instruction, and home–school communication.

Use of Evidence-Based Behavioral Techniques

Ample research shows that positive reinforcement, punishment, and other techniques of ABA are quite effective in changing individual students' behavior, particularly in the short term (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Stage & Quiroz, 1997). Research also shows that effective classroom teachers use both behavioral and nonbehavioral techniques in preventing and correcting misbehavior among their students (Bear, 1998; Brophy, 1996). Behavioral techniques are particularly valuable in addressing the problems

of students at risk of serious or chronic misbehavior or who are currently misbehaving (i.e., Tiers 2 and 3) (Kauffman & Landrum, 2008; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

Positive behavioral techniques are also valuable at the schoolwide level for preventing and correcting behavior problems. While not specific to the SWPBS approach, research studies show that positive recognition of good behavior is a common characteristic of more efficacious schools (Catalano et al., 2004; Embry, 2002; Gottfredson et al., 1993, 1996). Similarly, they demonstrate that fair and consistent behavioral expectations are related to fewer behavior problems at the schoolwide level (Arum, 2003; Catalano et al., 2004; Doyle, 1986; Gottfredson et al., 1993, 1996).

Some research shows that the schoolwide use of behavioral techniques not only is effective for short-term changes in student behavior but also may lead to more lasting change. However, such research is largely limited to the Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969; Embry, 2002; Kellam et al., 2008; Van Lier, Vuijk, & Crijnen, 2005), an interdependent group contingency program in which small groups of students within classrooms are given rewards based on good behavior, as described later in detail (Chapter 9). The extent to which the Good Behavior Game is used in SWPBS programs is unclear, however, as its use is seldom reported in the literature.

Ongoing Collection of Data

Reliable and valid data can serve multiple worthwhile purposes. For example, data from a needs assessment can indicate the areas of schoolwide discipline requiring the greatest attention as well as those areas that should be considered strengths. Similarly, evaluation data may indicate not only whether or not a given program is effective but also when and if modifications are needed. Data also are critical in persuading others (e.g., school boards and parents) that new programs are needed or that existing ones should continue to receive resources and financial support.

Limitations

Although the SWPBS approach has many notable strengths, it also has its limitations, as discussed below.

Neglect of the Role of Children's Cognitions and Emotions in Behavior and School Climate

Consistent with ABA theory and principles, environmental antecedents and consequences of behavior are seen as being the primary, if not exclusive, determinants of behavior. PBS has its roots firmly grounded in B. F. Skinner's operant behaviorism (1953), in which behavior is viewed as unidirectional, with environmental antecedents and consequences seen as the primary, if not exclusive, determinants of behavior. In this context, children's cognitions and emotions—how they think and feel—receive little, if any, attention. From its inception in January 1999 to the summer of 2009, the *Journal of Positive Interventions* published

26 articles that described SWPBS as practiced in schools, all of which reported the use of behavioral techniques, with 12 studies specifically referencing the systematic use of tokens to reinforce observable behaviors (e.g., following rules). Only 1 of those studies (i.e., Sadler, 2000) discussed children's thoughts and emotions, either in their interventions or measures of effectiveness. Generally, SWPBS programs were deemed effective if they resulted in reduced office disciplinary referrals, though no studies demonstrated a causal link between reduced ODRs and the use of positive behavioral techniques.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have observed that "the hazards of a personless environmentalism are well-known within psychology" (p. 11). Indeed, no mainstream theory of developmental psychology views the individual as being purely passive in the process of learning and development (Dixon & Lerner, 1999). Instead, modern theories of developmental psychology clearly recognize multiple determinants of behavior and emphasize that cognitions and emotions mediate or influence, and are influenced by, one's environment (Bandura, 1986; Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006; Eisenberg, 2006). In that light, undoubtedly one's environment, both immediate and distal, exerts a profound influence on student behavior, particularly in environments that are tightly controlled and regulated (such as prisons and many schools), where persons of authority, often assisted by electronic surveillance, constantly monitor and govern behavior. Yet, even in such contrived and controlling environments, an individual's thoughts and emotions influence behavior and the environment (Bandura, 1986). SWPBS neglects how thoughts and emotions of students influence both their behavior and the climate of the school.

