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2010

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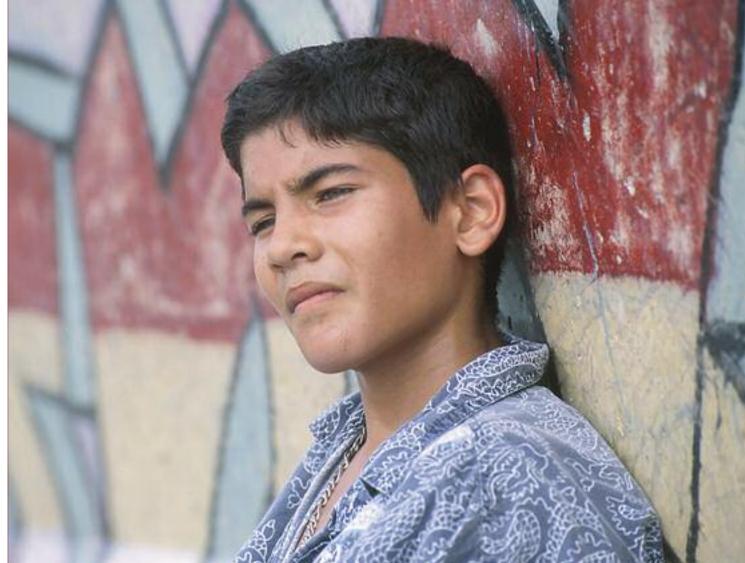
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Recommended Citation

Positive Behavior Support

Teaching and Acknowledging Expected Behaviors in an Urban High School

Kelly L. Morrissey | **Hank Bohanon** | **Pamela Fenning**

Schools are changing rapidly, and the pressure is on to find ways to effectively support the growing diversity of student needs found in general education classrooms (Knitzer, 1993; Lohrmann, Boggs, & Bambara, 2006). Traditional reactive approaches to discipline are repeatedly failing to improve the behaviors of many students, including students from diverse populations and with exceptionalities (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Reactionary discipline approaches, particularly suspension and expulsion, result in removal of students most in need of instructional minutes, especially children of minority backgrounds and those with academic problems (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Urban high schools, which serve students of diverse backgrounds, are in dire need of proactive approaches to discipline that will support student behavior rather than remove them through exclusionary discipline practices.

Positive behavior support (PBS) is one such model that is gaining empirical evidence of success as a method for addressing schoolwide behavioral issues, classroom management, and individual support systems for students with and without special needs (Taylor-Green & Kartub, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002; Warren et al., 2003).

Teaching and acknowledging appropriate behaviors on a prevention-oriented basis, rather than reacting through suspension once a problem occurs, may be the first step in turning the tide toward safer schools designed for keeping students in school and experiencing success.

The Need for a Proactive Approach

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) mandates that students with special needs have access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Although research indicates that the general education environment leads to better educational outcomes for students with special needs and is not detrimental to students without special needs (Idol,

and move along the continuum from attendance problems to dropping out of school (Sinclair et al., 2005; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Often teachers without special education training are now responsible for students with these increased academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs, and many of them feel anxious about this prospect. Staff members in inclusive general educational environments need more comprehensive techniques for behavior management as their school populations change.

Thus far, many schools have addressed concerns about handling discipline by creating increasingly punitive reactionary policies. These policies have led to numerous incidents involving seemingly trivial behaviors, such as sharing over-the-counter pain medication or holding up a paper gun, resulting in suspension or

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2006), it does pose new challenges for teachers. Students with disabilities are more likely to have behavioral difficulties, have trouble engaging in school,

expulsion of students (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Tebo, 2000). Along with these controversial incidents, suspension is widely used in

reaction to minor incidents such as attendance problems (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). A recent analysis of discipline policies revealed that the vast majority of techniques being used in schools are punitive, and many schools have little to no proactive measures in their policies (Fenning, Theodos, Benner, & Bohanon-Edmonson, 2004; Fenning et al., 2008). Although consequences for problem behaviors are necessary, the steady occurrence of several types of school crime, violence, and misbehavior (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003) indicates that for students with and without disabilities, the current punitive measures to change behaviors are ineffective.

