Collaborative leadership

"When parents, teachers, students and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students ..."

– Joyce L. Epstein et al., *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2nd edition)

School administrator leadership

Working collaboratively with other school staff, administrators can create environments that sustain positive behaviour support. Their involvement and leadership is key to the success of the initiative.

The school administrator is key to the success of any school-wide systems improvement initiative. According to a recent article on advocacy in the *Education Law Journal*:

> "… a school principal is at the centre of a complex organizational web. There are strands inside the school to the various points of service delivery. There are strands that extend outward to families, and the community, as well as to local and regional agencies and groups. There are strands that extend upward to the school district and from there to the ministry of education" (Smith 2007, p. 279).

School administrators can and should:

- identify positive behaviour supports as an important school-improvement goal
- be knowledgeable about positive behaviour support practices and systems change
- participate in core team meetings and related training
- model and visibly implement new practices (e.g., active supervision techniques) and reinforce staff who model new practices
- actively and frequently monitor and acknowledge students who meet behavioural expectations
- allocate resources to sustain positive behaviour supports.

Collaboration supports consistency

Consistency is an essential element of a school-wide approach. When all adults in the school community respond in a similar way, students have a better sense of how they are expected to behave.

If a student behaves inappropriately, the first adult to see this behaviour is responsible for addressing it, regardless of who that student's classroom or homeroom teacher is. Similarly, any or all school staff who witness positive behaviour should provide on-the-spot reinforcement for that behaviour.

When the school has an agreed-upon plan for consistency and collaboration, all adults in the school are more willing and able to assume responsibility for all students. Mutual decision making to develop action plans and resolve problems creates opportunities for all members of the school community to make a contribution. The result is a more effective and inclusive positive behaviour support system.

Supervisor's Story

Two years ago our senior high school began a positive behaviour support approach that used a tracking system to collect data on positive and negative student behaviour.

I participated from the beginning because I work in the lunchroom. There is a computer right in the lunchroom that we use to log incidents. Previously, the school had not kept a record of incidents. Once we started this new tracking system, we had a clearer picture of what was going on.

Having this data and talking about behaviour has helped school staff handle behaviour incidents more consistently. It has also helped students to know there is a procedure if they mess up, and steps to go through. The students sign a code of conduct to show that they understand this.

This approach has really made our school community more responsible. Everyone is more involved in creating a positive learning environment. I'm pleased to be part of the process and to be able to see the positive changes in behaviour, especially in the lunchroom. The students are more aware of the consequences of their behaviour and are more committed to making the school a good place for everyone.

– Lunchroom supervisor, senior high school

Building a team approach

Positive relationships among and between staff members are key to successfully implementing a school-wide approach to support positive behaviour. Research has indicated that the following characteristics promote positive staff relationships and a healthy school culture:[11]

- collegiality
- experimentation
- high expectations
- trust and confidence
- tangible support
- appreciation and recognition
- caring, celebration and humour
- involvement in decision making
- protection of what's important
- meaningful traditions
- honest, open communication.

To build a team approach, consider using the following strategies.

- Recognize that each staff member has something to offer. Create opportunities for staff to express their opinions, and acknowledge individual members' contributions.

- Ensure that many people share leadership responsibilities. Notice when team members are fatigued, and encourage others to step forward and share the load.

- Build a sense of security and trust through openness and the sharing of ideas and strategies. When a team member is comfortable with coming forward and asking for help with difficulties, other team members have an opportunity to offer the benefit of their experiences.

- Provide inservice training to support and motivate staff, or have one or more staff members attend a session and tell others what they've learned.

Building staff capacity

Michael Fullan (2005) describes capacity building as the development of "collective ability—dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation and resources—to act together to bring about positive change" (p. 4). Capacity building (e.g., increasing staff rapport and collaborative problem-solving skills) happens when school administrators intentionally create opportunities for teachers to work together.