Problems with the Maintenance and Generalization of Social Skills

Related to the SWPBS's unidirectional model of behavior and its failure to appreciate that students' thoughts and emotions often determine behavior, particularly when adults are not present, is the problem of maintaining and further generalizing social skills that are taught in SWPBS programs. That is, the social skills taught and learned through reinforcement and punishment often fail to be maintained once instruction ends. Students may also fail to generalize the new skills to settings outside of the context in which they were taught. Multiple reviews of the literature on social skills training have documented only small effect sizes for social skills training while concluding that there is little evidence that these social skills taught are either maintained or successfully generalized to other settings (Bullis, Walker, & Sprague, 2001; DuPaul & Eckert, 1994).

"The failure of researchers to produce treatment effects that routinely generalize to other settings, times, and responses has been a sharp and essentially legitimate criticism of behavioral programming since its early application to classroom settings" (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006, p. 59).

Research also has failed to support the lecture or law-related education approach to teaching desired knowledge and behaviors (Gottfredson, 2001). This approach is similar to that of social skills training and SWPBS, in which the authorities simply tell and show students what constitutes "good behavior." The ineffectiveness of this approach is well documented in drug education programs (e.g., Drug Abuse Resistance Education [DARE]; Lynam

et al., 1999). Finding that a direct approach to teaching appropriate behavior is insufficient for developing self-discipline is certainly not new in psychology and education. Some 80 years ago, in their classic studies of character that included over 10,000 students, Hartshorne and May (1928) found that directly teaching children moral knowledge, rules, or social skills did not necessarily translate into demonstrable moral behavior. Those who scored the highest on knowledge of the rules and codes of conduct were no less likely than those who scored lowest to violate such rules or codes (particularly to cheat or steal) subsequently once the external rewards, fear of punishment, and adult supervision were removed.

Underlying Assumption That All Children Require, and Benefit from, the Repeated Teaching of School Rules and Behavioral Expectations and the Systematic Use of External Rewards

Shortly upon entering elementary school, nearly all the students become familiar with the school's rules. To be sure, many fail to follow them, and very few follow them all the time, but relatively few students do not know what the rules are (just try offering one $10 to tell you the rule and to show you the appropriate behavior). Thus, repeatedly teaching school rules and reinforcing compliance are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to develop self-discipline. Programs with such an emphasis simply teach children to "be good for the sake of earning rewards and avoiding punishment," admittedly a somewhat hedonistic perspective. When the rewards and/or the fear of punishment are no longer salient, students are left with little reason to behave in the absence of their self-interest.

When external rewards and the fear of punishment are no longer present, students are left with little reason to behave.

The SWPBS approach largely dismisses concerns among researchers that systematic praise and tangible rewards (particularly the latter) may have a negative long-term impact on students' intrinsic motivation. As discussed later (in Chapter 6), some research challenges the use of tokens and other tangible rewards in many SWPBS programs as the primary, if not exclusive, means of managing the behavior of students. Additional research in the area of moral reasoning shows that children who tend to focus primarily on earning rewards and avoiding punishment, rather than the impact of their behavior on others, are the ones most likely to violate school rules (Bear, Manning, & Shiomi, 2006; Manning & Bear, 2002). These findings are consistent with a wealth of research linking social and moral behavior to cognition and emotion—two aspects of development that rarely receive attention in the SWPBS approach. Cognitions and emotions, and how to develop them in the context of SWPBS, are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The foregoing research findings do not mean that students should not be taught school rules, praised or rewarded for good behavior, or punished for inappropriate behavior. Instead, they suggest that such behavioral techniques are not sufficient in themselves to develop long-term self-discipline. Moreover, when not used wisely—for example, when not used in combination with techniques that focus on how students think and feel—ABA techniques that focus on external management of behavior may actually *undermine* the develop-

ment of self-discipline. Fortunately, this limitation to many SWPBS programs can largely be avoided by using praise and rewards strategically.

