

# Rethinking Discipline

*schoolwide*

Tougher punishments do not equate with better school discipline. Comprehensive schoolwide strategies and strong stakeholder support do.

BY SUZANNE M. SHELLADY AND KAREN A. SEALANDER

**S**trong leadership is required to build and maintain a schoolwide discipline system that establishes a safe and orderly learning environment in which all students can grow academically and socially. This is an especially challenging task given the dwindling resources and increasing responsibilities facing administrators in today's schools. To meet the public call for accountability, administrators must enlist stakeholders who can share the responsibility for designing, implementing, and maintaining the necessary components of an effective schoolwide discipline system that is based on communication, early intervention, and effective instruction.

To begin this building process, administrators may need to:

Reconceptualize schoolwide discipline as a dynamic and proactive process that evolves through teaching all students how to meet learning and behavioral expectations rather than establishing authoritarian control.

Facilitate as well as participate in schoolwide discipline development or ongoing professional development opportunities to enable all stakeholders to assume active roles in building a solid schoolwide infrastructure based on validated principles of effective early intervention.

Encourage and support shared responsibility for the frequent evaluation and discussion of student data to monitor the efficacy of current and newly implemented schoolwide discipline strategies.

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Attention to these preliminary planning considerations will help ensure that administrators and faculty and staff members avoid six common myths about schoolwide discipline:

- Increasing the intensity of negative consequences for disruptive behavior alone is sufficient to deter its future occurrence
- Targeting a core group of students who appear to be the worst habitual offenders of classroom or school codes of conduct will result in a more positive classroom or school climate
- Designing an effective proactive schoolwide discipline system is a quick and easy task
- Locating the one “right” strategy, technique, or curriculum will address the multifaceted discipline needs presented by all students
- Just replicating a specific approach to schoolwide discipline will be a good contextual fit across any classroom or school system
- Adopting the latest schoolwide discipline innovation in addition to those already in place is an efficient use of stakeholder time and school resources (Horner, Sugai, & Horner, 2000).

These myths are the source of discipline systems that rely on simplistic, reactionary, and often punitive disciplinary responses. Although reactionary or punitive approaches may result in short-term suppression of students’ problem behavior, they do not address the contextual factors that promote or maintain antisocial or violent student behavior (Mayer, 1995, 2002). Adopting a positive early intervention approach to discipline encourages and supports problem solving. Moreover, early intervention teaches appropriate behavior and results in long-term outcomes (e.g., decreased office disciplinary referrals, student social competence, academic achievement) that are likely to be sustained and valued across the school and community. (Dwyer, Osher, & Hoffman, 2000; Horner et al., 2000; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

### A Systems Approach

Two political documents released in the late 1990s highlighted the need to reexamine how schoolwide discipline issues are addressed for students with and without disabilities. The first, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, requires that all schools address the problem behaviors of students with disabilities that impede their learning or the learning of others through the individualized education program (IEP) process (Drasgow & Yell, 2002).

Specifically, the IEP team—which includes special educators, general educators, administrators, related service personnel, and parents—must take into account “strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §1414 [d][3][B][i]).

One would be remiss, however, to assume that positive behavioral support should be restricted to the discipline amendments of IDEA and the field of special education. The need to take an expanded look at schoolwide discipline issues that affect both general and special education teachers and students has been underscored by many educators (e.g., Dwyer, et al., 2000; Mayer, 1995, 1999, 2002; Shellady & Stichter, 1999; Sprague & Walker, 2000). In particular, Skiba and Peterson (2000) advocate that “school discipline is at a crossroads” and draw attention to the need for a shift from “zero tolerance to early response” to address environmental factors that affect students who are at risk or who engage in antisocial or violent behavior.

The second document, the U.S. Department of Education’s report *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) provides a prevention framework to assist in the early detection of factors correlated with antisocial or violent student behavior. The framework contains a multitiered approach to intervention and prevention, provides a continuum of behavioral supports to all students, promotes collaboration among teams of stakeholders from the school and the community, and allows for the implementation of policies that support and encourage the use of effective teaching and intervention principles (Dwyer et al., 1998; Dwyer et al., 2000). The Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs was established to support implementation of this framework (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

### The Support Team

To implement a proactive approach to schoolwide discipline, administrators must help stakeholders understand the key structural components of discipline systems: outcomes that students and staff members value; schoolwide, classroom, nonclassroom, and individual systems that interact and connect to support students; data sources, data-based decision-making processes, and strategies that provide a continuum of behavioral supports (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, et al., 2000).

