School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Restorative Discipline in

Schools

Jeffrey Sprague, Ph.D.

C. Michael Nelson, Ed.D.

Introduction

- 'what happened, who is to blame, what punishment or sanction is needed?'

    – The easiest consequence is the one most likely to be delivered (e.g., suspension or expulsion)

- 'What happened, what harm has resulted and what needs to happen to make things right?' (O'Connell, 2004)

    – A restorative process will initially be viewed as more effortful

Since the era of mass school shootings in the mid to late 1990s, efforts to improve school safety have led to a number of initiatives that are focused on student discipline, many of which are reactive and largely ineffective (Bohnert, Bradshaw, & Latkin, 2009; Nansel et al., 2001). The frustration and stress experienced by teachers, administrators, and parents is substantial and it often may seem that little works with some students. Many teachers and administrators experience enormous stress while attempting to "discipline" disruptive students, and often do not feel adequately supported by their colleagues, parents, or society. Teachers frequently lament, "I just want something that works" and yet, when asked how they define "what works," they are unclear about the goals of behavior change, how to measure change, and how long it will take to get there.

Over the past 15 years, the use of "consequences" such as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions has skyrocketed (Hoffman, 2006; Nansel, et al., 2001). Paradoxically, these practices are shown to actually *increase* aggressive behavior, truancy, vandalism and school dropout/disengagement and they are applied disproportionately to students of color, disability, and from lower income families (Mayer, 1995; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). A

common response is to increase the length of time a student is removed from the classroom or school if a behavior problem is not resolved quickly. For teachers, the temporary "relief" of removing a student quickly vanishes when the student returns with the same challenges. This only makes the problem worse in the long term for students and teachers, as not only have the students failed to learn more appropriate patterns of behavior, they also have missed out on instruction and fall further behind academically, becoming increasingly marginalized.

Office referrals, suspension and expulsion from school are often used to punish students, alert parents, and protect other students and school staff members but there are unintended consequences (Kim, Kamphaus, Orpinas, & Kelder, 2010). Disciplinary actions that remove students from instructional settings (office referrals, suspensions and expulsions) may exacerbate academic deterioration (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). When students are provided with no educational alternative, alienation, delinquency, crime, and substance abuse may ensue (Maulik, Eaton, & Bradshaw, 2010). Social, emotional, and mental health support for students can decrease the need for referrals, suspension and expulsion (Catherine P. Bradshaw, 2008a).

Purpose of this brief

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS, (C. P. Bradshaw & Garbarino, 2004) is being implemented in over 18,000 schools in the United States (Horner, personal communication, August, 2012), in addition to alternative settings, such as alternative education programs, residential treatment and juvenile justice facilities (Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, & Tobin, 2009). Research has documented that when SWPBIS is implemented with fidelity, improvements are noted in school climate, including reduced office disciplinary

referrals, improvements in perceived school safety, reduced rates of exclusionary disciplinary practices (suspension and expulsion) and improvements in student academic performance (Bradshaw, 2008b; Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner, Sugai, Smolkowski, Todd, Nakasato, & Esperanza, 2009).

However, students of color and students with disability experience higher rates of office disciplinary referral, suspension, and expulsion (Nansel, et al., 2001; Skiba, et al., 2002). There is a need to address the root causes of behaviors that lead to suspension and expulsion and provide alternative disciplinary policies, systems and practices. SWPBIS provides a model for reframing school discipline that is based on prevention, not simply reaction. Another alternative is "restorative discipline," adapted from the concepts and practices of "balanced and restorative justice" commonly used in juvenile and adult corrections and treatment programs.

This brief describes the features of SWPBIS and Restorative Discipline. Recognizing that these may be perceived as competing initiatives or as counterproductive to one another, a secondary purpose is to suggest how these two approaches may be implemented in a complementary framework.

Questions to ask

- How can we transform the disciplinary process to:
    - help students accept responsibility for their actions?
    - place high value on academic engagement and achievement?
    - teach alternative ways to behave?
    - focus on restoring the environment and social relationships in the school?

What is SWPBIS?

To prevent minor, as well as serious, antisocial behavior, educators around the world are turning to a comprehensive and proactive approach to behavior management commonly referred to as SWPBIS (C. P. Bradshaw & Garbarino, 2004; Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008; J. Sprague & Golly, 2004). SWPBIS is based on the assumption that actively teaching and acknowledging expected behavior can change the extent to which students expect appropriate behavior from themselves and each other. When consistent expectations are established by all adults the proportion of students with serious behavior problems are reduced and the school's overall social climate improves (Catherine P. Bradshaw, 2008b).

