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Hallways and High Schools: Changes in Adult Behavior to Decrease Disruption from Students in Non-Classroom Settings

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Changes in Adult Behavior to Decrease Disruption from Students in Non-Classroom Settings

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Abstract

Decreasing classroom disruptions that result from hallway related behavior in high school settings can be very challenging for high school staff. This article describes a case example of preventing problem behavior related to hallway settings in a high school with over 1,200 students. The interventions are described and the results of the plan are included.

Keywords: high schools, non-classroom settings, hallways, positive behavior support

There are unique challenges related to high schools, problem behavior, and settings outside of class. Approximately 40% of problem behavior in high school is related to not being in the classroom (e.g., tardy, skipping), with 9% of the issues occurring in the hallway (Spaulding, 2010). Students' unauthorized coming and going during instructional times (e.g., during class) can interrupt the flow of teaching and affect the ability of classmates to meet academic standards. In response, school staff may support the development of more restrictive policies (e.g., zero tolerance). These actions can inadvertently contribute to students feeling less safe (Tyre, Feuerborn, & Pierce, 2011). Fortunately, when evidence-based practices are implemented within a multiple-tiered system, they may lead to more effective outcomes and increased sustainability (Nelson et al., 2009). Some schools have adopted schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS) approaches to addressing their hallways issues.

SWPBS

SWPBS has been defined as a team driven, system-wide, data-based support continuum (Franzen & Kamps, 2008) that can effectively address social and behavior outcomes for high school students (B. Flannery, 2009; K. B. Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009). Within this approach, staff create protective cultures within schools through instruction, redesign of the environment, and attention to systems variables (e.g., policies, team structures, procedures; McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2009). SWPBS has been found to be effective within individual case studies (Solomon, Klein, Hintze, Cressey, & Peller, 2012) and through randomized control trials (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). The SWPBS approach includes addressing problems across settings, including those outside of the classroom such as hallways.

Non-Classroom Settings and Hallways

The hallway is considered a non-classroom setting. These settings (e.g., cafeteria, library, parking lot) can present exceptional challenges for teachers. The focus of these settings is typically non-academic. Teachers may feel less comfortable addressing factors that are outside of their content area (e.g., behavior). They may use interventions which may or may not be most effective for students. When school staff attempt to focus on safety and control through reactive strategies (e.g., suspension), they may inadvertently create environments that have a prison like feel (Muschert & Peguero, 2010). Regrettably, the use of detention, in school suspension, and out of school suspension may be more typical responses for middle and high school staff (Spaulding, 2010).

There have been multiple examples of preventative interventions for issues related to hallway settings and other related factors (e.g., tardy). These have included (a) the use of praise notes for being on time to class (Caldarella, Christensen, Young, & Densley, 2011); (b) large scale rewards (e.g., field trips and movie; de Baca, Rinaldi, Billig, & Kinnison, 1991); (c) posting teachers at the classroom door and interacting with students, along with escorting late students to appropriate settings (Caldarella et al., 2011); (d) teaching expected transition routines and actively supervising students during transitions (e.g., being a “post” to greet students at the door and address problems within the vicinity of the classroom), and (e) consistent consequences for tardiness (Tyre et al., 2011).

The following section provides an example of hallway supports that addressed several of these factors. It illustrates a plan developed to address the problematic presence of students in the hallway before and during class time in an urban high school. This example was based on a collaborative research project between a local university and a diverse urban high school.

Hallway Intervention – Case Example

School Information

This school was located in a large urban district in the upper Midwest with approximately 1,200 students. Within this setting, 85% of students had free or reduced-cost lunch, 21% of the students had a disability, and 17% were English language learners. The administrators in this case school were concerned with preventing hallway based problem behaviors within a more positive framework. Also, teachers, administrators, and security officers wanted to address the disruptive behavior of students in the hallways during class time. Unfortunately, part of the problem may have been due to environmental factors that provided incentive for misbehavior. For example, there was a lack of attention-getting signs, increased distractions, and limited active supervision (Haydon & Scott, 2008) in non-classroom settings. In particular, the deficit in active supervision (e.g., moving, scanning) was a critical missing ingredient for the success of students in their non-classroom settings (Johnson-Gros, Lyons, & Griffin, 2008). The school in this case had been planning and implementing SWPBS for two years prior to addressing their hallways settings under this model.