# SIX MYTHS ABOUT SCHOOLWIDE DISCIPLINE

1. Increasing the intensity of negative consequences for disruptive behavior alone is sufficient to deter its future occurrence
2. Targeting a core group of students who appear to be the worst habitual offenders of classroom or school codes of conduct will result in a more positive classroom or school climate
3. Designing an effective proactive schoolwide discipline system is a quick and easy task
4. Locating the one "right" strategy, technique, or curriculum will address the multifaceted discipline needs presented by all students
5. Just replicating a specific approach to schoolwide discipline will be a good contextual fit across any classroom or school system
6. Adopting the latest schoolwide discipline innovation in addition to those already in place is an efficient use of stakeholder time and school resources (Horner, Sugai, & Horner, 2000).

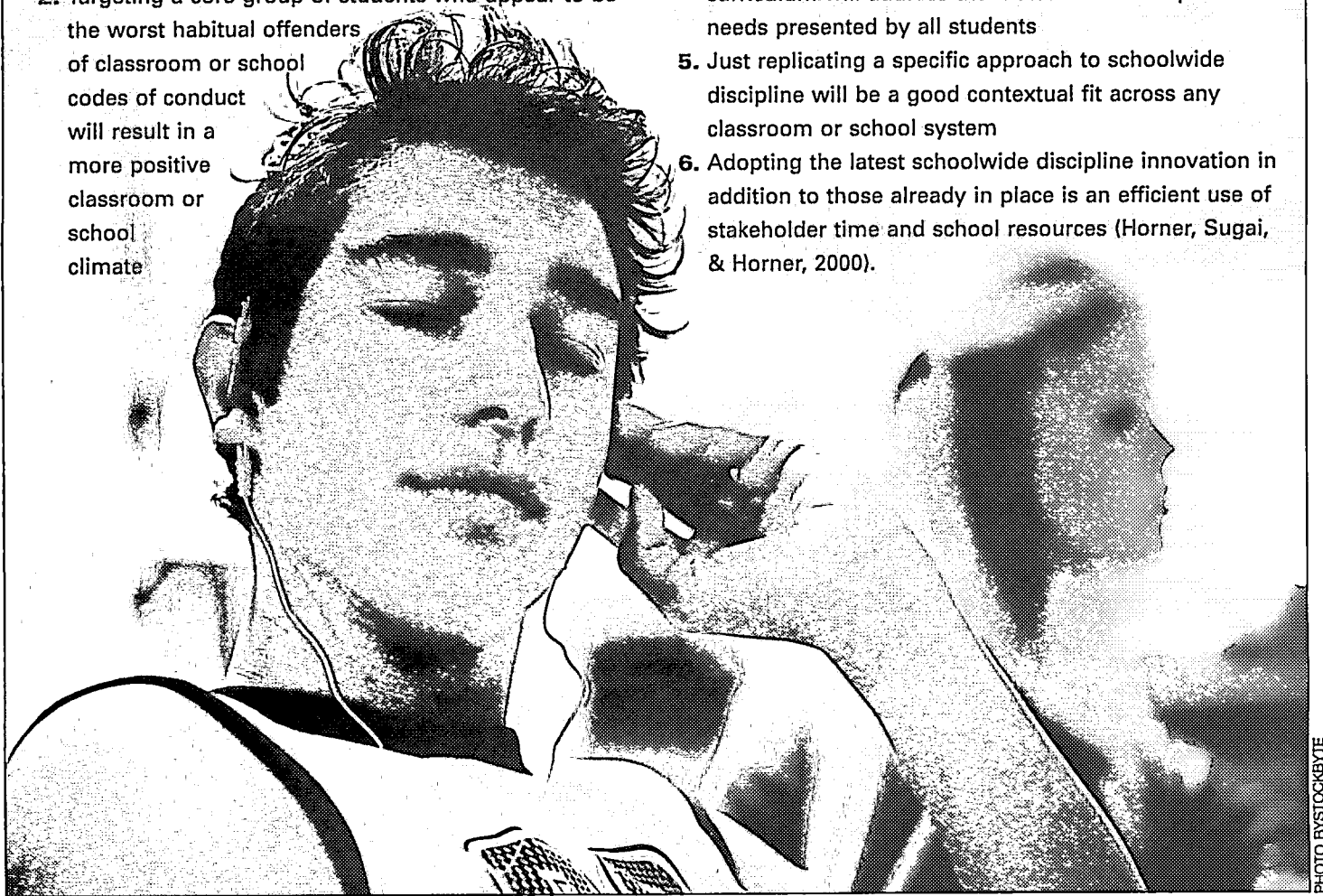


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To initiate the examination and discussion of measurable student and staff member outcomes that will be valued and sustained across time, Sugai and Horner (2002) recommend that administrators develop a collaborative support team for the school composed of stakeholders from within and outside the school. Typically, these team members have earned the respect of their colleagues or peers, have received information and understand the dynamics of providing positive behavioral supports to students, and are vested in making a long-term commitment to establishing and maintaining a school climate that maximizes social and academic learning opportunities for all students (Lewis, 2001; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2001, 2002).

