

Cheri Sinnott, LCSW, is the director of the Illinois Service Resource Center, a statewide technical assistance center of the Illinois State Board of Education serving deaf and hard of hearing student behavioral needs. She is currently an adjunct faculty member in the Social Work Department at the College of Lake County. Sinnott welcomes questions and comments about this article and can be reached via e-mail at cheris@isrc.us or by phone at (847) 559-8195.

hands working together

for behavioral and academic success

By Cheri Sinnott

When it is time for her class to go to gym, Mrs. Miller reminds her students of the hall walking skills they have learned and practiced. While the class is in the hall, another teacher tells Mrs. Miller that her students are demonstrating respectful, responsible, and safe behavior. One student is caught “being good” and rewarded with a slip of paper for closing a locker that had been left open. In the John Powers Center in Vernon Hills, Illinois, when students behave well, they actually are recognized for it.

The slips of paper—or tickets—students receive when “caught doing well” are saved in individual jars or envelopes. Each time a student accumulates five tickets, a hand cutout with the student’s name is added to the line of hand cutouts in the hallway. When the line of hands reaches the end of the hall, all students in the school have a celebration, such as a pizza party, a movie with popcorn, or special time to play a game. This gives each student a stake in all the other students’ behavior. The activities are part of a program called “Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports,” or PBIS, a nationwide effort to develop school-wide systems of support that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments. The John Powers Center is the

Right: Students receive “tickets” for good behavior, part of a school-wide initiative to create a positive learning environment.



Photos courtesy of Brent Bewick



Above: Each month a ticket is drawn for a Student of the Month. The school posts the individual names on a hall bulletin board for everyone to see.

personnel focus on a positive approach, students respond in a positive way. When students succeed in demonstrating appropriate behavior, there is often a noticeable change in school climate. Educational team members at the John Powers Center were surveyed prior to the implementation of this program and again at the end of one semester. Just five months after the program's implementation, the team members reported perception of a decrease in the number of disruptive incidents they saw daily. Principal Terri Nilson-Bugella said, "This program brought our school together; the teachers and the students notice the difference." Other educational team members shared similar positive comments.

At the beginning of each year a kickoff event reminds students about the various components of PBIS. For the first kickoff, a grant brought Ronald McDonald to

Illinois Service Resource Center (ISRC) demonstration site for this program in a setting for deaf and hard of hearing students. The ISRC is an Illinois State Board of Education Technical Assistance Project serving deaf and hard of hearing students' behavioral needs.

PBIS provides behavioral support for students along a continuum following the same model used to provide intervention in academics. This continuum extends to all students, with increased support for students who need it. The program has a strong visual component, specific behavioral expectations, and an understanding that students are sometimes cut off from incidental learning and need to have positive behaviors taught, modeled, prompted, and reinforced.

PBIS addresses student behavior from three perspectives: development of a system-wide approach, consistent practices, and review of data. When systems, practices, and data are connected, opportunities for student success are enhanced. As school



share information with students. The second kickoff included a luau theme. Students and staff wore Hawaiian shirts, received leis, and decorated bookmarks. At the John Powers Center, the three behavior expectations are:

- Be Respectful
- Be Responsible
- Be Safe

Next, a matrix was developed that defines what it means to be respectful, responsible, and safe in the various locations within the school, including the classroom, hallway, and cafeteria. Teachers used a set of lesson plans, called “Cool Tools,” to teach students a specific behavioral expectation each week. The Cool Tools include role plays and other activities that allow the students to learn and practice the expected behaviors. Data collection on specific behavioral incidents provides helpful feedback for the PBIS leadership team by identifying the locations, times of day, and types of behavioral incidents. Future Cool Tools can then be tailored to address these areas.



Most classes visit the store weekly. Options include reinforcements at the 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 75, and 100 ticket levels. At the higher ticket levels, choices include lunch with the principal, lunch with a local firefighter or police officer, and the opportunity for a student to earn a movie with popcorn for the class.

