

Data-driven decision making

“Accountability looks forward. Being accountable is not a ledger page or a spreadsheet. It means taking the information and using it to make judgements—about quality, about how good is good enough and, most importantly, about how to make changes that will enhance and extend student learning, for all children.”

– Lorna Earl, “Developing Indicators: The Call for Accountability”

A school-wide approach to positive behaviour support builds on clear indicators, benchmarks and measurable goals. Hard data guides staff as they determine which areas to target, how well efforts at change are working and how to improve success.

Staff can use data to:

- clarify *what* problem behaviours are occurring and with *whom*
- clarify *where* problem behaviours occur
- clarify *when* problem behaviours occur
- prevent problems
- develop supervision schedules
- make rules that are realistic, reasonable and practical
- choose positive reinforcements and negative consequences
- plan environmental modifications by setting physical boundaries related to behaviour
- set priorities (addressing the most important, problematic or unsafe behaviours immediately)
- set school-wide goals for behaviour change.

Initial assessment

Most schools begin by gathering information about the current climate, and the school’s behavioural strengths and needs. Methods of data collection include:

- school-wide audits
- surveys

- analysis of existing data, for example, office referral records, suspension rates and attendance records
- structured discussions or brainstorming sessions with staff, students and parents.

Schools should use at least three different methods of data collection, and use a process that provides information about the perspectives of all members of the school community: administrators, teachers, support staff, students and parents.

School-wide audits

As a starting point, either the core team or all adults in the school can complete a school-wide cultural audit to determine how well the school is currently addressing the key components of a positive behaviour approach.

For example:

1. We have defined a small number (e.g., 3–5) of positively and clearly stated school-wide expectations and related behaviours.
2. We are directly teaching positive student behaviours.
3. Appropriate numbers of students are in the hallways.
4. The physical environment has been modified to limit unsupervised areas, problematic traffic patterns, and access to and exit from school grounds.
5. Staff actively supervise students when they are outside the classroom.
6. Staff regularly and systematically reinforce positive behaviour.
7. We have clearly defined what problem behaviour is.
8. We have clearly defined the consequences for problem behaviour.
9. There are clear distinctions between office- and classroom-managed problem behaviours.
10. We have set up a team to plan a behaviour support system and solve problems in this area.
11. Staff receive regular opportunities to develop and improve their active supervision skills.
12. School administrators are active participants in the positive behaviour support team.
13. Staff receive regular feedback about behaviour patterns in the school.
14. We have procedures for informing parents about the school's behavioural expectations.

15. The school-wide positive behaviour support team has an action plan and the resources to implement it.
16. All staff are directly involved in school-wide behaviour interventions.
17. We have procedures for informing parents about both positive and problem behaviour.



Tool 7: School-wide Audit in Appendix A is a sample template for gathering information about a school's current strengths and needs.

Surveys

Surveys administered to staff, students and parents can provide:

- a snapshot of what is happening at the school (the current school culture)
- specific baseline data to use when measuring the impact of future interventions.



Some schools develop a survey while others use a published one. **Tools 8A, 8B and 8C** in Appendix A are sample surveys to use with students. These surveys were developed by The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities. For more information check out their website: <http://safeandcaring.ca/>.

Focused discussion and open-ended survey questions provide opportunities for staff and students to identify specific problem behaviours they see at school, as well as specific problem areas in the school and the times of day when staff need to pay particular attention. This information can be used to develop more detailed questions for data collection.



Tool 9: Survey on Predicting Problem Behaviour in Appendix A is a sample template for gathering information from school staff.

Analyzing and using data

Schools can analyze information gathered in the initial assessment stage to determine where they need to focus their attention. Some schools may find they are doing just fine, and can therefore focus on how to make their school culture even stronger. As schools implement their plans, they will continue to use data collection systems to measure progress over time.

Data from office referrals

Office referral data is useful for identifying:

- student discipline patterns

- the effects of school-wide and classroom interventions
- staff training needs.

In many schools, office discipline referrals are the main method of monitoring disruptive behaviour. Referrals are an index, not only of student behaviour, but also of the consistency and quality of the school discipline system. These types of referral systems help school administrators document whether or not interventions are producing positive changes over time.

Cautions¹²

Be cautious how you use discipline referral data, particularly when comparing one school to another. Keep in mind that:

- each school defines and applies referral procedures differently. A high rate of referrals does not necessarily mean that students at one school are less well-behaved than students at another school with fewer referrals
- the same student may evoke different responses from different teachers
- varying relationships between teachers and administrators may be the reason for one school to have more referrals than another.

Effective use of data¹²

Discipline referral data can provide useful information about individual student performance, and about problems in the whole school or a particular classroom. However, the data will be useful only if:

- school staff have a common understanding of its purpose
- there is an effective and efficient system for collecting, managing and reporting this data.



Tool 6: Student Referral Form in Appendix A is a sample template for collecting and organizing office referral data.

Many schools successfully use referral data for decision making. They use regular cycles of data collection and reporting. For example:

- recording referrals every day
- providing feedback to staff once a month
- creating a school profile summarizing data once a year.

It is important to keep the data-collection system efficient and low-cost in terms of effort, time and actual dollars.

12. Adapted with permission from Sopris West Educational Services. *Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools* by Jeff Sprague © 2005, p. 94.