The school had defined four common expectations across all settings of the school (i.e., Productive, Appropriate, Respectful, and Responsible). For instance, Being Responsible in the hallway was defined as timeliness to class, keeping hallways open for traffic, and reporting problems to staff. There also was some universal teaching of expectations across settings. Further, a schoolwide acknowledgment system was established, along with policies for addressing divergent behavior issues in classroom settings. The teachers and administration of the building had been attempting to address issues in the hallway with more punitive steps. These included using hall sweeps and detentions. The ODR data from the school indicated that these interventions did not appear to be a deterrent for problem behavior. The steps for

addressing the issues related to hallway behavior in this case included problem identification, problem analysis, intervention, evaluation. The example took place across three years. Data were collected for pre-intervention starting in year one and post intervention ending in year three.

Problem Identification

The SWPBS team at the school had begun to address the concerns of the staff based on data related to ODRs. According to their records, there had been 371 ODRs for hallway related problem behavior (.16 ODRs adjusted per instructional days, per 100 students, per average daily attendance). The schoolwide team then reviewed maps of the building to determine “hotspots” where students would be frequently seen during class time throughout the day. These zones included the first floor area one (near assembly hall), first floor area two (near indoor pool), and the second floor area one (near the girls’ gym). The administration and security staff identified students walking in the hallway during class as being most problematic at approximately 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM.

Problem Analysis

There appeared to be a number of students who were not only late but continued to walk in the hallway throughout the class period, knocking on doors and disrupting instruction. To further the problem analysis, the school hired graduate students from a local university to collect data in the hallways to determine if an issue existed at these times and locations. These students were trained by faculty from a partner university on the basics of SWPBS and on direct observation using event recording. The students practiced recording until they were within 80% reliability of the lead faculty. In order to determine inter-rater reliability, a second rater was used in 30% of all recording opportunities. Inter-rater reliability ranged from 94% to 100% for all observations. The protocol for the observations was modified from an existing SWPBS

observation tool (Hawken & Horner, 2003). Walking in the hallway during class time was defined as a student being present in the hallway five minutes after the ringing of the tardy bell. The observation continued for 20 minutes after this point. Students who walked by more than once and students who were apparently carrying hall passes could have been included in the recording. The definition did not include students who were in stairwells or clearly walking with an adult staff member.

Intervention

The intervention to address the issues of students in the hallway and for tracking the fidelity of treatment was based on the Self-Assessment Survey (SAS; Hagan-Burke et al., 2005). This instrument is used within SWPBS to determine the level of implementation and change priority in four areas: (a) schoolwide, (b) classroom, (c) non-classroom (e.g., hallways), and (d) individual supports. Approximately 20% of the staff ($n = 34$) completed the instrument during the first year of the hallway focus for the intervention. These results indicated that 60% of the staff believed that all necessary components to address non-classroom settings were in place. Further, 84% believed this was a high priority to be addressed in their school. The following section describes their proposed steps based on the components of the SAS for non-classroom settings.

Step 1: School-wide expected behaviors apply to non-classroom settings. Defining key expectations for the entire school is necessary but not sufficient for non-classroom settings. Although the staff had some basic expectations defined for hallway settings, they began to develop and post specific examples targeted for these settings. These specific expectations included passing on the right side of the hall, using appropriate language, and using a respectful tone when speaking to others. Next, they developed a policy for being on time to class that was

posted on every classroom door in the school which stated, “On time to class means students are 100% through the door threshold of the classroom when the bell rings” (see <http://www.author.net> for sample posters and on time policy from this school).

The process for developing an on time to class policy took longer than expected. There was considerable discussion within the SWPBS team and the general faculty regarding the actual definition. Providing examples from other high schools of on time to class definitions appeared to increase the efficiency of the team to develop this statement.

Step 2: School-wide expected behaviors are taught in non-classroom settings. Having posters and policies are helpful, but to be educative, skills must be directly taught. Staff proposed to teach these expectations related to on time and hallway behavior to all students. The plan included using common lesson plans at the beginning of the school year and through schoolwide assemblies that included student exhibition of expected behavior. These lesson plans typically included instructional objectives, connections with the schoolwide expectations, a rationale for the skill, opportunities to see or practice the inappropriate and appropriate behaviors, and teacher feedback (see <http://www.author.net> for example). To further encourage expected hallway behavior, several faculty dressed in road construction vests and flagged students to the right during passing periods. Finally, staff were encouraged to model the appropriate behaviors expected by students in the hall.

