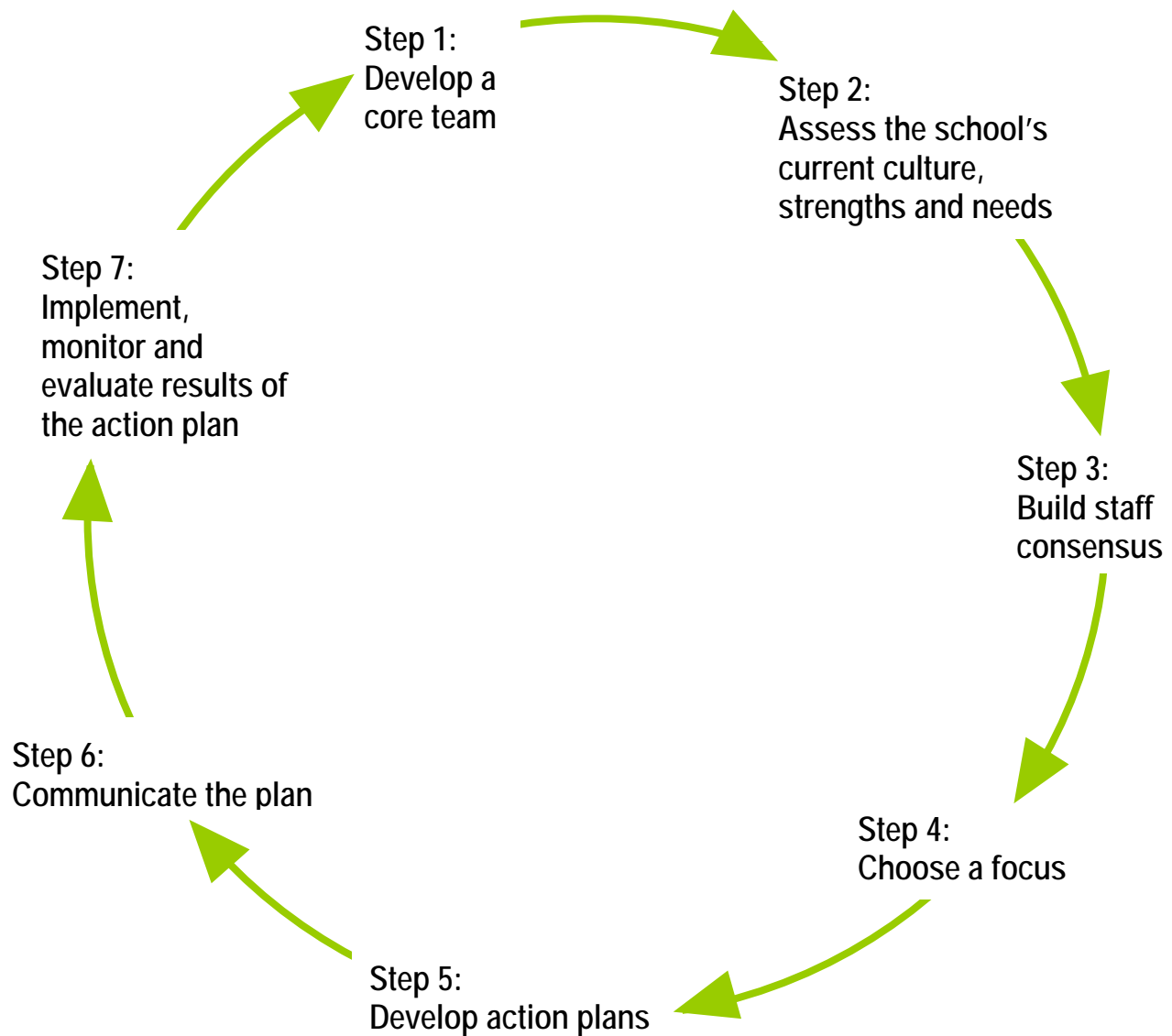# Action plan for school change

> "Small things done consistently in strategic places make change happen."
>
> – Cile Chavez, Author

The most effective way to effect change is to use a flexible approach, with overlapping and interrelated steps that promote continuous improvement. The following sample process describes steps that many schools are taking to develop, implement and monitor a school-wide approach to positive behaviour supports.

Step 1: Develop a core team

Step 2: Assess the school's current culture, strengths and needs

Step 3: Build staff consensus

Step 4: Choose a focus

Step 5: Develop action plans

Step 6: Communicate the plan

Step 7: Implement, monitor and evaluate results of the action plan

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Step 1: Develop a core team

A positive behaviour support system requires a core team of dedicated staff members who will:

- coordinate data collection (initial and ongoing needs assessments)
- use this data to make decisions about specific interventions (e.g., school rules, social skills instruction)
- develop an action plan for implementing positive behaviour supports
- use student- and staff-level data to refine and evaluate their efforts.

