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Supporting All Students to be Successful (PBIS): One Rural K-12 School's Story

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Introduction to the Project

Hepburn School, including its staff, students, surrounding community and the Professional Learning Community in its entirety, is committed to demonstrating health and growth in all aspects of teaching and learning. The implementation of Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been a key component and vital element of our health and growth as a professional learning community. Our main objective of the study was to determine the exact extent to which PBIS (also referred to as PBS in some publications) affects, enhances, and improves the health, efficiency, and effectiveness of our learning community.

The researchers in this study included those who work most closely with the staff and students of our school, namely, the staff and students themselves. These are the individuals whom we deemed to be most appropriately situated to provide feedback on the issues that we were studying, and they are the same people who were at the heart of the initial implementation phase of PBIS in the form of the Hepburn Hawks High Fives. The staff and students also worked and participated with us in the on-going reflection, discussion, and adaptations to and evaluation of the original PBIS concept. Finally, these are the people who have reaped the greatest rewards as a result of this study. The result has been effectively managed classrooms, as a vital and integral component of our learning community, which increase opportunities to provide social and academic instruction.

We know that research says one of the major building blocks of effective classroom management is proactive behaviour management. We wholeheartedly embraced this idea with the implementation of PBIS in our school at the individual classroom level as well as throughout the school community. The next logical phase involved the evaluation of this initiative in order to ensure that on-going learning, improvement, and monitoring remained part of this very positive approach to behaviour management. The premise of this evaluation was twofold. First, we wished to determine the extent to which the PBIS approach and the Hepburn Hawks High Fives were effective in proactively managing and shaping student behaviour. Second, we felt, based on the outcomes of the initial evaluation, that we needed to address the question of sustainability. How do we continue to **EFFECTIVELY** support and sustain positive behaviours so as to provide a learning community culture for the success of all?

PBIS – A Definition and Goals

Positive behavioural support is a general term that refers to the application of positive behavioural interventions and systems to achieve socially important behaviour change. PBS was developed initially as an alternative to aversive interventions used with students with significant disabilities who engaged in extreme forms of self-injury and aggression. More recently, the technology has been applied successfully with a wide range of students, in a wide range of contexts, and extended from an intervention approach for individual students to an intervention approach for entire schools (Sugai and Horner, 1999, p. 6).

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Center on Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports states that “PBS is a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviour” (OSEP Center on PBIS in Lewis). Furthermore, it is “an integration of (a) valued results, (b) science of human behaviour, (c) validated procedures, and (d) systems change” (Sugai and Horner, 2001, p. 3). It is not a new curriculum or program add-on. Instead, it is a way of thinking about, addressing, and carrying out those things that already constitute every educator’s busy and varied day. It is an effective means by which to effect and facilitate cultural change within a learning community by internalizing and generalizing a way to “work smarter, not harder”. (Lewis, 2003)

PBIS is not just a program, another add-on to the schedules of teachers who are already stretched to the limits. Nor is it yet another fad in administrative practice. Rather, it is intended to be a way of thinking that, over time, results in a change in mind set to focus on teaching, modeling and demonstrating positive behavioural expectations. PBIS is the container that holds together all the great character education activities that many schools, ours included, already deliver. All the numerous curricula that incorporate the teaching of values can be tied together by PBIS. The many great and positive ideas and concepts already being taught in our school finally have a common thread weaving them together to form the fabric of what we believe, what we do, what we expect. It is a paradigm shift and a move of 180 degrees from the bottom to the top of the behavioural cycle, so that behaviour is viewed preventatively from the top, the outset, the preliminary stages of occurring, rather than from the bottom, where we react to incidents of negative or unacceptable behaviour after they have occurred.

The goals of PBIS are:

- to approach behaviour positively and preventatively;
- to respond to displays of positive behaviour as a way to model, teach, and demonstrate behavioural expectations that we have of those within our learning community; and
- to encourage continuation of positive behaviour.

We believed that by responding to displays of positive behaviours, specifically, the Hepburn Hawks High Fives set out by the staff of our school, we would reduce the incidence of undesirable and negative behaviour. Incidents involving bullying, disrespect, truancy, non-compliance, defiance, or physical assault, which have historically required intervention and involvement by both classroom teacher and the school administration, have resulted all too often in disruption of teaching and learning opportunities and the teaching-learning process. We believed that by adopting the PBIS philosophy, we would reduce the incidence of behavioural disruptions, thereby increasing uninterrupted teaching and learning opportunities. Teacher and peer teaching and learning potential and accountability would be maximized by recognizing and promoting positive behaviour as a way by which to build cohesion in classrooms and throughout the professional learning community as a whole.

Hepburn School – Who Are We?

Hepburn School is a rural K-12 school of 230 students, a teaching staff of seventeen, and an additional eleven support staff. Its stated mission is “to create a safe and caring learning environment characterized by responsibility, respect, and celebration of our successes”. Located in a rural setting and comprised of an elementary, middle, and secondary school all under one roof, our school is not in itself unique. What we do believe to be special are the central philosophy and cultural change brought about by the implementation of PBIS at our school in August 2002.