The staff in the school had been provided with professional development on the teaching of expectations for at least one year prior to these efforts. Having some background on the teaching of expectations to high school students appeared to support their ability to develop lessons related to hallway behavior. They were able to use their own creativity and find ways to

teach expectations that were novel (e.g., dressing as construction workers) and engaging for the students as well as adults.

Step 3: Supervisors actively supervise students in non-classroom settings. Staff were encouraged to support student success in hallways by increasing active supervision. The key components include moving around the setting, scanning the environment, and interacting with the students. The staff were asked to visually scan around their classroom areas during passing periods and encourage students to move to class. They also were to greet students at the door of their classroom.

Prompting by the principal on a regular basis appeared to serve as an effective reminder for teachers to engage in active supervision. He did this through daily announcements over the intercom and through staff emails. The principal would actively walk through the halls and acknowledge staff for being at their posts supporting their students. This buy-in from the administration appeared to support overall staff engagement in the process.

Step 4: Rewards exist for meeting expected student behaviors in non-classroom settings. The key to this step included making appropriate behavior work for the students. Staff in this setting were provided with training for acknowledging student behavior. They were provided with face-to-face instruction during rotational faculty meetings using “one pagers” (see <http://www.author.net> for example) that included examples of acknowledgment skills (e.g., specific praise, immediate feedback). The school had an existing schoolwide acknowledgment ticket system (e.g., Buzzy Bucks) which could be exchanged within a school store for spirit related items. The staff also provided other large scale schoolwide acknowledgements (e.g., outdoor picnics, popcorn). Finally, teachers were encouraged to have a bell ringer for students to complete upon arrival to the classroom. This assignment was not worth more than 10% of their

grade. The purpose of this task was to provide additional incentive for being to class on time, which may have been effective for some students.

Other schools implementing similar processes have used ticket systems to acknowledge staff who were activity supervising students. These tickets were turned in for rewards such as free copy paper, bottled water, release from certain duties, gift cards, etc. Some schools have also held staff drawings for prizes based on tickets that are turned in. These prizes are typically donated by the community and have included items such as gift cards to local restaurants, passes to local spas, and airline tickets.

Step 5. Physical/architectural features are modified. There was a need to examine and change the flow of traffic in the hallways. Effective travel for students and staff was impeded by students walking on the wrong side of hall. The staff taped a yellow line down the middle of the hallways to encourage students to stay on the right side. The hope for this intervention was to decrease congestion by prompting students to stay to the right and increase the possibility students would be to class on time. Finally, the three deans' offices were moved from one location on the first floor to placements across three floors. This was to decrease the distance students had to travel in the case of ODRs.

This step on the SAS encouraged the staff to think about the structures in the school that were encouraging or discouraging desired behaviors. This tool may have helped to move the attribution of the problem away from unalterable causes (e.g., students are unmotivated about being in school) to alterable variables (e.g., posting reminders about the flow of traffic). The reflection based on the SAS also possibly moved the conversation of the staff towards their ownership of what could be components of the problem and toward possible solutions.

Step 6. Scheduling of student movement ensures appropriate numbers of students in non-classroom spaces. The master schedule was a tool that could aid in the support of schoolwide success. The juniors and seniors in this school started and ended their day earlier than the freshmen and sophomores. This led to increased numbers of students in the hallways and subsequent distractions at the end of the day. The administration changed the schedule to ensure that all students would start and end at the same time to decrease this traffic problem.

Other schoolwide initiatives such as response to intervention and professional learning communities consider the school schedule as a possible tool for intervention. This connection appears to hold true for SWPBS efforts as well. This step on the SAS may have caused an effective discussion between both academic-focused personnel (e.g., curriculum directors) and behavior-focused personnel (e.g., discipline deans) on possible ways to improve their overall environment.

Step 7. Staff receives regular opportunities for developing and improving active supervision skills. As previously stated, high school staff may be less likely to perform a skill outside of their content area and comfort zone. Therefore, the SWPBS team for this school provided training for all staff on skills related to interacting with students (e.g., redirection). Staff were provided with another “one page” example of effective redirection strategies along with practice during staff training at the beginning of the year (see <http://www.author.net> for examples). These documents were later included in the faculty and staff handbook.