The results of current research indicate that an overreliance on punitive policies is not only ineffective at changing behavior (Reynolds et al., 2006), but possibly exacerbates problems. Students who have been suspended tend to repeat the same offense, and are more likely to drop out of school than their peers (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Wald & Losen, 2003). In addition, zero tolerance discipline policies (wherein students are suspended or expelled for minor offenses) create a window for excluding students from the educational system disproportionately. Students from minority backgrounds, particularly African American males, and students who demonstrate low academic achievement are much more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). This trend feeds into the direct pipeline of young men who struggle in school and who are of minority descent moving into the correctional system (Noguera, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Finally, coercive methods of discipline can trigger counter-aggressive behaviors in students when used in the absence of reinforcement (Mayer & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1991). Teachers who are relying too heavily on punishment in the absence of positive reinforcement may be risking a backlash from students such as behavioral outbursts,

vandalism, or even assault in extreme cases. The bottom line is that schools are in need of a proactive method for approaching discipline. The direct teaching and acknowledging of expected behaviors involved in schoolwide PBS is one alternative to the current reactive patterns in discipline.

Overview of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)

The PBS model is a systemwide process that ideally involves teachers, students, parents, administrators, community members, and other staff members at a school (Carr et al., 2002; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; OSEP, 2002) Schoolwide PBS is a three-tiered model. Tier 1, the focus of this article, is the schoolwide system, designed to address the needs of about 80% of the student population through the delivery of a universal system of behavior support delivered to the entire school population. Schoolwide PBS is a proactive systemic approach to discipline and involves everyone in the building. The key elements of a successful schoolwide PBS system include the following:

- Committing to addressing behavior in the school.
- Forming a representative team.
- Examining behaviors at a schoolwide level using data such as office discipline referrals and surveys.
- Choosing three to five behavioral expectations and generating specific examples of these for locations throughout the school (see Table 1).
- Providing systematic direct teaching of expected behaviors to all staff and students and then acknowledging (rewarding in some way) all those who meet the expectations.
- Clarifying consistent procedures for responding to problem behaviors.
- Systematically using data to monitor progress and adjust interventions as needed (Carr et al., 2002; OSEP 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2007).

Examples from a case study of schoolwide PBS at one urban high school are

provided in the following sections of this article.

The focus of this article is schoolwide PBS applications; however, it is important to note that whereas the majority of students (up to 80% of the student population) will respond to the Tier 1 interventions of teaching and acknowledging expectations, some will not. Once the schoolwide system is in place, students with more intense behaviors are identified. Typically about 15% of the students (e.g., Tier 2 of PBS) in a school will need slightly more focused means of support, often delivered on a group basis, such as academic remediation or a group check-in check-out system (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; OSEP, 2002). In addition, about 5% of the school population (e.g., Tier 3 of PBS) benefit from even more intensive and individualized supports, which may include wraparound community services to address specific issues of quality of life (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002). Schoolwide PBS is designed to address the behavioral needs of as many students as possible in an efficient manner, freeing up resources for those who need the most support for success (Muscott et al., 2008; OSEP, 2002), including students with special needs. Many elementary and middle schools have found PBS to be effective in improving school climate and student behaviors, but the next frontier appears to be adapting PBS for use in high school settings (Sugai, Flannery, & Bohanon-Edmonson, 2005).

Teaching and Acknowledging Behaviors

Within schoolwide PBS, a core team is formed that determines systematically (through interviews, observations, and examination of discipline data such as office referrals) the major behavioral concerns of the school. The team is asked to examine schoolwide data reflecting problem behaviors, such as noise in the halls during class, and to generate replacement behaviors, such as arriving to class on time, through a decision-making process based on these data. Using a team problem-solving process, three to five general