Underlying Assumption That Because ABA Works with Individual Adults and Children with Severe Disabilities, It Must Also Work When Applied Schoolwide with All Children and Adolescents

SWPBS evolved from research demonstrating the effectiveness of ABA techniques in controlling and managing the behavior problems of adults with disabilities, particularly self-injurious behavior (e.g., head banging), aggression toward others, and pica (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009). Drawing largely from that research base, it is frequently stated in the PBS literature that nearly all behaviors serve one of two functions, either gaining attention or avoiding/escaping from situations or behaviors that are aversive (Crone & Horner, 2003; Day, Horner, & O'Neil, 1994). This rather simplistic understanding of the causes of human behavior is applied also to SWPBS. That is, just as special education teachers are advised to assess the functions of an individual's behavior when developing individualized education plans for students with disabilities (Day et al., 1994), so too are SWPBS schools advised to assess the functions of schoolwide behavior when they implement or modify schoolwide interventions (e.g., Bambara, 2005; Crone & Horner, 2003; Lewis, Newcomer, Trussell, & Richter, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai et al., 2000). They are to determine which of those functions account for the behavior problems and to alter antecedents and consequences in the school accordingly. For example, if a large number of students were being sent to the office from several classes, the team might hypothesize that the students were misbehaving in order to avoid work and might counter the problem by further rewarding students for work completion. Although other researchers have recommended that additional functions of behavior should be recognized when conducting a functional behavioral assessment (FBA)—power/control, acceptance/affiliation, expression of self/gratification, or justice/revenge (Stoiber, 2004)—gaining attention and avoiding/escaping punishment receive primary, if not exclusive attention, in the SWPBS approach.

There are serious reasons to question the practical value of FBAs. To be sure, there is a wealth of single-subject design research that supports the usefulness of FBAs for both adults and children with serious behavior problems (Marquis et al., 2000). However, it is unclear whether FBAs can be conducted reliably in nonresearch settings; whether they lead to interventions that are any more effective than those not linked to FBAs; whether they are useful for students without disabilities, especially students beyond the early grades; whether they are useful for targeting behaviors for which antecedents and consequences are either not readily observable or are distal rather than proximal in their linkage to the behavior (e.g., substance use, many acts of aggression, stealing, cheating, lying); and finally whether they are a practical alternative in most schools, given the preceding limitations and the realization that they are not easy to conduct and often require additional personnel (Gresham et al., 2004; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Sasso, Conroy, Stichter, & Fox, 2001; Schill, Kratochwill, & Elliott, 1998; Scott et al., 2005). As noted by Landrum and Kauffman (2006, p. 62), "Although the idea of FBA may have legitimate conceptual roots, it has

become a bandwagon on which many ride with little understanding or appreciation of its difficulty in practice."

Although the foregoing criticisms were directed primarily toward FBAs for individual students, they certainly apply to SWPBS, challenging the assertion by Sugai and Horner (2009) and others that schoolwide interventions should be grounded in FBAs. There is no research showing that FBAs can be conducted in a reliable manner at the schoolwide level or that the results improve the effectiveness of interventions.

Underlying Assumption That Teachers and Schools Are Primarily Accountable, and Thus to Blame, for the Behavior Problems of Their Students

With its emphasis on environmental antecedents and environmental consequences, an assumption inherent in the SWPBS approach is that teachers and schools—not students, families, and the wider community—are primarily responsible for student behavior. As noted by Marquis et al. (2000), "A key concept in PBS is that deficient contexts must be remediated first in order to reduce problem behavior" (p. 138). From the perspective of SWPBS, "deficient contexts" are classrooms and other school settings (e.g., cafeteria, hallways, gym) or wherever the school has authority (e.g., school bus, playground, sports events). When student behavior problems exist, such problems reflect deficit settings, which includes deficit teachers, administrators, and school staff. Student behavior is not viewed as a shared responsibility of teachers, students, and families but rather as the responsibility of those who control environmental antecedents and consequences in school.