Based on the review of the ODR data, it appeared that many of the problems were coming from the freshmen students. The principal requested targeted training for freshmen and special education staff regarding practices for teaching, acknowledging, and redirecting student

behavior. These sessions were provided during planning times for the staff across six weeks. The sessions also were attended on a voluntary basis by security and front office personnel.

Step 8. Status of student behavior and management practices are evaluated. Data can be useful for developing support for interventions, determining effectiveness, and improving approaches. The key data used by the team included ODRs. These were reviewed by the leadership team at least quarterly. Also, as previously mentioned, other data (e.g., observations of actual students in the hallway) may be needed to build the case that the intervention is needed and effective.

A word of caution is warranted related to presenting ODR data to staff. The staff were presented with the reductions in ODRs during faculty meetings. Some staff responded by saying these reductions in ODRs were based on an implicit message from the administration that writing an ODR was to be discouraged. The SWPBS leadership team revised future presentations by pre-teaching the staff through encouraging them to write ODRs when needed. They also stated hope for possible reduction in problems behaviors that triggered them.

Step 9: All staff are involved directly or indirectly in management of non-classroom settings. Staff involvement was critical in supporting the success of students in non-classroom settings. In this case, all staff were involved in the development of the on-time to class policy. Further, they were involved in the development of the specific expectations for hallway behavior. Finally, all staff were encouraged to be at their doors to direct students around their classroom area, greet students as they entered, and provide acknowledgment for students who were engaging in appropriate behaviors. As previously mentioned, the administration provided frequent prompts and reminders to the staff regarding these expectations through announcements and emails.

The entire staff participated in the process of addressing the issues in the hallway from problem identification to evaluation. This involvement may have increased their buy-in and ownership of the needs and solutions related to student hallway disruptions. The problem identification and analysis steps may have helped create a needed sense of urgency for the staff (Kotter, 1995) to change non-classroom practices and explore intervention options (Fixsen & Blase, 2009). Lack of staff participation could have thwarted the overall implementation efforts by encouraging a sense from the staff that SWPBS in the hallway was only a top down approach.

Evaluation

There appear to be some improved outcomes for staff and students in this case example related to improving their non-classroom settings. There were 10 direct observations during pre-intervention and 18 during the post intervention stage. Based on these data, there was a minimal reduction of students in the hallway during class at 10:00 AM from pre to post intervention (from 33 to 32, 0.13 to .012 adjusted for average daily enrollment). There was 55% decrease in the number of students in the hallway during class time between pre and post intervention at 2:00 PM, (from 67 to 30, 0.30 to 0.11 adjusted for average daily enrollment). There was a 42% reduction in the first floor area one (from 77 to 45, 0.33 to 0.16 adjusted for average daily enrollment) and a 53% reduction in first floor area two (66 to 31, 0.28 to 0.12 adjusted for average daily enrollment). There was a slight decrease in the number of students in the hallway in second floor area 1 between pre and post intervention (31 to 28, 0.14 to 0.10 adjusted for average daily enrollment). These overall decreases may indicate that with fewer students in the hallway, more students were in classroom settings where instruction was occurring. Also, the decrease in the number of students in the hallway during instructional time diminished the possibility of classroom disruptions.

A possible cause for the lack of a large decrease of students in the hallway at the 10:00 AM time period could be related to the higher concentration academic content during the morning. Walking in the hallway behavior may still have been more reinforcing for students who were academically frustrated. Increased structure would be necessary but not sufficient to address their escape and avoidance of their classroom settings. More intensive academic supports would be required in addition to the schoolwide efforts. The lack of greater reductions in the second floor area in terms of students in the hallway may have been somewhat related to its position near the student gymnasiums where classes could have been less structured. The moving of the deans' office to the second floor also could have increased or maintained the number of students who were in the halls and were reported for discipline issues.

As illustrated in Figure 1, there was a 67% reduction in ODRs between years. Reductions in ODRs in non-classroom settings also meant these students were missing less instruction due to being engaged in disciplinary meetings that result from ODRs. Further decreases in hallway ODRs may have required more intensive interventions. Based on previous experience, students are typically in the hallway because they: (a) do not know the expectations, (b) lack of incentives academically and socially to be in class on time, and (c) are communicating that they have an academic problem by avoiding the class. While this intervention potentially addressed the first two, more intensive interventions would be required to impact the third one.