Table 1. Sample Grid for Schoolwide Expectations

Behaviors	In the Classroom	Community: To and From School	During Assemblies
Be Respectful	**P** = Bad language, yelling, cutting people off, talking back, talking down, favoritism. **T** = Say something positive, ask for a conference, keep temper, count, teachers show interest in others.	**P** = Throwing trash in yards, walking on gardens, talking back to community members. **T** = Throw trash in can, walk on the sidewalk, let an administrator know about problems.	**P** = Being in wrong spot, booing, loud talking. **T** = Listen, participate, sit in correct spot, make encouraging/ positive statements. State dislikes appropriately when given the opportunity.
Be Academically Engaged	**P** = Head down, no materials, not participating, not handing in assignments, not physically attending, tardy, disruptive. **T** = Make the class interesting, use variety, have supplies, have assignments, ask, be in uniform, be on time. Have a creative lesson. Have rewards.	**P** = Not being on time or in dress code, not attending school, hanging out during school hours. **T** = Be on time, be in dress code. Show your ID when asked.	**P** = Not following presentations, not listening. **T** = Use materials during the assemblies, follow along.

Note. P = problems; T = teach instead.

positive behaviors are identified, such as being respectful, which serve as an overarching umbrella under which all the specific behaviors will fall. Next, specific examples of the replacement behaviors are developed to be taught in every location of the school (see Table 1). To identify replacement behaviors, staff can be asked for examples of the typical problem behaviors in that location, then asked to identify the positively stated alternative expected behavior.

Once the team has determined the expectations for the school, the entire student body is explicitly taught these expectations (Bohanon et al., 2006; OSEP, 2002) Direct teaching of expectations can be done through initial assemblies, video presentations, and ongoing direct classroom instruction, workshops, or orientations. All students and staff members should have access to the expectations.

After the expectations have been taught, the expected behaviors should be prompted and reinforced through reminders, posters, and, most important, random positive recognition for following the rules. This acknowledgement should be accessible to every student in the building. Often ticket systems are used, at least initially, where

faculty members randomly "catch" a student following the guidelines for good behavior and present them with a ticket and praise. Professional development focuses on how verbal praise is specific, tied to the behavioral expectations, and paired with the distribution of a ticket. For example, instead of saying "good job" or "thanks for being respectful," a lunchroom attendant would say, "Thank you for putting your tray away without being asked, that was very respectful." The tickets are then redeemable for some small prize, possibly being entered into a raffle for slightly more substantial items. In addition, staff members are recognized for participating in the schoolwide PBS system through tangible

iors and also help teams track how many students are being recognized in a positive way.

Less frequent, mid-level and larger scale celebrations such as dances or parties are also common and are geared toward celebrating with the school as a whole for overall improvements in behavior (Bohanon et al., 2006; Carney, 2005). This schoolwide system of teaching and acknowledging expected behaviors not only takes the guesswork out of determining what behaviors are valued and expected in a school, it also provides many opportunities for positive social engagement between students and staff members and positive recognition for many students who otherwise might go unno-

The tickets serve as a consistent reminder to adults to be looking for positive behaviors and also help teams track how many students are being recognized in a positive way.

reinforcers, such as raffle systems. Although these tickets can lead to tangible reinforcement, they also may serve as a prompt for staff to increase their positive to negative feedback practices with students. The tickets serve as a consistent reminder to adults to be looking for positive behav-

ticed unless they misbehave or fail (Muscott et al., 2008; OSEP, 2002).

Schoolwide Orientations in an Urban High School

Although examples exist that show the promise of PBS as a method to improve discipline in elementary and

Table 2. Building Expectations: A Sample Lesson Plan

Expectation: Be respectful in hallway **Location:** Hallway **Objective:** Discuss and demonstrate differences in safe and unsafe behaviors **Activity:** Role play, demonstration	
Teacher Asks	**Sample Student Responses**
Why is this important? How does it benefit us to be respectful in the halls?	No one gets hurt and people get to class on time.
Negative Example What does it look like to be disrespectful in the halls?	Running in hallways, yelling and screaming in hallways, hitting others, hanging out in wrong hallways, being late to class, hanging out in groups—clogging up hallways.
Positive Example What does it look like to be respectful in the halls?	Walking in hallways, keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself, being where you are supposed to be in order to get to class on time, walking directly to class (no congregating), no yelling (loud talking) in hallways.
Practice Remember not to do anything that will get you sent to the office. Also, remember when I raise my hand you are to stop what you are doing! When I raise my hand what are you to do? Cue students when to start and stop role plays.	Students practice negative example first; then positive example.
How will you know they have learned the skill? Quietness in the hallways; fewer incidents and tardies in hallway (based on referrals); fewer accidents and confrontations. **Next Steps:** Acknowledge respectful hallway behaviors, monitor data, and re-teach as needed.	

middle schools, there are limited data regarding PBS in high schools (Sugai et al., 2005). In large secondary schools, there is a particular need for simple and effective strategies for behavior management.