Team members need to have leadership abilities and the respect of colleagues. They also need skills in effective communication, team building and collaborative problem solving.

Team members could include:

- an administrator
- teachers from different grades or departments
- staff with general and special education or counselling expertise
- staff with behavioural expertise
- support staff such as secretaries, lunchroom supervisors, custodians, bus drivers and teacher assistants
- a school council member
- a student.

The core team will require adequate support and resources so that they can meet regularly over a two- to three-year period. Change will happen if school staff are committed to the process for at least 36 months.

Some schools find that half-day or full-day meetings are most productive, and they often separate these longer sessions by at least one month. This allows time for initial planning as well as developing and using various strategies.

The core team will need to help staff and parents develop an understanding of:

- how to develop and implement positive reinforcement systems
- data-based decision making
- effective classroom management strategies

- adapting instruction to increase positive behaviour through differentiated instruction
- functional behavioural assessment and developing individual behaviour support plans.

Step 2: Assess the school's current culture, strengths and needs

Before a school-wide positive behaviour support system is introduced, it is important to systematically assess the school's strengths and needs, and its culture (that is, the underlying set of beliefs, values, traditions and norms that have evolved and that determine how people think and behave). School culture also includes the way teachers and other staff members work together.

Tool 7: School-wide Audit and *Tool 8: Supporting a Safe and Caring School: What Students Say* in Appendix A may be useful in assessing the school culture and identifying current strengths and needs.

A comprehensive school assessment generally involves two or three sources of data. For example:

- surveys of staff, students and parents
- staff observation and discussion
- facilitated sessions with staff
- data that is already available (for example, office referrals, attendance records, suspension and expulsion rates).

Step 3: Build staff consensus

Since the success of a positive behaviour approach depends on the active participation of members of the school community, the majority of staff must support the initiative. All staff will have leadership roles. The literature suggests that an effective school-wide behaviour support system requires that at least 80 percent of the school staff acknowledge the existence of problem behaviour and commit to sustained involvement over the long term.

When our school began developing an effective behaviour support approach, we realized the importance of staff support. All teachers and teacher assistants on staff have the opportunity to provide input into our behaviour support climate committee. We use a collaborative decision-making process that involves analyzing data on both positive and inappropriate behaviour.

There was some skepticism at first. Staff thought the administration of the process would be too much. However, through our Professional Learning Community work, including professional development presentations by regional behaviour experts, staff became more committed to the approach. We developed data graphs showing the results of the approach so parents were more aware of how well it was working.

We also worked with students to develop an acronym to help them remember behavioural expectations. The school motto became "Be a STAR!" and the letters in STAR stood for "Stop, Think, Act Right!"

We feel that by keeping the staff engaged through professional learning opportunities, and by using the effective behaviour support system, we are helping our students develop strong moral intelligence and act out their beliefs in positive ways.

– Principal, junior/senior high school

Step 4: Choose a focus

Since staff have limited time, schools need to focus on goals and related strategies that are clearly identified by the data and that all staff support. The results of the school survey and other initial assessment measures will help identify a focus. Concentrating on a few big ideas and translating these into measurable goals provides a clear starting point.

The core team can support the focus by providing:

- ideas about how to address the goals (for example, sharing information about best practices)
- information about how well the school is currently addressing identified areas of need.

The following story describes how one school chose to focus on preventing bullying.

Principal's Story

Bullying was a major problem at our school. School council took the lead in establishing a bullying prevention initiative. We held an evening information session to introduce parents and students to the idea of using an effective behaviour supports process to prevent bullying.

We used the "HA HA SO" technique to summarize proactive behaviour that would prevent bullying:

Help
Assert yourself

Humour
Avoid

Self-talk
Own it.

A Grade 6 peer group made up of 12 volunteers—mostly girls—takes the lead on bullying prevention and showing a positive attitude at school. Also, the safety patrol program provides role models and advice for students by putting on skits at school assemblies about how to deal with bullying.

– Principal, middle school

For more information on bullying prevention, see Chapter 9 in *The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools*, at https://education.alberta.ca/media/142774/the_heart_of_the_matter_character_education_and_citizenship_in_alberta_schools.pdf.

Also see the Government of Alberta's Web site at www.bullyfreealberta.ca. This site provides information to parents, teens and community members to help them prevent or intervene in a bullying situation.