The procedures that define SWPBIS are organized around three main themes: prevention; multi-tiered support; and data-based decision making. Investing in *prevention* of problem behavior involves (a) defining and teaching a set of core behavioral expectations (e.g., be safe, respectful, responsible), (b) acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior (e.g., compliance to school rules, safe and respectful peer-to-peer interactions, and academic effort/engagement), (c) systematically supervising students in classrooms and common areas, and (d) establishing and implementing a consistent continuum of consequences for problem behavior (Sprague & Horner, 2012). The focus is on establishing a positive social climate, in which behavioral expectations for students are highly predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored.

SWPBIS employs three levels, or tiers, of behavior support (see Figure 1). *Primary prevention* is aimed at preventing initial occurrences of problem behavior through universal practices that involve all students and staff (i.e., adopting preventive rules, routines, and

physical arrangements; *secondary prevention* involves reducing reoccurrences of problem

behavior through practices that target students with multiple occurrences of office discipline

referrals; and *tertiary prevention* focuses on reducing the severity and impact of problem

behavior in students with chronic patterns of such behavior. It also incorporates a *data-based*

decision-making model in which students' response to intervention (RtI) is a basis for

determining when and for whom more intensive levels of behavior support are needed

(Gresham, 2004; J. R. Sprague, Cook, Wright, & Sadler, 2008).

Figure 1. Three-Tiered Positive Behavior Support
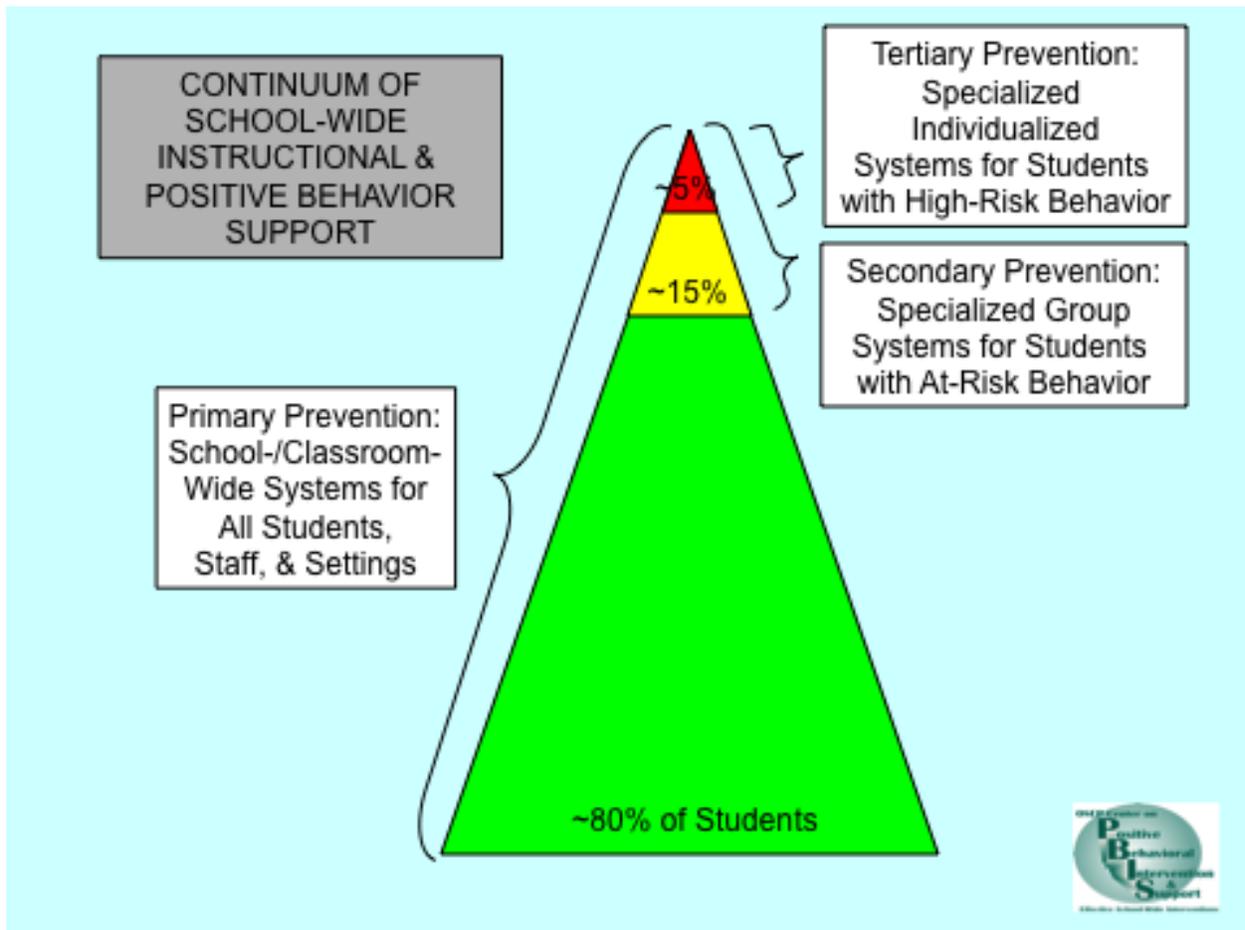
Data-based decision-making is a practice that is used throughout SWPBIS, and builds on the assumption that staff members, family and students will be most effective in the design of behavior supports if they have access to regular, accurate information about the behavior of students. It is equally important to regularly assess fidelity to behavior support plans and systems, and to share this information with implementers. The value of data for decision-making is emphasized for both the design of initial support systems, and the on-going assessment and adaptation of support strategies (Irvin et al., 2006; Spaulding, Vincent, & Horner, 2009). The SWPBIS approach includes adoption of practical strategies for collecting, summarizing, reporting and using behavioral and fidelity data on regular cycles.