<Insert Figure 1 here>

Additionally, systematically targeting of hallway areas appeared to influence the staff's ability to address non-classroom settings successfully. In terms of fidelity based on the SAS, the percentage of staff who believed that supports for non-classroom settings were in place changed

from 60% (pre) to 88% (post). Based on interviews with the staff, some of these components were implemented with greater confidence than others. According to the leadership team the key components that were implemented with highest degree of integrity included: (a) posting the tardy policy, (b) increasing active supervision by staff and administrations in the hallways in general, (c) moving the discipline deans within closer proximity to each classroom across floors, (e) changing the schedule to synchronize the flow of traffic in the building, and (g) encouraging staff to be consistent with the policy and to engage in active supervision.

In terms of sustainability, while the staff were not directly taught to use the observation protocols. This task would be within their range of skill development. The school hired graduate students on an hourly basis to conduct the observations. The benefit of this approach was that the data collection was not dependent upon external funding. Future research should include directly teaching school staff to conduct these types of observations for their own problem analysis.

Conclusion

This example included at least three important factors for addressing hallway behavior: having teachers at their posts, escorting students to their expected location, and providing brief interactions with students (Johnson-Gros et al., 2008). Having staff greet students at the door and providing brief and often positive interactions with students may be one way to efficiently increase emotional support for students. High school students in classroom settings with higher levels of this type of support have realized significantly higher academic achievement gains and reductions in the likelihood of failure (Allen et al., 2013). The connection between dealing with hallway settings and the effective use of active supervision seems apparent. Being at the door of the classroom may improve the climate in non-classroom settings through increasing active

supervision. Classroom management is simultaneously improved through enhanced engagement and student connection. The reduction in tardiness and the potential improvement of student/teacher connections would mark this as a highly efficient intervention.

A word of caution should also be stated. As previously mentioned, high school staff may be less willing to move out of their comfort zones in terms of expected professional responsibilities. This high school focused on providing targeted training to the entire school on the basics of teaching, acknowledging, and redirecting student behaviors which are key components of SWPBS (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013). Focused training on these areas also was provided to freshmen and special education instructors. The general rule applied in this example was to never implement or train people on a policy without the required support (e.g., modeling, practice, feedback). This may be a critical success factor for most interventions in high school settings, including the hallway. Also, this example took over three years to implement. Staff should be encouraged to take the time needed to ensure they have systems of support and evaluation data in place before implementation of practices.

Note 1. The data presented in this case example were taken from an actual research study in a high school.

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Figure 1. Adjusted Hallway Related ODRs Pre and Post

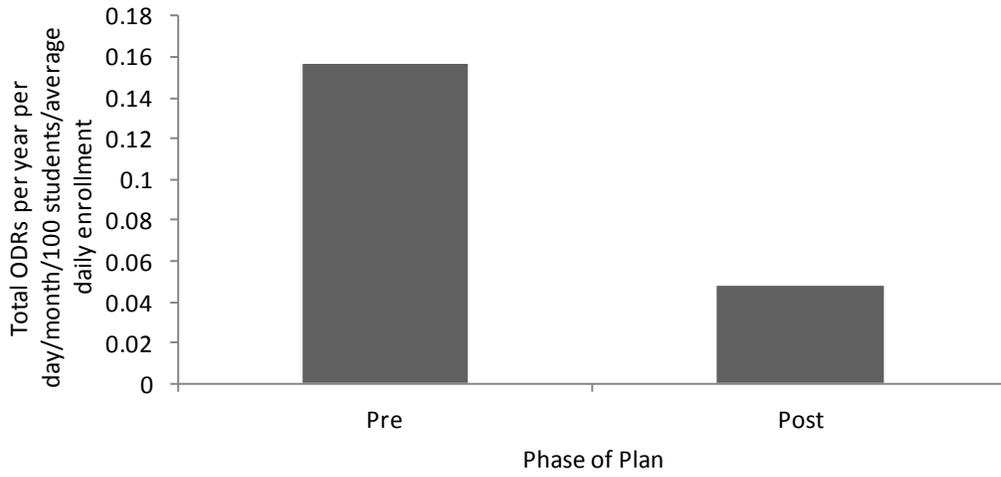


Figure 1. Adjusted Hallway Related ODRs Pre and Post. Comparison of hallway related ODRs for the entire year between pre and post intervention.