As part of a longitudinal study of PBS in urban high schools, researchers at Loyola University Chicago collaborated with a Chicago public high school to examine what PBS might look like and how effective it may be at the secondary level. Over the course of 4 years, a team of university professors, graduate students, and faculty members from the high school gathered information and took the first steps toward a schoolwide system of PBS. The major expectations developed for the building were to be: Caring, Academically engaged, Respectful, and Responsible (CARR). The team used a planning grid (see Table 1 for a portion of the grid) to outline the expected behaviors in each location of the school and then began to determine what would be the best way to teach

the expectations to the entire student body (approximately 1,800 students).

The Summer Pilot

The team decided to pilot an approach that involved directly teaching and acknowledging students for demonstrating expected behaviors during summer school when the student body would be reduced to about 100 students. During the first week of summer school, all of the students were brought together for an assembly. PBS team members reviewed the major expectations for the school and described the acknowledgement system, which involved random distribution of reward tickets that were redeemable for snack items. Next, the presenters used a simple lesson plan (Taylor-Green et al., 1997) to teach the expected behaviors for being respectful in classrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria (See Table 2).

The students were first asked why being respectful is important. They were then asked for nonexamples and

examples in each of the previously mentioned locations. Subsequently, they were asked to role play being disrespectful and then to practice being respectful. The reason for doing a role play of the nonexample first is to use the principle of behavioral momentum (Belfiore, Lee, Scheeler, & Klein, 2002; Dunlap & Morelli-Robbins, 1990). A person who complies with a request is likely to continue to comply with the next request. High school students may be more likely to agree to role play if they are first asked to show the negative. A critical element to this type of lesson plan is that the students must be taught before the role plays begin that they are not to do anything dangerous, illegal, or that might get them into disciplinary trouble. A hand signal is then taught clearly to be the "stop" signal, meaning that when the signal is given, the role play comes to an end. Table 1 provides an example of the types of expectations that were taught during this pilot.

During the orientation session in the summer pilot, the students were directly taught the expectations using the lesson plan (Taylor-Green et al., 1997) presented in Table 2. They were then acknowledged with tickets for demonstrating the behaviors. The staff members were taught to use the clear, specific praise (described earlier) when distributing tickets to students. The team felt that the students responded well to the lessons and liked receiving the tickets, resulting in improved behaviors (e.g., good contextual fit), and they decided to proceed with the intervention at the beginning of the academic school year.

Fall Schoolwide Orientation—Year 1

In the fall, the student body gathered in the auditorium, one grade level at a time. The lesson plan from the summer pilot was used again. Role plays portraying respect during assemblies were conducted with the entire group. Individual students demonstrated responsibility in the hallway through other role plays. A video, created by university and high school staff members, depicting being responsible in the cafeteria was shown to the students.

The majority of the students responded well to the assembly and participated in the role plays. The staff noted that it was somewhat overwhelming to have hundreds of students practicing walking in the halls at once, and it was difficult to determine how well the students were attending to the information presented in the auditorium. However, no major incidents of problem behavior were reported. Staff acknowledged students for participating appropriately by handing out PBS tickets, which could be redeemed at a school store for snacks at the end of each week. Throughout the school year, teachers were encouraged to re-teach and continually acknowledge students for meeting the expectations using the tickets.

Year 2 Adjustments

The team made a few adjustments to the lesson plan for Year 2 of schoolwide implementation. Several senior students had been asked about the lesson plan and reported that they felt it was geared toward younger children and seemed a little immature. For Year 2, team members were trained to mention why the behavior is important rather than asking and were encouraged to use humor and joke with the students about the lesson plan itself. An example one team member gave was saying to the students, "Okay, this may seem a little silly to some of you, but bear with me because this is important information for you to have. Knowing this stuff will work for you and help you get what you want."