PBIS and the Hepburn Hawks High Fives

The development and implementation of PBIS at Hepburn School was neither random nor haphazard. Rather, it was presented with a great deal of planning, forethought, and preparation. It arose out of a perceived need by administration and staff to see a change in student behaviour and performance, and also from a desire to recognize and respond to displays of positive behaviour both in the classroom and at school-related events. The vision was one of an entire learning community promoting care, respect, safety, and learning and then also celebrating our successes in these areas. We recognized that, as Kagan states,

Today’s students will be tomorrow’s parents, passing their values to the next generation. In that sense, the values and virtues we instill in today’s youth determine our future. Nothing less than the basic social fabric of our society is at stake (Kagan, 2001, p. 52).

Furthermore, Tim Lewis writes that common features of the context of today's schools include an increase in problem behaviour, "educators relying on reactive and crisis management intervention to solve chronic problem behaviour", and the fact that "[t]eachers are being asked to do more with less" (website). PBIS addressed these concerns, and others, as a systemic, cultural, mind-set change for the entire learning community.

We believed that among the many factors contributing to student success, student behaviour defining a healthy, positive learning environment was key to promoting and maintaining both academic and social success. We were interested in reaping the benefits of PBIS as we observed its positive impact on the health of our learning community. We anticipated that with the change in mind-set and culture as a result of PBIS, there would come more opportunities to provide social and academic instruction. The burning question then became: How can we support, promote, encourage, and sustain positive student behaviour for the success of all?

The norm for classroom teaching seems always to have been well-defined objectives and goals for the concepts taught, with the concepts following a logical, natural progression. However, this process of teaching and learning has not always been the norm for dealing with student behaviour. Whereas in academics, the process has been to review and enhance what and how we teach to improve student learning, the same process has not always been applied to student behaviour. Rather, it has become common practice to react to student behaviour as it happens or after it has already happened. Often, the resulting reinforcement is negative and the consequences punitive. If we apply educational methods used in classroom teaching to student behaviour, both in the classroom and elsewhere in school-related settings, our teaching practice would dictate that expectations be set and followed up with pointed, perhaps repeated, teaching in a variety of different ways.

In June 2002, the decision was made to initiate planning for using the PBIS approach school-wide at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. During the summer, a school team, including the administrative team, secondary resource teacher and PBIS coach, attended an initial training event. This Introduction to PBIS Process workshop provided the team with a structure for problem-solving and action-planning and assisted with the design of a school-wide positive behaviour intervention/discipline system for all Hepburn students. The team introduced the concept at the initial staff meeting of the 2002-2003 school year. The approach was tailored and adapted for our specific context, resulting in the Hepburn Hawks High Fives.

Teachers worked together to establish the common language and expectations of our High Fives, which specified our expectations for behaviour in different school-related contexts. Together, we brainstormed our priorities for student behaviour in light of our school's context. Some of our questions included:

- What are the locations and school-related activities in which we expect students to behave in a positive, appropriate manner?
- What are the general headings (now known as the High Fives) under which all behaviour might fall?
- What are the specific behaviours under each general heading?

We determined that all of the desired behaviours might fall into one of the following five general headings:

1. Be respectful and caring
2. Be responsible
3. Be safe
4. Choose to learn
5. Celebrate success

We then brainstormed the specific locations or activities in which we wanted students to display positive behaviours. These locations were:

1. Classroom
2. Gym
3. Commons and Hallways
4. Library
5. Computer Lab
6. Bus
7. Extra-Curricular Activities

These specified locations or activities were then assigned to groups of teachers, who were asked to state “in the positive” the expectations for student behaviour in that instance. It is important to note that teachers were not grouped by grade level. It was felt strongly that the behaviour and expectations related to “respect”, for example, would be defined differently by a teacher of Grade One students than it might be by teachers at the Middle or Senior High level. For this reason, we wanted the groups to reflect input and ideas from a cross-section of grade levels in our school.

This collaborative, cooperative brainstorming approach encouraged teachers to take ownership for the approach and accept responsibility for the change in the culture of our school as it applies to student behaviour. It resulted in a school-wide cultural change rather than isolated pockets of reform in particular classrooms. It was a hallmark of the High Fives and the stated expectations that everything was stated in positive terms rather than delineated as a list of “do nots”. A positive approach is also central to PBIS. Posters were created with a matrix stating the expectations for each specific school and school-related setting (e.g., classroom, bus, gym, extra-curricular activities, library, computer lab, playground, washroom, commons and hallways). The posters were printed and distributed for display in classrooms and each of the settings specifically identified on the individual High Five posters. (See appendix A.)