## Determining Needs

Once this support team is assembled, its first task is to conduct a needs assessment to determine the status and efficacy of schoolwide, classroom, and individual behavioral supports currently being used within the building (see Lewis & Sugai, 1999, for a sample needs assessment

survey). These school-based data allow the support team to identify and prioritize areas to be addressed during upcoming discussions with administrators, faculty and staff members, and parents. The team establishes an action plan, and individual members may be asked to assume varied leadership roles, such as organizing and facilitating training opportunities, disseminating information, and securing consensus among staff members about key issues (Lewis and Sugai, 1999; Sugai et al., 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

## Discipline Structures

A second structural component is the various levels of discipline structures within the school (i.e., schoolwide, classroom, and nonclassroom) that interact and support students' learning and compliance with academic and behavioral expectations. Faculty and staff members must examine the interface between contextual factors (e.g., different task demands, physical surroundings, staff visibility, or social situations) and their differential effect on students' behavior (Hendrickson, 1992).

## RESOURCES.....

Easy access to research-based professional development materials is an important part of supporting ongoing staff development regarding the effective use of positive behavioral supports. These three comprehensive websites offer professional development resources regarding presentations, laws and regulations, conferences, research-based strategies, professional organizations, and technical assistance. All represent U.S. Department of Education-funded projects that work collaboratively in a multidisciplinary format with numerous agencies and professional organizations (e.g., NASSP, NAESP).

### ***OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports***

Behavioral Research and Training  
5262 University of Oregon  
Eugene, OR 97403-5262  
<http://pbis.org>

### ***Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice***

American Institutes for Research  
1000 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W.  
Suite 4000  
Washington DC 20007  
<http://cecp.air.org>

### ***U.S. Department of Education and OSEP IDEA Partnerships Project: IDEA Practices***

<http://ideapractices.org>

### ***Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools***

[www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS).....

Attention should also be devoted to ensuring that rules and behavioral expectations that are employed throughout the school do not conflict with or contradict one another (Mayer, 2002). Meeting this criterion should not be accomplished by adopting only one unilateral set of rules across all the school settings. Different levels of discipline structures inherent within a school should support and represent extensions of the larger schoolwide discipline system. A review of common features (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Mayer, 1999, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2002) that ought to be clearly articulated and inherent across these multiple levels of discipline structures should include:

- Rationales that create a common understanding among all stakeholders regarding the purpose or function that specific behavioral expectations or rules serve
- Rules or behavioral expectations that clearly define the

aspects of desired behaviors so student engagement in these behaviors is observable, measurable, and acknowledged by all stakeholders

- Direct instruction, review, and corrective feedback to students who make errors in learning how to meet rules or behavioral expectations within or across settings
- Rewards for staff members and students who meet the behavioral expectations or rules by providing a continuum of reinforcement options within and across settings
- Procedures that designate how, when, and by whom different types of appropriate consequences will be delivered to students who violate rules or behavioral expectations within and across settings
- Formative student data to assist periodic review efforts and encourage data-based decisions regarding system revisions as students' abilities to meet expectations evolve.

Modifications to these common schoolwide discipline features will be needed in different settings within the school to ensure that specific discipline structures fit students' needs. For example, general and special education teachers will need to consider which modifications to schoolwide discipline policies may be necessary to formulate classroom rules, procedures, or routines to accommodate students' behavioral and learning needs within the context of their classroom. This reinforces the assertion by Rademacher, Callahan, and Pederson-Seelye (1998) that to effectively manage their classrooms, teachers must proactively and systematically plan, teach, and evaluate classroom rules and procedures. To create a seamless transition between schoolwide discipline policies and nonclassroom settings (e.g., hallways, assemblies, and the cafeteria) minor modifications to increase the level of overt supervision and reminders of behavioral expectations by faculty and staff members may be sufficient (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1991).

### **Finding and Using Data**

The third structural component focuses on implementing data-based decision-making processes and identifying potential data sources. Horner, Sugai, and Todd (2001) offer four principles to guide the development of useful data collection systems:

- Establish a common understanding among stakeholders regarding why, when, and for whom different types of data need to be collected
- Create a data collection approach that is based on ease and efficiency of use
- Discuss how data will be employed locally (within the school building) before broader dissemination of data occurs

- Construct a recurring cycle of data collection to ensure that information is available when decisions need to occur.