Also for the orientation at the beginning of the second year of implementation, the PBS team decided to use a slightly different format for teaching expectations. Because of the inability to fit a schoolwide assembly into the schedule at the beginning of the school year, several team members and other staff members were trained to do the orientations in individual classrooms. Using this method, students were taught by a university and high school staff team member in much smaller groups of about 20. A simple grid was developed (Fenning, 2004; see Table 3) to help team members practice the key elements of the lesson plan before teaching it to students. Each team practiced the lesson while a third person watched and rated the instruction. This ensured that the lessons would be taught with consistency despite the multiple sessions. All teams reached at least 80% of the instructional items before teaching on their own.

Overall, participation was very good. At the end of each orientation, the students were given a PBS acknowledgment ticket and thanked for their respectful participation. Teachers and students gave positive feedback about the orientations. A key positive element to this approach is that the teachers were able to attend to the orientation content instead of focusing on managing student behaviors (as they had done in the large assembly). Students were able to ask questions, get involved with the role plays, and reported learning more about the PBS program. Again, the acknowledgement tickets were available for teachers to use throughout the school year.

Year 3: Back to Assemblies

At the beginning of Year 3 of implementation, the team decided to return to the schoolwide assembly orientations. This decision was made based on Office Discipline Referral (ODR) data (see Figure 1), indicating a decrease in September (from 3.65 in 2002–2003 to 1.38 in 2003–2004 ODRs per day, per month, per average daily enrollment, per 100 students) when the orientation was done in assemblies, and an increase the next year during the classroom orientations (from 1.38 in 2003–2004 to 1.97 2004–2005 ODRs per day, per month, per average daily enrollment, per 100 students). Assuming a possible connection between the orientations and ODR rates, the class-by-class orientations may have failed to produce such results because it took several weeks to reach all students, and the orientations were not completed until mid-October. During the third year, older students taught the expectations through role plays during the assemblies, and again students were given acknowledgment tickets for respectful participation.

Results

Overall, schoolwide PBS has been associated with reductions in ODRs at this school (see Figure 2). Although the lack of experimental control in the study prohibits the ability to assume causality, during the months and years where schoolwide PBS interventions were implemented, ODRs declined. Also, comparing baseline data to the first year of implementation revealed that a significantly smaller number of students received multiple ODRs during the implementation year in comparison with the baseline year (see Figure 3). Only 46% of the students in the 2002–2003 school year had zero to one ODRs compared to 63% of the students with zero to one ODRs by 2004–2005. In addition, 33% of the students had two to five ODRs in 2002–2003 compared to 23% in 2004–2005. Finally, in 2002–2003, 21%

Table 3. Lesson Checklist

Checklist for Teaching Expectations	
Activity for Teaching _____ **(list the expectation being taught)**	**Yes = 2; Good Start = 1; No = 0** **Comment for additional practice**
Were the schoolwide expectations reviewed (i.e., CARR)?	
Was the teaching method clear (e.g., discussion, role play)?	
Was there a discussion about why the expectation is important?	
Were students asked for negative examples of the expectation?	
Were students asked for positive examples of the expectation?	
Were the students allowed to practice the negative, then the positive behaviors?	
Did the teacher preteach prompts and set limits (e.g., "when I raise my hand, stop yelling") to stop inappropriate role play (e.g., "show what ____ does not look like") and were limits of behavior set?	
Total points: _____ **Teacher's Name:** _____ **Percentage:** _____ **PBS Consultant:** _____ **Teacher has reached a proficiency level of 90% or better** _____ Yes/No	

Note. CARR = Caring, Academically engaged, Respectful, and Responsible.