Targeting behaviour at recess

Many elementary schools identify behaviour during recess as an area of concern. These are some actions a school might take to improve behaviour at recess.

- Develop and review recess guidelines with staff.

- Develop and share related learning activities for classroom teachers to use.

- Encourage teachers to review recess behavioural expectations with students at least once a month.

- Establish a school-wide process to reinforce positive behaviour at recess and address problem behaviour.

- Review monthly data on playground behaviour.

- Conduct a staff and student satisfaction survey at the beginning of the intervention and at other times throughout the process.

Following are several sample learning activities related to appropriate behaviour at recess.

- Review and discuss a labelled map of the school playground.

- Walk around the playground with the classroom teacher and discuss where it is (and is not) safe to play.

- Watch a demonstration of the behavioural expectations in action.

- Rotate through the apparatus and game area stations to learn and practise behavioural expectations for each area.

- Discuss playground behavioural expectations and reviewing "What if …" scenarios.

- Watch a video of recess play and identify positive and/or problem behaviours.

Step 5: Develop action plans

Most schools find it useful to conduct a needs assessment and then use the information collected to develop a comprehensive, tailor-made plan that targets the behaviours staff have identified as having a high priority.

Action plans define tasks, time lines and people responsible for strengthening and maintaining critical features. Sample tasks might include:

- defining behavioural expectations
- teaching specified behaviours
- acknowledging positive behaviour
- establishing negative consequences
- monitoring behaviour patterns
- modifying physical arrangements
- supervising in different ways.

Tool 10: Action Plan to Enhance School Culture in Appendix A is a sample template for an action plan.

Setting goals

Schools can use information from the assessment process to set three or four measurable goals that can be achieved within a school year. (Goals are broad statements describing appropriate behaviour and conduct.)

The goals should:

- be immediately useful
- lead to other related and/or more important or complex skills
- help students acquire greater independence and adopt more socially acceptable behaviours.

For example, a school might choose one or several of the following goals.

- The noise level in the hallways will reduce by five decibels.
- The frequency of "on time" arrivals for class will increase by 50 percent.
- There will be more injury-free days on the playground.
- There will be more days when supervisors and students hear only respectful language in the hallway.
- Students will complete 95 percent of their homework assignments.

The core team might develop more detailed descriptions of the expected change and what it will look like in order to help school staff communicate expectations, and teach, recognize and reinforce the desired behaviours.

Objectives are narrower statements of school-wide targeted behaviour. A well-stated objective identifies what students are expected to do and indicates how performance will be measured. Well-stated objectives also include checkpoints along the way— intermediate steps between the current level of performance as identified in the school audit and the final objective. These short-term goals follow a logical and developmental sequence of mastering subskills.

The following are examples of specific, measurable school-wide objectives.

- We will implement active supervision in the hallways between classes; the number of students getting to class on time will increase by 50 percent by March 15.

- We will use active supervision to increase positive behaviour; the number of office referrals during morning and afternoon recess will decrease by 25 percent by March 15.

Developing measurable outcomes at the outset will help staff collect more accurate data. When developing goals and objectives, consider the SMART acronym that outlines criteria for effective goal setting:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time-limited.

Some schools support school-wide rules and behavioural expectations with overarching mottos phrased in student-friendly, memorable language. For example:

- Respect Yourself, Respect Others, Respect Property

- Keep Yourself Safe, Keep Yourself Learning

- This Is Our School, Let Peace Dwell Here.

Step 6: Communicate the plan

All students must be aware of and understand the school behaviour goals for the year. Communicating the behaviour plan is crucial to student, parent and staff understanding. Having the behavioural expectations clearly stated in student-friendly language and posted throughout the school will help teachers and other adults monitor for positive behaviour. These signs also serve as friendly reminders to students and staff.

Making a plan

One school developed the following plan to communicate what the staff would do to support positive behaviour over a period of a few months.

As a staff, we agree to take these steps:

Right now
• Be in the hall five minutes before class to greet each student as he or she enters the classroom.   • Each week, learn the names of five students you don't know.   • Stop by areas you don't normally visit during your hallway supervision.   • Include an inspiring quote of the day in the morning announcements.
Within the next few months
• Use the moveable display boards to post photos and captions describing positive school behaviour.   • Each week, make three phone calls to parents to deliver a positive message about their child.   • Adjust the supervision schedule to increase the number of staff in the cafeteria and gymnasium at noon hour.   • Continue to make positive remarks to students in various social settings throughout the school.
In the future
• Get as many students as possible involved in the leadership club.   • Publish the criteria for year-end awards in the school newsletter.   • Increase staff availability to talk with students and/or parents before classes begin in the morning.