Staff must agree on which behaviours are inappropriate and how they will respond when those behaviours occur. Having all staff participate in developing the plan increases ownership and support for implementing and maintaining it.

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11. Adapted from Saphier, J. & King, M. (1985, March). "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures." *Educational Leadership*, 42(6), 67. Adapted with permission from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

School-based support teams

When a school-wide system has been established, small groups of teachers will benefit from regularly scheduled time to solve issues with individual students and/or deal with classroom management in general. Since teachers will need to feel comfortable talking about the challenges they face, they should have opportunities to build their skills through collaborative problem solving and/or peer coaching.

Administrators should ensure that teachers have opportunities to spend time in each other's classrooms to observe and team teach, and then reflect and discuss different practices they might use to enhance their planning and instructional practices.

Mentoring and role models

Community partners can also serve as mentors to students, staff and parents. A number of community agencies such as Big Sisters, Big Brothers, screen and match trained volunteers to work with students.

Experienced teachers and administrators are role models for the entire school community. They can have a major impact on respectful relationships and effective school-wide management. Providing mentoring opportunities for beginning teachers as well as teachers who are new to the school helps them to learn about and understand the strategies and tools that other staff members are using. Creating opportunities for the mentor and mentee to visit each other's classrooms and discuss what they observe fosters the sharing of knowledge and builds capacity.

As well, teachers who have previously taught in other schools can share their successful experiences elsewhere with colleagues.

Onsite community partners

A team approach to providing a school-wide support system for students works best when it is on-site, multidisciplinary and multi-level. Members of an on-site support team could include, but are not limited to:

- public health and psychiatric nurses
- dietitian
- social worker/mental health therapist
- youth worker/family liaison worker
- community police resource officer.

Having a community of caring adults located right in the school on a regularly-scheduled basis (e.g., several hours each week or half-a-day a month) provides rich opportunities for building positive relationships, teaching social skills and problem solving and providing intervention and support on an as-needed basis. With these

kinds of supports in place, students have more opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills to choose healthy behaviours, to make better life choices and, ultimately, to respond to life's changes and challenges with resiliency and emotional maturity.

This collaborative "all for one" approach—in which partners work together to support one school, one classroom and one individual student, will help create a stable, caring environment for learning and teaching.

For more information on the Comprehensive School Approach, visit the Alberta Mental Health Board website at http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/csh.aspx.

School policies and practices

One way to promote consistency between and among adults in the school community is to infuse positive behaviour support approaches into school policy and practices.

The provincial *School Act* defines behavioural expectations for students and outlines the responsibilities of school boards, administrators and teachers for creating a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviour.

Jurisdictions develop student behaviour policies that align with the *School Act*. Each school develops practices that will create a safe and caring environment in that school community. To be effective, school practices need to be intentional and should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. Practices could include how staff perform certain tasks such as supervision, reporting problem behaviours (office referrals) and reinforcing positive behaviour. Policies could also plan for specific situations such as lock-downs or emergency evacuations.

A school team might develop a plan for responding to specific types of situations that include a written protocol to share at staff meetings once a year, and review and revise as needed. The following illustrates how a school staff might operationalize a policy about handling student fighting.

1. Assess the situation.

    *   Is there an audience egging them on? Dismiss the audience.

    *   Do you have a good relationship with these students? If so, they will be more likely to cooperate with you.

    *   Who is fighting and how many? Get names and note discriminating physical features.

    *   Are there any weapons? Ask them to hand over any potential weapons.

2. Call for help.
    Teamwork is very important in this situation; work in pairs when called to break up a fight.

    *   Notify the office that a fight is occurring. Use a cell phone or ask a student to go and get help.

    *   Let other adults know where you are going and where the fight is occurring.

    *   If two adults are on the scene, work as a team and stand four to six metres apart from each other. This diverts attention by causing the students who are fighting to focus on more than one staff member. One staff member can give the verbal orders while the other staff member concentrates on visual cues.