Types of data¹³

Schools might collect the following types of office referral data:

- total number of office discipline referrals
- referrals per student
- average referrals per school day or per month
- location of behaviour resulting in referrals (e.g., common areas or classrooms)
- percentage of students with none or one referral
- percentage of students with two to six referrals
- percentage of students with seven or more referrals.

Analyzing data¹³

Following are some guidelines for analyzing office referral data.

- A high number of referrals per year and per student indicate a need for school-wide improvement.
- A high number of referrals from a specific area of the school indicate a need for improvement in that area.
- Improved classroom management is needed when:
 - more referrals are coming from all classrooms
 - specific classrooms have more referrals.
- Individual student improvement is needed when:
 - a high proportion of students have two to six referrals
 - some students have received more than six referrals
 - many students are being suspended and expelled.

Assessing effectiveness of office referrals¹³

To assess the effectiveness of their office referral practices, schools might consider these points.

- How is discipline referral data used in the school?
- Are there concerns about using discipline referrals to make school discipline decisions?
- How often does the administrator provide information about discipline?
- How do we need to improve the current office discipline referral system?

13. Adapted with permission from Sopris West Educational Services. *Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools* by Jeff Sprague © 2005, pp. 95, 96.

We are in our fourth year of using effective behaviour supports. It is a regular item on our monthly staff meeting agenda. Graphs identify students who have had multiple incidents, the type of difficulty (e.g., swearing, physical altercations, rough play, etc.) and the areas of the school where these behaviours happen most frequently. We use hard data to identify the problem, rather than relying on people's opinions about what might be the problem. This helps us focus our energies more effectively and creates a shared understanding of what behaviour we are aiming for.

At staff meetings, we discuss and share ideas about how to address the problem behaviours and reinforce the positive ones. We review our progress month by month and, when an approach doesn't work, we're always willing to go back to the drawing board and try something new.

To raise awareness and gather input from parents, we conduct surveys on specific topics throughout the year. For example, we find out information about self-control by asking parents, "How does your child demonstrate this skill at home?" We can then use this information to plan lessons and create structured opportunities for practising self-control at school.

– Principal, junior high school

Ongoing assessment and monitoring

Deliberate and thoughtful assessment guides the development, decision making and evaluation of a positive behaviour support initiative. Schools need reliable evidence that the new actions they are taking are truly making a positive difference and are resulting in measurable positive outcomes.

Schools can gather data about:

- types of behaviour
- the settings and location of behaviour
- the time of behaviour.

Schools can also gather data on the types of interventions used as part of the positive behaviour support approach. This data provides information about how effective the interventions are generally, and helps to identify which ones are most successful.

If schools gather and report data regularly, action plans can be adjusted to provide optimal support for interventions. Some schools designate 10–15 minutes during each staff meeting to discuss the school-wide behaviour system.

Streamline the collection process

To make the collection of data a meaningful and manageable task:

- focus on a few key outcomes. Limit the number of measures and collect accurate data on the behaviours that really matter. Do a few things well; specific, measurable targets work best
- design data-collection methods that are simple and easy to use
- summarize the data and report it to the school community. Document, post and celebrate goals achieved. Consider using bar graphs to demonstrate progress and communicate this progress by posting it in the staff room, on bulletin boards in the hallways and/or in the school newsletter.

Develop a collection plan

Developing a data-collection plan ensures that data will be accurate and provide a clear picture of the kinds of behaviour being reported. As much as possible, make the data collection system part of current school practices. For example, many schools are already collecting data about lateness and absenteeism, and can expand that system to include office discipline referrals, incidents of vandalism and/or the results of school satisfaction surveys.

Following is an example of an assessment plan designed to gather and analyze data for future planning for positive behaviour supports.

Goal of evaluation	Evaluation strategy	Time line
Identify positive behaviour goals.	<i>Baseline assessment.</i> Survey all students, staff and parents about strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for addressing positive behaviour in the school.	Sept. 30 Issue baseline survey Oct. 1 Calculate survey results Oct. 15 Report results
Assess current implementation plans and activities.	<i>Process evaluation.</i> Design a checklist of programming components that are observable school-wide. Then assess current implementation activities through interviews and observation.	Nov. 1 Design checklist Nov. 7–21 Observe hallways, classrooms and/or interview teachers Dec. 1 Report results
Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and activities.	<i>Outcome evaluation.</i> Prioritize goals and designate appropriate assessment measurements. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a school climate survey to assess students’ perceptions of the school’s strengths and needs. • Collect discipline records to track incidents of negative behaviour. • Review attendance records to estimate correlation between school climate and attendance. 	Feb. 15 Decide on assessment measures in relation to goals March 1 Issue school climate survey to students, staff and parents March 15 Calculate survey results April 1 Collect discipline and attendance records April 21 Report results
Use evaluation results to improve planning and implementation for the next school year.	<i>Action research.</i> Propose planning and implementation improvements based on the results of the needs assessment, process evaluation and outcome evaluation.	May 1 Report findings and propose program adjustments to the school community

Keep the cycle going

Monitoring and evaluating are ongoing processes. Continuously:

- ask, “How are we doing?”
- compare early measures of behaviour data to current measures
- modify or eliminate what is not working
- celebrate and communicate successes.