Everything you need to know about preventing and responding to student behavior (well, almost!)

Jeffrey Sprague, Ph.D.
COSA Annual Conference
October 2016

Why are we asked to do it this way?

- Exclusionary “discipline”
  - School to prison pipeline
  - Adverse Childhood Experiences
  - Teacher/Educator Wellbeing
- How can we make a difference?
  - Supportive school climate
  - Teacher wellbeing
  - Restorative justice/practices
  - Teaching with poverty and stress (student and adult) in mind

Exclusion as “discipline”

- If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you always got.
  - “Moms” Mably
Common response to behavioral problems: Apply increasing sanctions

- Increase monitoring and Supervision
- Restate rules
  - Try to talk them out of it
  - Pay more attention to problem behavior
- Refer disruptive students to office, suspend, expel

Exclusionary discipline practices appear to “work” in the short term
- Removes student
- Provides relief to teachers, students, administrators
- BUT, we attribute responsibility for change to student &/or others (family)
School-to-Prison Pipeline

**What it is:** School policies and practices that push students out of traditional school settings into more restrictive settings, including juvenile justice settings

**Pathway:**
- Students failing academically and behaviorally
- Reactive disciplinary policies (zero tolerance, criminalization of behavior)
- Disciplinary exclusion (AE, suspension, expulsion)
- Youth disengagement from school
- Court involvement and juvenile detention

---

School to Prison Pipeline

- 3 million students suspended annually
  - Double + from the 70's
  - Increase after gun free schools act
- 70% of students involved in school-based arrest are Hispanic or Black
- Suspension likelihood
  - 1/20 White
  - 1/14 Latino
  - 1/13 Native American
  - 1/6 Black
  - 1/4 Black with Disability

---

What are the preconditions for suspension risk?
- Special Education/Disability
- Low academic performance
- Low income/poor
- Male
- Minority
- History of disciplinary exclusion
  - "Reputation"

What do suspensions really do?
- Truancy
- Tardiness
- Fewer class credits
- 2/3 of suspended students do not graduate in 4 years
- Long term suspension in middle school associated with 3X probability in high school
- Do NOT put students "back on track"
- Damages teacher-student relationships
Teacher/Educator Wellbeing

In a 2005 national survey, 44% of teachers who left the profession pointed to student behavior as a reason for leaving, and 39% of highly qualified teachers left for that reason.

“We lose a third of our new teachers within three years... [M]ore young teachers leave teaching because of discipline issues than over teacher pay.”

[Image of a scene with a child looking sad]
Teacher support

- The National Center for Education Statistics provides a staggering statistic:
  - out of the 467 accredited universities and colleges in the study, only 51% stated that they offered specific courses in discipline, and only 43% of the students at these schools were required to take these courses

- National Council on Teacher Quality: Preservice training in classroom management is a top priority

Teacher satisfaction continues to decline:

MetLife Survey

- Teacher satisfaction has declined 23 percentage points since 2008, from 62% to 39% very satisfied, including five percentage points since last year, to the lowest level in 25 years.
- Half (51%) of teachers report feeling under great stress several days a week, an increase of 15 percentage points over 36% of teachers reporting that level in 1985.
- Less satisfied teachers are more likely than very satisfied teachers to be in schools where budgets declined in the last 12 months (61% vs. 47%) and in time for collaboration with other teachers (21% vs. 14%) in the last 12 months.
- Nearly all teachers (97%) give high ratings to other teachers in their schools.
  - MetLife Survey of the American Teacher

Teacher factors to consider

- Job DEMANDS
  - Pupil misbehavior
  - Workload
  - Emotional demands and emotional labor
  - Parental behavior

- Job control
  - Improved job satisfaction
  - Reduced emotional exhaustion

- Collegial support
  - Supportive leadership
  - Supportive colleagues
  - Rewards and respect at work

- Gender and Age
  - Lower job satisfaction, higher work stress and lower wellbeing
    - Males (first 10 years)
    - Females (later career)

- Burnout
  - Depression
  - Experiential avoidance

- Self-care skills and practices
Burnout = Depression = Burnout

- Depression
  - Sub-threshold
  - Major
  - Experiential avoidance

Depression

- How prevalent
  - 17% lifetime and 7% for a one year period
  - Women are more likely to experience depression
  - In one study 27% of teachers reported depression