These preliminary guidelines will help prevent data-collection errors that could deplete valuable time, resources, and opportunities to secure stakeholder support and commitment. Although these guidelines outline the successful use of data, they do not clarify what types of data should be collected. To make this determination, it is necessary to examine the outcomes that are desired and the data that currently exist. Schools often collect office disciplinary referral reports, which typically include a wealth of information, such as the students involved, a description of the behavioral problem, when and where the problem occurred, and who witnessed or reported the problem. This data may be quickly and easily be coded for entry into a computer spreadsheet, which would allow easy access and dissemination to pertinent stakeholders. Office referral data also can reveal where extra behavioral support is needed, the environmental factors that need to be addressed, and which stakeholders need support (Sugai, Sprague, et al., 2000).

### Continuum of Support

The final structural component is identifying strategies to provide a continuum of behavioral supports for primary, secondary, or tertiary levels of prevention (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, et al., 2000; Sugai, Sprague, et al., 2002).

- Primary prevention teaches all students the requisite school survival skills (e.g., how to ask for assistance, pass in the hallway between classes, etc.) and to remove or modify environmental factors within the school that promote problem behavior.
- Secondary prevention focuses on a smaller subset of students who are identified as at-risk for developing patterns of behavior that may be problematic to their school success (e.g., truancy, failing grades, pattern of minor discipline infractions, etc.).
- Tertiary level prevention focuses on individual students who require intensive behavioral supports or interventions to assist them to develop appropriate replacement behaviors that serve the same function or purpose that the problematic behaviors (e.g., threats of violence, chronic truancy, chronic disruptive, etc.) did within various school situations or contexts.

Walker et al. (1996) suggest that 80% of students' needs may be met with primary prevention efforts, approximately 15% will need secondary level assistance, and roughly 5% will require intensive tertiary support.

### Implementation

To implement appropriate professional development opportunities for faculty and staff members it is essential that administrators ascertain whether the faculty and staff members' and parents' content knowledge regarding positive behavioral supports needs to be created, supplemented, or updated. An initial understanding of what each stakeholder group brings to professional development activities or discussions enables administrators to provide those facilitating training activities that connect new ideas and procedures to those already in the repertoires of faculty and staff members or parents (Shellady & Stichter, 1999).

To gain this knowledge, we recommend that faculty and staff members be surveyed about their content knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs toward student behavior, as well as perceived barriers and need for support. In addition, the level of technical assistance needed to maintain and extend their understanding of positive, research-based interventions must be assessed. Facilitating early intervention requires staff members to rethink their approach to schoolwide discipline, which requires administrators to be insightful and dynamic leaders. **PL**

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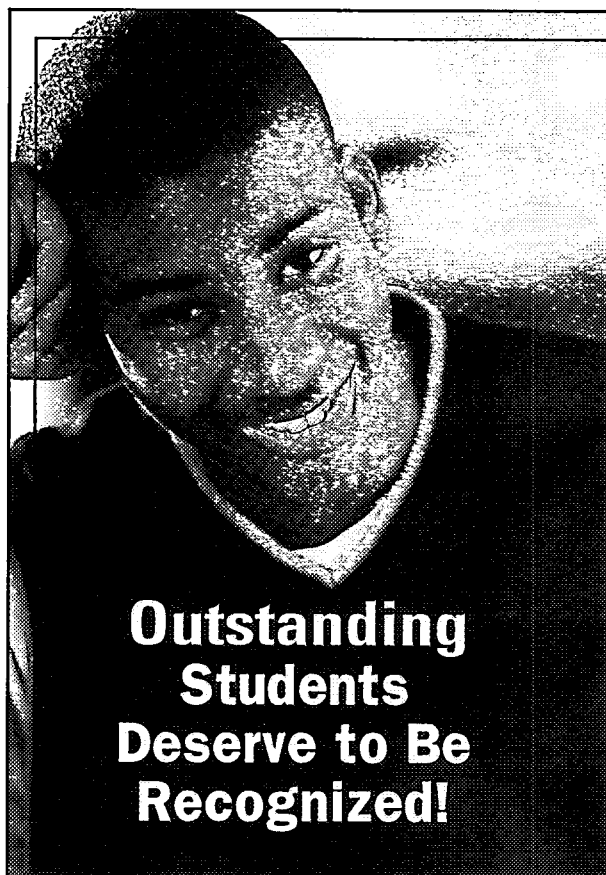
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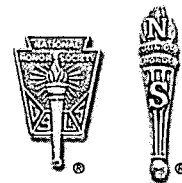


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