When SWPBS is found to be ineffective, the almost automatic assumption is that the teachers and staff failed to implement interventions with fidelity. Indeed, this attribution—that the teachers, not the interventions or the programs per se, are to blame—often appears in the literature (e.g., Bohanan et al., 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai et al., 2008). There may be many reasons for a lack of fidelity in implementing a program—perhaps chief among them teacher resistance to, if not outright rejection of, an approach's philosophy or technique (Fullan, 2007). This observation certainly applies to SWPBS. That is, consistent with their university training and personal philosophy of school discipline, many teachers (particularly general education teachers) prefer a more student-centered perspective, or combined student-centered and teacher-centered perspective, rather than SWPBS's teacher-centered unidirectional perspective regarding school discipline. Indeed, as noted by Landrum and Kauffman (2006) in their review of the behavioral approach to classroom management, "Despite a rich history and extensive empirical underpinnings, the behavioral perspective on teaching and management is not highly regarded in the education community (see Axelrod, 1996)" (p. 47).

Landrum and Kauffman (2006) cite several reasons why educators often fail to embrace the behavioral approach, perhaps foremost among them is the lack of generalization of skills taught when behavioral techniques are used. As noted earlier, Landrum and Kauffman view this shortcoming as a legitimate criticism of the behavioral approach. Many educators are well aware that the effects of rewards and punishment are often short-term and specific

to the behaviors and situations for which they are used. Although viewed by Landrum and Kauffman as a less legitimate criticism of the behavioral approach, another common reason for rejection of the approach is that many educators view behavioral techniques as forms of control, coercion, and bribery. As emphasized by Landrum and Kauffman, this criticism is valid only when behavioral techniques are *misused*. As they correctly note, behavioral techniques are "neither good nor bad" (p. 60) but are powerful tools that can be used as a means to achieve either a good or bad end. It is when the means and the end are one and the same—namely, to control or coerce students rather than to develop academic, social, and emotional competencies—that the behavioral approach is misapplied or applied in an ethically questionable manner. Unfortunately, whether the technique of choice is punishment or positive reinforcement, the behavioral approach often is used for social control. While many educators support and engage in such use, others reject it.

Empirical research also more directly challenges the SWPBS assumption that classroom and schoolwide environments determine student behavior (and thus an underlying assumption that teachers and schools are the primary source of behavior problems). The assumption that teachers and schools are the greatest determinants of student behavior is inconsistent with empirical research showing that the largest amount of variance in student behavior (Thomas, Bierman, Thompson, & Powers, 2008) and in school climate (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005) is explained not by differences between schools and classrooms but by differences among individual students. For example, Bierman et al. (2007) reported that 74.6% of aggressive and disruptive behavior was attributable to individual-level factors (with aggression and attention problems at home explaining most of the variance), 18.8% to classroom-level factors (e.g., teacher–student relationships, rules and expectations, classroom disruptions), and only 6.6% to school-level factors. At the practical level, these research findings are obvious to many educators, who observe that even the very best teachers and schools have students who exhibit behavior problems. It also is reflected in many students' *not* exhibiting behavior problems even when placed in poorly managed classrooms and schools. To be sure, teachers and schools still make a significant difference in student behavior, and factors in the school environment that influence student behavior should be a focus of any schoolwide discipline program. However, by focusing solely on the school environment while largely overlooking the critical importance of children's thoughts and emotions in self-discipline and of adult–student relations (other than providing support via praise and rewards), SWPBS fails to address individual and interpersonal factors that have consistently been shown to account for the greatest variance in student behavior and school climate.