Developing tools

Schools can use a number of different methods of communicating behavioural expectations. For example:

- displaying posters throughout the school
- organizing assemblies where specific behaviours are modelled and recognized
- making announcements over the public address system
- sharing information through the school newsletter and the school council
- posting information on the school Web site.

One school developed the following charter and introduced it to parents by sending home a copy of the charter with a letter and a quiz.

Project Respect Charter

Any School is a community of learners. We are all here to learn, grow and become good citizens.

At Any School, we:
- respect ourselves
- respect others
- respect property.

Guiding principles

Project Respect is designed to help create a climate of cooperation, respect, safety and academic excellence at Any School. Project Respect is based on five guiding principles. We believe these principles will help create a positive learning environment for all students.

The guiding principles are:

1. Clear expectations for student behaviour.
2. Clear and consistent strategies for
   - teaching appropriate behaviour
   - encouraging appropriate behaviour
   - discouraging inappropriate behaviour.
3. A support system and individual behaviour interventions for students with exceptional learning and/or behavioural needs.
4. Clear methods for evaluating and revising Project Respect.
5. Clear and consistent communication with students and parents about the characteristics and philosophy of the behaviour plan.

Sample letter to parents

Dear Parents:

Any School has always prided itself on being a safe and caring school with a high level of respect among staff and students. Over the past few years the student population has doubled. As a staff, we felt the need to be proactive in establishing a behaviour plan that takes into account our growth.

Since September, the school staff, with assistance from the University of Anywhere, has been developing a school-wide behaviour plan called Project Respect. This plan is designed to foster a climate of cooperation, academic excellence, respect and safety at Any School.

Our plan makes use of effective instructional strategies, consistent correction procedures, logical consequences and positive reinforcement to teach students the skills and behaviour necessary to succeed now and in the future. This month we are working on moving around the building in a safe and respectful manner.

For the past week students have been learning about Project Respect. We have encouraged them to discuss the plan with you. Please spend some family time discussing the various aspects of Any School's Behaviour Plan with your child.

Once you have reviewed the information with your child, please test your knowledge by taking the Parent/Child Test Your Knowledge survey. After you test your knowledge, please sign the form indicating that you discussed the plan with your child and return the signed form (one per family) to your child's teacher. The deadline for responding is Friday, March 7.

We are also interested in any questions or comments you have about the plan.

Test Your Knowledge about Project Respect

Please do this quiz as a family—your child will be able to help you with the answers!

1. Our school purpose states that "We all are here to _____,

    _____ and become good _____.

2. Any School's Three Rs are:

    we respect _____,

    we respect _____, and

    we respect _____.

3. List three ways students can show respect for themselves at school.

    _____

    _____

    _____

4. List three ways students can show respect for others at school.

    _____

    _____

    _____

5. List two behavioural expectations for moving through the building and walkways.

    _____

    _____

_____   _____
Student Signature   Parent Signature

Please return to classroom teacher by March 7.

We have assemblies once a month where a new theme is introduced and discussed. Past themes have included Sportsmanship, Determination and Respect.

At the assembly, I give students general feedback, such as how the sportsmanship on the soccer field has been great for the past week. We also have bulletin boards throughout the school showcasing our theme of the month.

– Principal, senior high school

Step 7: Implement, monitor and evaluate results of the action plan

Implement

Many schools begin focusing on positive behaviour on the very first day of school. Then throughout the year they provide refresher sessions on behavioural expectations and celebrate successes.

Schools that have successfully implemented a positive behaviour supports system also use these strategies:

- providing orientation for new staff who arrive during the year, including student teachers

- using staff development opportunities to help create a positive school culture that is student-focused and supportive, and provides an optimal learning environment

- analyzing data to see whether interventions are being used consistently

- analyzing data to identify interventions that are not working and need to be changed

- offering staff ongoing professional development opportunities related to needs identified through data analysis

- providing feedback to staff about how well their efforts and interventions are working, including feedback about small successes that might have been overlooked

- using data to develop future goals and ensure that current progress is monitored and sustained.

Monitor and evaluate

Once staff have identified a few key goals to address, the school can set up systems for monitoring results. For example: Are the steps we're taking to reduce the noise level in the hallways producing results? If not, try revising the approach and re-evaluating at a later date.

Targeting specific expectations and gathering data about results in those areas makes the process more explicit and measurable, and provides clear feedback to staff.

Use *Tool 11: Positive Behaviour Implementation Checklist* in Appendix A to monitor the action plan.

See sample strategies on pages 69 to 77, "Data-driven decision making" for information and strategies on monitoring and evaluating levels of behaviour and impact of interventions.