- Escalating cycle
  - Depressed teachers are more likely to focus on negative behavior and less likely to praise positive behavior
The Trap of the Dedicated Teacher

- Teachers in schools with high levels of misbehavior and other stressful conditions
  - Become less interested in teaching
  - Have higher levels of stress and burnout
  - Are more likely to leave the field

The Trap of the Dedicated Teacher

- Self-image as Caring and Competent (Evaluation)
  - Difficulties with students, demands on time
  - Negative thoughts and feelings
  - Efforts to control negative thoughts and feelings
  - Many reasonable things, like exercise, listening to music, recreation
  - But also:
    - Drinking
    - Taking Medication
    - Complaining about others and the system
    - WORKING HARDER!
- Experiential Avoidance!

Experiential avoidance: A key enabler of burnout

- Experiential avoidance (EA) is the tendency to try to control the form or frequency of unpleasant thoughts and feelings even when doing so causes difficulties in life (Ellert & Forsyth, 2000; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).
  - Drinking
  - Taking Medication
  - Complaining about others and the system
  - WORKING HARDER!
- Rather than working to control unpleasant thoughts and feelings, EA seems to exacerbate these experiences (Hayes et al., 1999).
  - Thus, a diverse array of general stressors increases EA, which, in turn, locks people into struggle with whatever specific form of distress their particular situation and their unique history lead to.
Implicit Bias
Stereotype
Threat
Racial Anxiety

- Lack of
Procedural
Clarity
- Fatigue
- Poor
relationships

(Godsil, Tropp, Goff, & Powell, 2014; McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolowsky, 2014)

Are we biased? Let us count the ways!

“How’s that Working for You?”
Addressing vulnerability and trauma

On any given day 1 in 5 of your students will be:
- Having a problem
- Getting over a problem
- Getting ready to have a problem!

Problem behaviors develop over time
- **By age 6:** aggressive behavior, difficulty managing strong feelings, weak academic skills
- **Elementary school years:** academic difficulties, poor bonding to school, rejection by peers
- **By early adolescence:** drift toward other troubled peers, experimentation with problem behaviors
- **The earlier these problems begin, the more chronic and serious they become throughout adolescence**
Multi-problem youth are especially COSTLY

- The 20% of youth who have multiple problems account for about 70% - 80% of the cost of:
  - Drunk driving
  - Violent arrests
  - Total arrests
  - Drug health problems
  - Alcohol health problems
  - Improper needle use

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Risk Persists

- Exposure to multiple adverse childhood experiences predicts increased risk for serious life adjustment problems
  - Academic failure
  - Emotional and Behavioral Disorders
  - Peer and Teacher Rejection
  - Depression
- Is linked to health and life outcome status decades later
  - Predicts increased risk of dying from any one of the seven leading causes of death in adults (Felitti et al 1998)

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- How does this effect development?
  - Neurobiologists analyzed the ACE Study data against demonstrated
    - neurobiological defects that result from early trauma
    - changes to areas of the brain that mediate mood, anxiety, healthy bonding with other people, memory
    - even where our bodies store fat.
  - “early experiences can have profound long-term effects on the biological systems that govern responses to stress...Disturbances [in neuron-development] at a critical time early in life may exert a disproportionate influence, creating the conditions for childhood and adult depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms.”
Categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences

- recurrent and severe physical abuse (11%)
- recurrent and severe emotional abuse (11%)
- contact sexual abuse (22%)
- growing up in a household with:
  - an alcoholic or drug-user (25%)
  - a member being imprisoned (3%)
  - a mentally ill, chronically depressed, or institutionalized member (19%)
  - the mother being treated violently (12%)
  - both biological parents not being present (22%)

http://www.cdc.gov/ace/prevalence.htm

It's not which stressor, it's how MANY and how CHRONIC

The higher the ACE Score, the greater the likelihood that multiple negative outcomes will happen to the child almost simultaneously, at the same time.