Evidence suggests that high fidelity and sustained use of SWPBIS practices can alter the trajectory of at-risk students toward destructive outcomes, and prevent the onset of risk behavior in typically developing students. It is expected that effective and sustained implementation of SWPBIS will create a more responsive school climate that supports the twin goals of schooling for all children: *academic achievement* and *positive social development* (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

From Restorative Justice to Restorative Discipline

- The United Nations defines restorative justice as:
    - A **problem-solving approach** to crime that focuses on restoration or repairing the harm done by the crime and criminal to the extent possible, and involves the victim(s), offender(s) and the community in an active relationship with statutory agencies in developing a resolution.

- The modes for delivering Restorative Justice include, but are not limited to,

  restitution of property, restitution to the victim by the offender, reparations ... .

  (United Nations 2003, p. 28)

Restorative Discipline. Along with a general interest in restorative justice in society at

large, attention has turned to the development of restorative justice practices in educational

settings and how these might respond to some of the continuing concerns about discipline and

violence in schools. Restorative discipline seeks to provide a framework for including restitution

and repair in the process of administering school discipline, in which misbehaviors can result in

sanctions, but within a context where the relationships damaged by the misbehavior are the

priority and based on the premise that this damaged relationship can and should be repaired

and that the offending individual can and should be reintegrated to the school community, not

only for the good of that individual but also for that of the community as a whole

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). Positive outcomes from

this approach have been reported (Lee, 2011; Lewis, 2009; Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton,

2010) including reduced rates of office disciplinary referrals, out-of-school suspensions and

expulsions. Anecdotal reports also document increased satisfaction with the disciplinary

process by all stakeholders

Restorative Discipline Practices. Schools using restorative practices work to recognize

the purpose or *function* of behavior (Lewis, 2009; O'Neill et al., 1997). Restorative practices

work to addresses the needs of those *harmed* and works to *put right* the harm through

appropriate sanctions, restitution and restorative processes such as circles and mediation.

Restorative practices:

- Focus on harm done rather than only rule breaking

- Give voice to the person harmed

- Use collaborative problem solving methods

- Enhance responsibility through the use of restitution and collaborative

  processes

Restorative discipline practices include whole school prevention approaches where educators provide models of restorative practice, and the physical and emotional environment promotes an ethos of care (Lewis, 2009). School policies and practices focus on restoration and flexibility in assigning consequences or other responses to the problem. The use of "differentiated discipline" gives administrators and other members of the school community opportunities to focus on repairing harm and moving forward rather than just focusing on the severity or duration of a consequence.