3. Dismiss the audience.

    *   Disrupt the fight by calling out the names of the students who are participating as an audience. This conveys the message that adults are present, will disperse the audience and may distract the students who are fighting.

    *   If necessary, remove the audience by starting at the perimeter and working your way closer to the fighting. Direct audience members to tasks; e.g., "Go and get another teacher."

    *   Another effective strategy for dispersing an audience is for a number of school staff to converge on the area. Some schools have an "all code" indication that all school staff should converge on a certain area.

4. Defuse the situation.

    - Identify yourself as a teacher. Make sounds by whistling or shouting exclamations such as, "Stop" or "Calm down" or "Move apart."

    - Act like a peacemaker, keep your hands up and approach the students from the front. Stay out of striking distance.

    - Stop any type of taunting interchange. Prefight provocation commonly includes teasing, insults, bumping and staring.

    - Deal with one individual at a time. Confront the one who is most likely to comply with your request, either the student you know best or the student who is getting the most hurt.

    - Use the student's name and ask him or her (Student A) to calm down and move away. Offer the student a way out. For example, "You don't want to get into any more trouble. Let the principal deal with him (or her)."

    - Repeat your requests again and again until you have the student's attention.

    - Use specific commands such as pointing and stating, "Walk over to the bench." When Student A is disengaged from the fight, ask him or her to go to a specific location.

    - Don't ask questions; this can fuel bad feelings.

    - Keep the other student (Student B) in your peripheral vision; that student will now be watching your interactions with Student A.

    - When you have the attention of Student A, allow the student about five seconds to "save face" by moving away. Remind him or her "You don't need this."

    - Deal with the remaining student.

    - Isolate them to separate rooms.

    - If at any time the students decide to stop fighting and leave, do not try to detain them. Allow them to exit and document the incident for formal follow-up.

If the above doesn't work:

    - Remind them of the school rules regarding fighting. "There is no fighting in this school."

    - If the fight continues, immediately inform them that the police will be called and remind them of the consequences if they continue by stating, "Fighting will get both of you suspended."

5. Resolution

- Once the students have calmed down and are able to control their anger, help them find a solution. Conflict mediation can be helpful in solving the problem.

- Ensure established school consequences for fighting; e.g., three-day in-school suspension, include steps for the involved students to resolve the issue, make restitution and develop plans for coping with conflict more appropriately.

6. Debriefing

- Be aware of your own emotional state after dealing with a fight. If possible, debrief with another school staff member and give yourself some time for recovery.

- Debrief the class or audience of peers who may be anxious or "hyped-up" about the encounter.

Strengthening school practices

Many schools review how staff are currently supervising, engaging and acknowledging students' positive behaviour. For example, the following chart illustrates how carefully planned playground supervision supports a school-wide positive behaviour support approach.

Playground Supervision	
Supervise actively	• Interact with as many students as possible. • Scan the playground systematically (like a lifeguard scans a pool). • Systematically walk around the playground (e.g., completing a figure eight in a 10-minute block of time).
Engage successfully	Consider teaching a variety of outdoor games. Put together plastic tubs of play equipment and have individual students make sure materials are returned by matching items to a list of materials on the tub.
Acknowledge positively	Verbally reinforce individual students who demonstrate positive behaviours. Distribute "Caught you cooperating" slips that students can share with classroom teachers and parents.

Linking with other school initiatives

Look for ways to link positive behaviour supports with other school initiatives and approaches such as character education, ongoing school climate activities or the work of school councils.

See *Appendix B* for brief descriptions of these approaches and philosophies, which can complement positive behaviour supports:

- Caring Relationships
- Center for the 4th and 5th Rs
- Circles of Courage
- Community of Caring
- Developmental Assets
- Emotional Intelligence

- Hope Research

- Lions-Quest Canada/Thrive!
- Moral Intelligence
- Professional Learning Communities
- Resiliency Research
- Safe and Caring Schools Initiative
- Skillstreaming: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills

- Virtues Project.