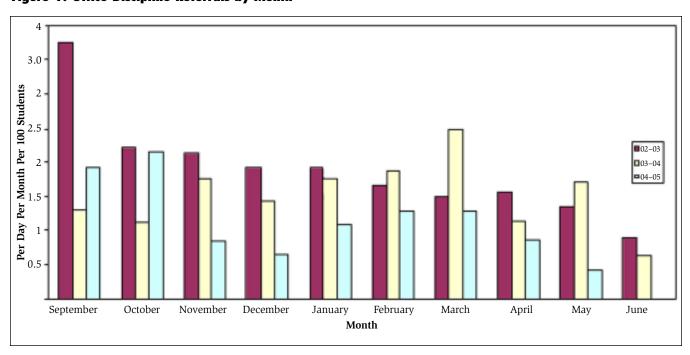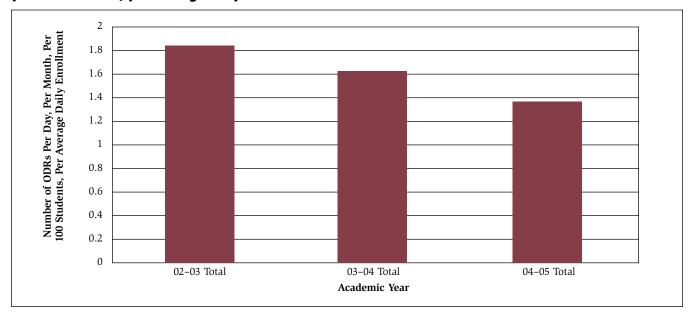**Figure 1. Office Discipline Referrals by Month**

Figure 2. Number of Office Discipline Referrals by Year Adjusted per Day, per Month, per 100 Students, per Average Daily Enrollment

of the students had six or more office discipline referrals compared to 13% in 2004–2005. A larger number of students were in the category of those requiring schoolwide Tier 1 supports, and could be supported using prevention-oriented teaching and acknowledging of behaviors implemented on a schoolwide basis, rather than requiring more intensive group (e.g., Tier 2) or individual (e.g., Tier 3) supports. No other major interventions, changes in enrollment, or other likely causes for changes in discipline rates were identi-

fied, lending support to the possible connection between schoolwide PBS and these improvements in discipline referrals.

Examination of the ODRs at this high school indicates, as mentioned earlier, that the large assembly format may have had a greater impact on student behavior (see Figure 1). In the 2003–2004 school year, the orientations were done as large assemblies by grade, all during the first week of school in September. The ODR rate dropped impressively compared to the

prior September. During the 2004–2005 school year, the assemblies were dispersed over the months of September and October. ODRs did not decrease until the month of November, which is the time when all students would have been oriented to the expectations.

Conclusion

On an anecdotal basis, there has been a great deal of positive feedback about the orientations in both the large assembly and small group formats. The students seemed to enjoy the

Figure 3. Proportional Office Discipline Referral Data

	2002–2003	2003–2004
■ 6+ Referrals to Office	21.00%	16.00%
■ 2 to 5 Refferals to Office		
■ 0 to 1 Referrals to Office		

break from routine and no major disruptions or problems have been reported. The teachers appreciated that the interruptions are brief, regardless of the orientation style. Each lesson plan takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. This brief format for teaching expectations is versatile in that it can be done in any setting where a student or group of students appear to need a reminder or need to be taught what appropriate behaviors are for a setting. The large assemblies appear to be the most efficient format for teaching expectations on a school-wide basis, whereas the small group format may serve as an ideal way for teachers to provide booster reminders of expectations throughout the school year as follow-ups are needed. Once the appropriate behaviors for the school are defined, they can easily be inserted into the lesson plan.

Students responded well to the tickets they received at random, and one of the challenges facing the team was delegating the responsibility of distributing the tickets to faculty members. The overall reduction in referrals at this particular high school during the years of implementation indicates that there was a good possibility that schoolwide PBS was having a positive impact on student behaviors (see Figures 2 and 3). Although this study is limited to data collected from one urban high school, it does lend support to further study of teaching and acknowledging appropriate behaviors in inclusive urban high schools, as well as the investigation of other aspects of PBS at the high school level. Initial studies are just the beginning of piecing together the puzzle of how PBS will work in a high school, but the picture is beginning to take shape.

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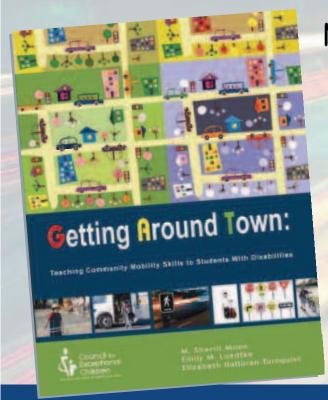
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