Advice to New Schools: Words of Wisdom

As the 2006-2007 school year came to a close I took the opportunity to ask some schools, Coaches, and District Coordinators for advice for new schools receiving SWPBS training during the summer. These individuals were asked, “If you were to go through the School-wide training again, what would you like to know? What things would you do differently?” Below are a compilation of words of wisdom passed along from individuals who have been implementing SW-PBS from just one year to four or more years. As you are putting your action plan together, remember the advice from those who were in your shoes just a short time ago.

• Only positive people on the team
• Focus on the positive rather than the negative; keep the meetings positive
• Diversity among team members
• Incentives for all employees
• Stick together (team members)
• Let staff and students know about PBS at the beginning of the year
• Follow through
• Be willing to make adjustments
• Be a team player-it also teaches the students to be team players
• Have perseverance and commitment
• Stay consistent
• Be real
• Teach teachers strategies they can use
• Start fundraising early
• Administrative support is necessary
• Make sure students and parents know about PBS expectations
• Network with other schools
• Get community involvement especially partners in education
• Let students have an opinion, especially with items to stock school store, and get age-appropriate incentives
• DATA, DATA, DATA! Data are key. The entire faculty/staff need to see the data. It promotes buy-in as well as being instrumental in problem solving. Use SWIS data
• Use freebies, such as Crime Watch and Learning For Life
• Staff need to identify with the students
• Continuous faculty buy-in especially after the Winter break
• Hold monthly meetings no matter what – FCAT, fire drill, absent members. Do whatever it takes, reschedule, change location, just be sure to hold a meeting every month
• Start & stop meetings on time
• Learn how to disagree in an agreeable way
• Send out an agenda before the meeting – people need to prepare, think of what they need to bring, and even add to the agenda
• Take attendance & keep a record. Members may be unaware of their responsibilities – their contributions can make the team a stronger one.
• Before people go out the door, review what was decided and who will be responsible for what actions.
• Ask the staff and students for feedback. The entire faculty should be part of key decisions – procedures will work best when everyone understands not only what, but why things are the way they are.
• Train staff to recognize the levels of behavior & give ongoing updates & suggestions for responding to behaviors.
• Keep it simple – elaborate plans may sound good, but they may be difficult to follow through with consistency.
• Notify everyone through multiple forms of media if changes are to be made (email, signs in gathering areas, phone, face to face, etc.)
• When the team responds to suggestions and concerns, remind every one that the new action or notice is in response to a request/suggestion from staff/students.
• Don’t let the same people do all the talking – get the most out of your team by using skillful leadership to encourage everyone to have a say.
• Involve custodians, office staff & bus drivers in the school plan – we hope to do this next year.
• The principal is key! Even if the AP is involved, the principal must actively support PBS and the PBS team. The principal needs to visibly show support.
• Write an action plan with dates, times, tasks, etc. It is important that tasks be broken down and assigned to different people. Don't let one or 2 people shoulder all responsibility. Give copies to all members.
• Get feedback from the kids. What do they think of PBS? What do they think the issues are at the school? What do they think of the reward systems? (As a mom of a student at a PBS school, I have heard things from the "other side." My son and his friends have a clear idea of issues at the school that PBS could address, but PBS is not understood by them.)
• I guess to summarize PBS belongs to the whole school and all of the stakeholders should have the opportunity to have input
• Take baby steps and get faculty buy-in
• Don’t get frustrated when interest wanes. Plan on it and brainstorm

If you have any ideas or lesson plans that you would like to share with other schools, please pass them along to smartinez@fmhi.usf.edu