ODRs Are the Primary, If Not Exclusive, Measure of Program Effectiveness

Numerous case studies of individual SWPBS schools have reported a reduction in ODRs (e.g., Bohanon et al., 2006; Ervin, Schaughency, Matthews, Goodman, & McGlinchey, 2007; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2002; McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Sprague et al., 2001; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). Indeed, reducing office disciplinary refer-

rals, rather than improving school climate and other aspects of schoolwide discipline, is the primary, if not sole, outcome (or goal) measured in many SWPBS programs. This preoccupation with ODRs flies in the face of researchers' repeated citation of their limitations or shortcomings (Morrison, Redding, Fisher, & Peterson, 2006; Sugai et al., 2000; Tobin & Sugai, 1999; Wright & Dusek, 1998); which include:

- Inconsistencies exist across schools and over time in referral procedures (e.g., a new principal, or changes in the district's code of conduct).
- Inconsistencies exist across schools and teachers, and over time, in teachers' tolerance levels and disciplinary practices (e.g., changes due to staff turnover, staff training, time of year).
- Inconsistencies even exist within individual teachers in reasons or justifications for a referral (e.g., the same teacher might tolerate the behavior of one child but not of another or might tolerate the behavior one day and not the next).
- ODRs do not necessarily reflect the full range of social, emotional, and behavioral problems (e.g., minor classroom disruption, internalizing problems, social-cognitive deficits, etc.), and do not reflect the development of protective factors or related strategies (e.g., emotional and cognitive development). Instead, they may simply reflect changes in the use of punishment, specifically sending a child to the office.
- ODRs tend to underestimate the severity of disciplinary problems.
- A reduction in office referrals does not necessarily reflect a more positive school climate or development of self-discipline (indeed, it is just as likely to reflect the opposite—greater external control and governance by the teachers themselves).

General Lack of Research Supporting SWPBS

Although SWPBS has now been implemented in thousands of schools for over a decade, there is remarkably little empirical research supporting its effectiveness. With few exceptions, evidence of its effectiveness is limited to case studies that show the SWPBS process can be implemented with fidelity (as assessed by the SET) (Bohanon et al., 2006; McIntosh et al., 2006; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Scott & Barrett, 2004) and that such implementation coincides with decreased in ODRs (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). To date, there are no published comparative studies demonstrating that SWPBS is any more effective than other schoolwide discipline programs. Likewise, there are no longitudinal studies showing that SWPBS leads to lasting changes in any important outcome.

Particularly lacking are randomized controlled studies, deemed by most researchers as necessary for demonstrating program effectiveness. There are several exceptions, however. Using a randomized control group design, Koth et al. (2008) reported no differences in school climate between SWPBS and non-SWPBS schools after 1-year of implementation. Two randomized control group studies of elementary schools (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ilongo, & Leaf, 2008; Horner et al., 2009) reported improvements in school climate. However, in both studies school climate was evaluated by the same school staff that actually implemented the program. Moreover, improvements were found in very limited areas

of school climate and/or with measures of questionable validity. Bradshaw et al. used the Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools (OHI; Hoy & Feldman, 1987), a validated measure of staff reports of five dimensions of the school's organizational health. They found statistically significant differences in favor of SWPBS schools on two of the five dimensions (resource influence, which measures the principal's ability to acquire school resources and positively allocate school resources; and staff affiliation, which measures positive relations among staff) and in overall OHI scores. A marginally significant difference was found for academic emphasis, and no significant difference was found for either collegial leadership or institutional integrity. When differences were found, effect sizes were small, ranging from 0.26 to 0.34.