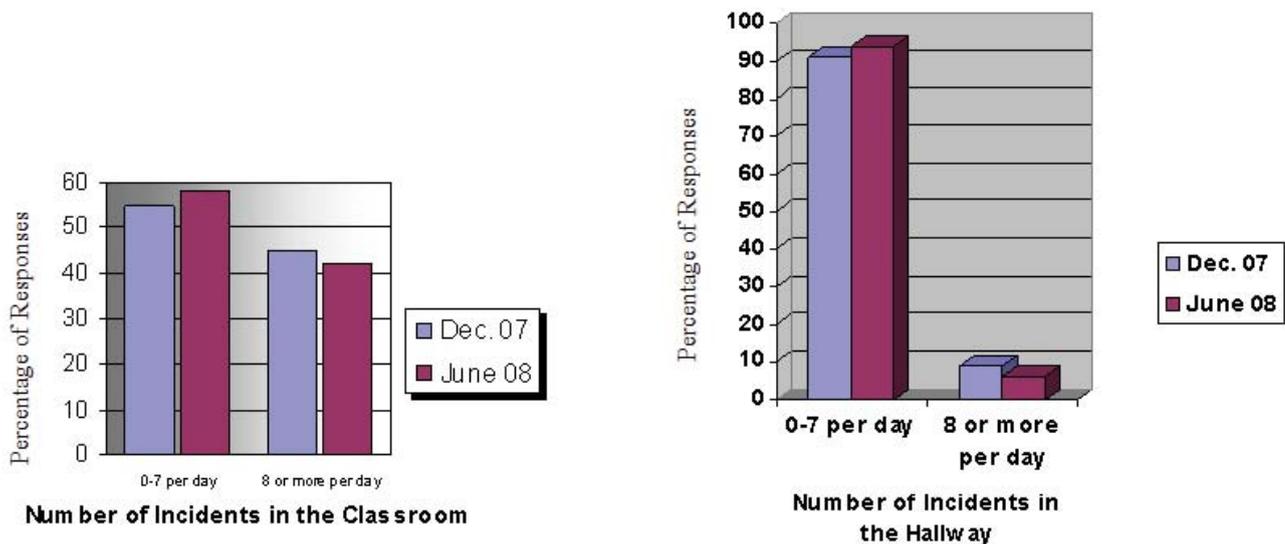
Visual reminders in the hallways and in classrooms are especially helpful for deaf and hard of hearing students. Posters read “We are Responsible,” “We are Respectful,” and “We are Safe.” The theme chosen by the school, “Hands Working Together,” is highly visible and includes a mural painted by a talented staff member. Some schools select themes connected to their school mascots and reinforce students with “Dolphin Dollars” or “Bear Bucks.”

When students are reinforced for appropriate behavior and data is collected on inappropriate behavior, teachers and other educational team members can easily identify students who face behavioral challenges. Targeted and, in some cases, Intensive Level interventions support these students. To build

Reinforcement of appropriate behavior varies by school. At the John Powers Center, teachers and other educational team members carry tickets that are passed out when they see students behaving well. Students exchange their tickets for individual reinforcements at the school store and contribute to a school-wide reinforcement that is achieved when the students reach a goal as a group. Each month a ticket is drawn to select a Student of the Month and a Staff of the Month. The names of those individuals are then featured on a bulletin board.



Staff Perception Of Problem Behavior



Educational team members perceived fewer incidents of problem behavior per day in June than they did in December, following the implementation of PBIS at John Powers Center in Illinois.

When teachers spend less time addressing behavioral concerns within the classroom, there is more time available for teaching and learning.

the capacity of educational teams to work with students who have Targeted and Intensive Level needs, the ISRC provides training for 25 behavior support teams in Illinois serving deaf and hard of hearing students. The teams come together on a quarterly basis to build skills with individual student interventions; to assess behavior including intervention plans; and to serve as behavioral coaches for educators at the local level.

At the Secondary or Targeted Level, some students are identified as needing social skills training while others benefit from a Check In/Check Out intervention. Students participating in this intervention have their behavior monitored and recorded on a checklist at various intervals throughout the day. Their behavior is rated during each time interval and they receive specific and immediate feedback.

Some students exhibit Intensive Level needs that extend beyond the school day. The ISRC provides support for those students' family members, educators, and community members. Teams

assess the students' strengths and needs and look for potential supports in the home, school, and community. For example, one student was sharing a bed with her mother because she did not have her own mattress. The ISRC secured a donated mattress and the student was able to sleep on her own.

When teachers spend less time addressing behavioral concerns within the classroom, there is more time available for teaching and learning. As a result, schools that implement PBIS often find that students' academic performance improves as teachers are able to return to teaching academics (Simonsen, Sugai, and Negron, 2008).

For more information, visit www.pbis.org and/ or www.pbisillinois.org. You may also contact the ISRC at (847) 559-8195.

Reference

Simonsen, B., Sugai, G., & Negron, M. (2008). School-wide positive behavior supports. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(6), 32-40.

Resource

Crone, D., Horner, R., & Hawken, L. (2004). *Responding to problem behavior in schools: The behavior education program*. New York: Guilford Press.