The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences Throughout The Lifespan

Where is school on the path to negative outcomes?
Acute and Chronic Stressors

- Stress is the physiological response to the perception of loss of control resulting from an adverse situation or person
  - Acute
    - Severe stress or trauma
  - Chronic
    - High stress sustained over time
    - Chronic stress is more common and exerts a more relentless influence on children's day-to-day lives
  - Allostatic load
    - “carryover” stress
    - “hot responder” or “not motivated”
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMSU1C0DwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMSU1C0DwQ)

The Effects of Toxic Stress on Brain Development in Early Childhood

- The ability to manage stress is controlled by brain circuits and hormone systems that are activated early in life. When a child feels threatened, hormones are released and they circulate throughout the body.

  ![Image](image.png)

- Prolonged exposure to stress hormones can impact the brain and impair functioning in a variety of ways.
  - Toxic stress can impair the connection of brain circuits and, in the extreme, result in the development of a smaller brain.
    - Brain circuits are especially vulnerable as they are developing during early childhood.
      - Toxic stress can disrupt the development of these circuits.
        - This can cause an individual to develop a low threshold for stress, thereby becoming overly reactive to adverse experiences throughout life.
      - High levels of stress hormones, including cortisol, can suppress the body's immune response.
        - This can leave an individual vulnerable to a variety of infections and chronic health problems.
        - Sustained high levels of cortisol can damage the hippocampus, an area of the brain responsible for learning and memory.
        - These cognitive deficits can continue into adulthood.
Chronic Stress

- Linked to 50% or more of all absences
- Impairs attention and concentration
- Reduces cognition, creativity and memory
- Diminishes social skills and social judgment
- Reduces motivation and effort
- Increases likelihood of depression
- Reduces growth of new brain cells

Does Teacher Burnout Affect Students?

**Stress Contagion**

- Elementary school children's morning cortisol levels varied among classrooms.
- Classroom teacher burnout predicted higher morning cortisol in children.
- Burnout explained more than half of the classroom variability in morning cortisol.
- Teachers’ occupational stress is linked to students’ physiological stress regulation

This may be the pattern for a stressed student.
Questions to ask

• How can we make the behavior support process
  • Help students accept responsibility?
  • Place high value on academic engagement and achievement?
  • Teach alternative ways to behave?
  • Focus on restoring the environment and social relationships in the school?

School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is....

• A systems-based strategy to create a "host environment" in schools to reduce problem behaviors
  • Three-tier intervention logic
  • Behavioral interventions
  • Team-based planning and implementation
  • Systematic use of student-level behavior data to support decisions and improve program implementation
  • Systematic use of intervention fidelity assessments to guide implementation
  • NOT a single "program" but rather the "vessel" for many approaches

Selected
(At-risk Students)
Classroom & Small Group Strategies
(30-40% of students)

• Advanced academic support and practice
• Mandarin social skills training
• Social-emotional learning
• School-wide social skills teaching
• School-wide social skills teaching
• Active supervision and monitoring in common areas
• Positive reinforcement systems
• Restorative Practices

Targeted/Intensive
(High-risk students)
Individual Interventions
(3-5%)

• Intensive academic support
• Intensive social skills teaching
• Restorative Practices
• Effective Academic Supports
• School-wide social skills teaching
• School-wide social skills teaching
• Active supervision and monitoring in common areas
• Positive reinforcement systems
• Restorative Practices

Universal
(All Students)
School-wide, Culturally Responsive Systems of Support
(75-85% of students)

• Restorative Practices
• School-wide social skills teaching
• School-wide social skills teaching
• Active supervision and monitoring in common areas
• Positive reinforcement systems
• Restorative Practices

What we know about PBIS Effectiveness

- Evaluation reports, single-case studies, and a series of randomized control trials have demonstrated that implementation of SWPBIS is related to:
  - reduction in problem behavior
  - improved academic performance
  - improved perception of school safety
  - improved staff retention
  - improved organizational health of schools
  - reduction in bullying behaviors
  - increased social emotional competence of students
  - improved organizational health of schools
  - reduction in bullying behaviors

- There is relatively strong evidence that direct instruction of behavior school-wide, in small groups and individually within a function-based behavior plan has a positive impact on problem behavior

- There is relatively strong evidence that direct instruction of behavior school-wide, in small groups and individually within a function-based behavior plan has a positive impact on problem behavior

  Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010

- There is relatively strong evidence that direct instruction of behavior school-wide, in small groups and individually within a function-based behavior plan has a positive impact on problem behavior

  Dunlap, Iovannone, Wilson, Kincaid, & Strain, 2010

Moving Along with SW-PBIS

- Reductions in disciplinary exclusion
  - Racial/ethnic, gender and disability disproportionality remains
- Restorative Practice
  - Culture building
  - Alternative to exclusion (referrals and suspensions)
- Trauma informed care/practice
- Teacher Wellbeing

- ‘what happened, who is to blame, what punishment or sanction is needed?’
  - The easiest consequence is the one most likely to be delivered
- ‘What happened, what harm has resulted and what needs to happen to make things right?’ (O’Connell, 2004)
  - A restorative process will initially be viewed as more effortful
Restorative Practices

• Rather than simply punishing offenders, restorative practices aim to hold students accountable for their actions by involving them in face to face encounters with the people they have harmed.

A balanced approach

Why do we think it “works”

• **An Authoritative** approach is more effective than **Authoritarian**
• Social capital -- relationship
• Repair and Forgiveness
• Impulse control
• Procedural justice
Repair and Forgiveness

- Acknowledge the harm
- Receive an Apology
- Restore and/or Repair
- Hold Accountable
  - Teach new ways to behave
  - Prevent future occurrence
- Show mercy to the person who harmed you
- Move on
  - Lather, Rinse, Repeat

Restorative Practices Continuum: Procedural Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Affective statements</th>
<th>Affective questions</th>
<th>Small, impromptu conference</th>
<th>Group or circle</th>
<th>Formal conference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

We Know a Lot About Human Development

• It’s never too early, nor too late to nurture and support children and youth
  • Prevention is the outcome for everyone
  • Intervention is how we achieve prevention
• Simple things form the basis for all interventions
  • Positive, caring interactions
  • Monitoring and supervision
  • Physical activity
  • Multiple points of influence

Safe and Predictable

• Developing children need reliable caregivers who offer high predictability, or their brains will typically develop adverse adaptive responses
• Strong, secure relationships help stabilize children’s behavior and provide core guidance needed to build lifelong social skills
  • Attachment
  • Attunement

Embody respect

• Give respect to students first, even when they seem least to deserve it
• Share decision making in the class
• Avoid harsh directives
• Avoid demeaning sarcasm, shaming, yelling, etc.
• Model the process of adult thinking
• Prompt discipline through positive relationships

These are not evidence-based methods, they are simply abusive and unprofessional.
Teaching

• Every proper response you don’t see at your school is one that you need to be teaching
• Rather than telling kids to “be respectful.” demonstrate appropriate emotional responses and the circumstances within which to use them
• Allow students opportunities to practice applying them
  • It is developmentally normal for students to misbehave about every three minutes. This should be viewed as an opportunity teach, not stand in judgment of their character (or that of their family)

Teacher Wellbeing: Threats to Success

• New initiatives may fail because teachers
  • fear the extra work involved in implementing them
  • fear that their efforts will be sabotaged or priorities will changed on a whim
  • feel pressured by other demands (test scores, legal threats)
  • do not feel supported by colleagues or administrators
Organizational Support Makes the Difference!

• high-quality leadership and support provided by a principal or other administrator
• an internal “champion” for a program (aka coach)
• access to formal training and technical assistance
  • Just in time and continuous
  • No train and hope or “drive by workshops”
• adequate financial resources for adoption, implementation, and maintenance of the program.

Be Clear About What **You** Value – What Values we Share

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Thanks Renee Van Norman!

Garage Sale Principle

“Everything looks different when we can see it”

• Guidelines for focused attention
• Collect everything you can
• Lay it out where you can look at it
• Cut out the unnecessary – follow your values
Acceptance-Focused: Garage Sale!

Cut out the unnecessary
Thank you!

• Kurt Vonnegut once told a story of his favorite teacher when asked this question. The man asked him one time, "What is it artists do?" And Vonnegut mumbled, "they do two things," he said. "First, they admit they can’t straighten out the whole universe. And then second, they make at least one little part of it exactly as it should be. A blob of clay, a square of canvas, a piece of paper, or whatever."  
• We have all worked so hard and well to make this moment and this place exactly what it should be today, so be grateful!