In their randomized wait-list control study, Horner et al. (2009) used the School Safety Survey (SSS; Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1996) to measure school climate. This measure yields a risk factor score and a protective factor score. No research has been published on the validity of the measure, including its factorial validity. Nevertheless, differences between SWPBS and non-SWPBS schools and improvements in SWPBS schools (as reported by the school staff in each of the schools) were found only in risk factor scores. It is unclear, however, whether the differences in the scores reflected differences in school safety per se, as claimed by the researchers, or simply differences in risk factors related to school safety. For example, among the 13 items on the risk factor scale are "Poverty," "High student mobility," "Truancy," and "Graffiti," and "Students adjudicated by the courts." The researchers were unable to examine differences in ODR-levels because those data were either missing in too many schools or deemed by the researchers as not meeting appropriate standards. The researchers noted that the percentage of students with ODRs in SWPBS schools was slightly less than the national average. However, the same data also show that ODRs actually increased *in absolute terms* over time in SWPBS schools.

Not only is there a lack of research supporting SWPBS per se, but also reviews of the research literature should encourage educators to question the effectiveness and value of behavioral techniques in general when applied schoolwide as the primary or only means of preventing behavior problems. For example, in a meta-analysis limited to studies that employed a randomized control group design, Lösel and Beelman (2003) reported that cognitive and cognitive-behavioral programs were twice as effective as behavioral programs when one looked at studies that included a follow-up measure. Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003) reported similar findings, particularly when examining the most rigorous experimental studies (programs using randomized control groups and most likely to have been implemented with fidelity) and statistically controlling for the number of students with serious behavior problems (a correlate of program effectiveness). Under those conditions, they found that social-cognitive programs were three times more effective than behavioral programs.

Emphasis on Social Control Rather Than Self-Control or Self-Discipline

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the SWPBS approach to schoolwide discipline is that too often its primary aim is to bring about compliance to rules and expectations, as measured

by reduced ODRs. The aim of schoolwide discipline—to manage or control student behavior—is the same as that of zero-tolerance programs. Only the means used to achieve that aim differ, with SWPBS employing positive instead of punitive techniques. Whether it is in the form of punishment or positive reinforcement, too often techniques of ABA are used for the purpose of social control of student behavior (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008; Kohn, 1996, 1999). When SWPBS programs operate—or are perceived by students and faculty to operate—in this fashion (irrespective of intent), they do little to develop self-discipline, improve school climate, or engage students in learning.

Rarely does one find in the SWPBS literature any discourse or research on how students internalize the school's societal values and norms or come to manage their own behavior when external rewards and punishment are not salient. Likewise, it often is very unclear what values and norms SWPBS advocates believe should be internalized, other than what is expected and required by adults in the school. Typically, one often finds that the schoolwide behavioral expectations and techniques used in preschool and elementary schools are the same ones used in high school. For example, responsibility and respect are taught via social skills training and token reinforcement systems. As spelled out further in Chapter 6, not only are the techniques used in SWPBS insufficient for developing self-discipline but also when used in a controlling manner they may well undermine it. SWPBS researchers either downplay or dismiss altogether research that questions the long-term positive impact of the systematic use of praise and/or tangible rewards on developing intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). As recently observed by the Center for Mental Health in Schools (2008), "Care must be taken not to over-rely on extrinsics to entice and reward because to do so may decrease intrinsic motivation" (p. 6-9). The Center further notes that "enhancing intrinsic motivation is a fundamental *protective* factor and is the key to developing *resiliency*" (p. 6–9).

Too often, "behavioral support" consists of a form of "social control aimed directly at reducing disruptive behavior" (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008, p. 6–4).

SWPBS: ADOPT? REJECT? OR INTEGRATE?

As discussed above, a major strength of ABA techniques of is that they often are effective in the management of student behavior, especially in the short term. It would be difficult to imagine classrooms and schools in which the basic principles of reinforcement and punishment were not employed. Unfortunately, however, too many schools *overemphasize* punishment to the exclusion of other methods and techniques. The SWPBS approach offers an alternative to those schools that are managing student behavior solely by using punishment, namely, using positive reinforcement instead.