Restorative responses to problem behavior include the following:

- Reintegration following office referrals or suspension

- Conferencing practices such as class meetings or circles

- Mediation or conflict resolution

How SWPBIS and Restorative Discipline Can Work Together

Both SWPBIS and Restorative Discipline attempt to cast discipline in a new light, one that shifts the focus from reacting to misbehavior with punitive consequences to a focus on strengthening and supporting desired behavior. Both contribute to a school climate that emphasizes prevention and positive responses to problem behavior (e.g., teaching and supporting reparative actions). The multi-tiered framework of SWPBIS provides a structure for

making decisions regarding the level of support or intervention that are needed. SWPBIS also

offers a system of data collection and analysis to inform decisions regarding behavior. In

general, Restorative Discipline interventions may be considered applicable at the secondary or

tertiary tiers of prevention, in that specific practices occur following occurrences of problem

behavior. However, some practices such as class meetings or circles can be engaged in as

universal preventions. For example, a class meeting may be held to discuss how all students are

affected by the theft of one student's property, and what they can do to prevent initial

occurrences of this behavior.

Research supporting SWPBIS is more established and widespread than that supporting

Restorative Discipline. Researchers are encouraged to continue and expand studies

documenting the impact of Restorative Discipline practices on rates of office discipline referrals,

suspensions, expulsions, and on measures of student achievement, school climate, and safety.

The following table summarizes the features of each.

SWPBIS	Restorative Justice/Discipline
Assumptions/Theory	
- Applied Behavior Analysis - Implementation Science (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005) - Human Performance (Gilbert, 1996) - Host Environment (Jones et al., 2009)	- A restorative environment provides the context for restorative practices - Control Theory (Li & Mustanski, 2012)
Practices	

SWPBIS	Restorative Justice/Discipline

• Building-level PBIS team established to guide needs assessment, planning and integration with school improvement
 	
• Consistent school wide expectations that are taught and followed by all students and staff
 	
• Students are acknowledged for their success in meeting expectations
 	
• Decisions regarding interventions are based on data collected on student behavior
 	
• A continuum of responses to rule infractions is used consistently by all staff
 	
• Routine collection and summary of discipline data to identify school wide, classroom and individual student needs
 	
• System improvement decisions based on outcome data
 	
• Firm but fair consequences for misbehavior are clearly defined
	Whole school prevention
	
	• Educators are models of restorative practice
	
	• Physical environment promotes an ethos of care
	
	• Emotional environment promotes an ethos of care
	
	• School policies and practices focus on restoration
	
	   – Conflict resolution
	
	   – Flexible policies
	
	     • Differentiated discipline
	
	Restorative Responses to Problem Behavior
	
	• Reintegration following office referrals or suspension
	
	• Conferencing
	
	• Class meetings
	
	• Circles
	
	• Mediation
	
	• Conflict resolution

SWPBIS	Restorative Justice/Discipline
Research Base	
• Three randomized control trials in elementary schools (C.P. Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Lynne-Landsman, Bradshaw, & Ialongo, 2010) • One completed randomized control trial in middle schools (Sprague et al., in preparation) • Multiple single subject studies and evaluation studies documenting positive effects (C. P. Bradshaw & Garbarino, 2004)	• Multiple case study reports in U.S. and Canada (Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson, & Power, 1999; Lewis, 2009; Marini, Dane, Bosacki, & YLC-CURA., 2006; Sumner, et al., 2010)

Recommendations

- Implement the "3 tiers of SWPBIS" as best you can

    – Understand that you are dealing with a major public health issue

- Establish a "system of care" for students needing intensive behavioral supports

    – Students and their families should be encouraged to access health care and

    social services if there is a disciplinary action or a student is at risk of such action

    – A full assessment for social, medical, and mental health problems should be

    conducted for any expelled or suspended youth.

Out-of-school placement for suspension or expulsion should be limited to the most egregious circumstances, and processes for successful reintegration and restoration should be implemented

- – Consider and implement restorative practices and alternatives to out of school suspension or expulsion

- – For out-of-school suspension or expulsion, the school should be able to demonstrate how attendance at a school site, even in an alternative setting with a low ratio of highly trained staff to students, would be inadequate to prevent a student from causing harm to himself or herself or to others.

- – Matters related to safety and supervision should be explored with parents whenever their child is barred from attending school.

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