Other schools, however, might have less need to manage student behavior by using external techniques of behavioral control and therefore aim as well to develop self-discipline. Such schools should not reject the use of behavioral techniques associated with SWPBS. ABA techniques are often valuable in managing and correcting student behavior. Moreover,

as discussed throughout this book, when used in combination with other techniques, ABA techniques foster the long-term development of self-discipline. However, because these ABA techniques, as implemented in SWPBS programs, are insufficient to develop self-discipline, most schools should consider either (1) adopting the evidence-based SEL approach to schoolwide discipline that aims to develop self-discipline or (2) integrating the techniques of the SWPBS approach with those of the SEL approach. The latter alternative is recommended in this book.

There are different definitions of SWPBS. SWPBS does not have to be only behavior modification, and it shouldn't be.

A question often emerges when the integrated/combined strategy is taken, however, namely, "Is the school now an SWPBS school?" The answer depends on what definition and perspective toward SWPBS one accepts. If one views PBS and behavior modification as the "same approach with different names" (Horner, 2000, p. 99), as seen in the SWPBS approach, then by integrating SWPBS with another approach that is not behavior modification, the resulting approach should not be referred to as SWPBS but more accurately as a combined approach. However, if one views SWPBS more broadly and as "a generic term and construct that represents a broad set of potential components" (Knoff, 2008, p. 749), then a combination of approaches to schoolwide discipline would fall under the more general umbrella of SWPBS, including the more narrowly focused and popular SWPBS approach of Horner and Sugai. Several definitions capture the more generic meaning to SWPBS. George, Harrower, and Knoster (2003) define SWPBS as

> simply . . . establishing specific guidelines and providing proactive prevention and support for all students and faculty in a given school. The goal is to nurture the emergence of a school culture that promotes positive or appropriate behavior and learning, seeks to prevent problem or inappropriate behavior, and operates through collaborative data-based decision making to build a positive school climate. (p. 171)

Similarly, Sugai and Horner (2009) emphasized "school culture" in recently defining SWPBS as "a systems approach for establishing the social culture and individualized behavior supports needed for a school to be a safe and effective learning environment for all students" (p. 309). An attractive feature these two definitions share is the emphasis on "school culture"—a major focus of the approach advocated in this volume.

SUMMARY

With its emphasis on the systematic and schoolwide use of positive reinforcement of desired behaviors, the SWPBS approach offers an attractive alternative to the frequent use of punishment seen in the zero-tolerance approach to school discipline. However, there are numerous other approaches to schoolwide discipline that emphasize the value of positive techniques, though not necessarily positive reinforcement. Key to the SWPBS approach are three features: (1) an emphasis on measurable outcomes; (2) the manner in which posi-

tive reinforcement is implemented, typically through the systematic posting of behavioral expectations throughout the school and the use of token economics; and (3) seeking to manage student behavior by controlling the external use of rewards (and punishment).

Each feature can be viewed as both a strength and a weakness. Whereas an emphasis on measurable outcomes is clearly a strength, too often the only measurable outcome is ODRs, which have several limitations. This shortcoming can be addressed, however, by using additional outcome measures, such as measures of school climate (see Chapter 11 and Appendix B). Communicating clear expectations and rules also is chiefly a strength, as research has consistently confirmed. The systematic use of reinforcement, especially token systems, may be of value in classrooms and some schools with significant behavior problems but is of questionable utility and value in most schools. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, praise and the occasional use of external rewards are likely to be sufficient, and often more effective, especially in the long term.

Finally, the third key feature of SWPBS—the aim of managing student behavior by controlling the external use of rewards (and punishment)—is also both a strength and a weakness. To be sure, many students do not exhibit self-discipline, and for them external rewards and punishment are often necessary and effective in managing their behavior. When used wisely, external rewards and punishment can also help foster self-discipline. Problems arise, however, when managing students' behavior, rather than developing the cognitions and feelings associated with self-discipline, becomes the school's primary aim. Fortunately, as with other shortcomings of SWPBS, this too can largely to be addressed by using ABA techniques not in a controlling manner (except when necessary) and always in combination with other techniques that focus on students' cognitions and emotions. How this can be done is the focus of the remainder of this book.