Teachers were also creative in using PBIS and adapting its tenet of proactive behaviour management and positive reinforcement for the most effective, efficient use in their own classrooms. Initially, each display of positive behaviour earned a High Five note for the student and a second note for display on a hallway High Five board. After reviewing this process, teachers reported that it was cumbersome and time-consuming. They shared their adaptations. Division I and II teachers created a generic, postcard-sized card with each of the High Fives printed on it. Each student received a card for his/her desktop. Anyone, including supervisors or visiting teachers, who wanted to recognize positive behaviour by a student, simply initialled the student’s card under the appropriate behaviour heading. After the student had received several recognitions (a required number was established by each classroom teacher), the card was displayed on the hallway High Five board. When the board was filled, the

cards were sent home with the students. Staff who didn't work with a defined class of students, e.g., administrators or resource room teachers, continued to use the High Five in its original form, as did middle and high school teachers. Meanwhile, the teachers in elementary classrooms found the adapted system easier to use. (See Appendix B for both the original and adapted versions.)

PBIS – Overcoming Challenges

The implementation of the High Fives was not without challenges. Due to unforeseen changes in staffing and in light of new educational initiatives, we found ourselves re-examining our commitment to the on-going implementation of PBIS at Hepburn School. Upon reflection, we decided that we had just begun what we felt to be a valuable and culture-changing endeavour and we wished to evaluate its effectiveness to determine whether it was in fact worthy of our continued efforts. To do this, we needed to maintain what we had already established and continue to adapt the process of recognizing positive behaviour in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness.

Efforts to establish a baseline for comparison were hampered slightly by conditions and circumstances that were outside the control of the researchers. The most significant of these circumstances were changes in administration and staffing. However, our realization that changes such as these are unavoidable only reinforced the importance of PBIS as a way to change the culture of our learning community. It served to establish and maintain stability and consistency even in the midst of uncertainty and on-going flux. It allowed for cultural continuity even while the school was weathering the storms of change that are inevitable in the educational setting. With the philosophy of PBIS imbedded in the culture, the school remained steady even in the face of on-going staffing, administrative, student, and social change. The benefits of school-wide cultural change have been supported by research over the past twenty years into demonstration projects and individual school efforts:

As the behavioural culture of the school improves, behaviour improves, academic gains are experienced, and more time is directed toward academic instruction (Sugai & Horner, 2001, p. 5).

Data - Initial Findings

Baseline data provide relevant, invaluable information about the cultural change we have been striving for with the implementation of PBIS. Analysis of data showed 22 incidents of student behaviour in the 2001-2002 school year that resulted in student suspensions. These incidents translate into 233.75 hours or 14,025 lost minutes of learning for the students involved. In addition, they

represent 1,500 lost minutes for teachers, and 75 hours or 4,500 minutes lost to administrators, a loss with significant impact on administrators' availability to provide leadership support to the learning community.

With the introduction of PBIS and the resulting change in culture, routine, and mind-set, the data reflected dramatic behavioural changes. In the 2002-2003 school year, only two student suspensions were recorded, and obviously, significantly less time was lost in the minutes available for learning, teaching, and administration. In 2003-2004, the school administration recorded only a single suspension. Furthermore, incident tracking showed that 70% of the recesses and noon hours passed without incident. Of the incidents recorded, 22% were of an extremely minor nature (e.g., a student reporting that another student kicked a soccer ball out of the bounds of the school ground and retrieved it without first asking permission).

Given this data, the effectiveness and benefits of PBIS seemed to be clearly stated. In our opinion, such dramatic, positive change can come about only if there is a school-wide change in culture. Since cultural change was our primary objective, the data indicated that our objective had indeed been accomplished.

Staff and Student Reflection

The PBIS process has already been shown to be highly effective in supporting and shaping student behaviour, both in the classroom and in other school-related venues. To ensure on-going success and maintain the process, teachers and students engaged in periodic reflection that assisted in determining the effectiveness of the PBIS approach and the extent to which it was maintained. In May 2003, teachers were asked to participate in a school-wide survey to provide a snapshot of student behaviour in the school and determine what actions could be taken to ensure on-going implementation of PBIS. Furthermore, students, teachers, and support staff again took part in reflective discussion in the Winter / Spring 2003-2004 to review progress and maintenance with respect to the High Fives. Information gleaned from this activity resulted in the determination of a need for on-going review and adaptation to streamline and improve the school's efficiency in recognizing displays of positive behaviour.

Effective teachers make appropriate changes to the academic curriculum when change or adaptations are required. Skills and concepts are not lost, only reviewed or enhanced. A "behaviour curriculum" is no different. It also requires on-going review and adaptation to maintain effectiveness and to ensure that its skills and concepts are reaching all learners.

As with all curricula, teachers also need opportunity to connect with each other to discuss academic teaching strategies and ideas. With our "behaviour curriculum" of PBIS, teachers found that visiting colleagues is valuable in preventing themselves from slipping into old habits. Hence, PBIS continues to thrive in our school, even while keeping pace with social and contextual changes.

Arising from conversations among the staff was the challenge of being a K-12 school and the need to adapt the PBIS concept and its accompanying recognition for positive behaviour so that they have universal appeal and are equally meaningful for primary and senior students. Addressing this concern is part of the on-going adaptation process. We recognize the importance of recognizing positive behaviour in all students and realize that, regardless of age, students value the recognition. We continue to work on finding a way for the recognition, display and celebration to be age-appropriate.

Reflective discussion also revealed overwhelming support from both staff and students for the benefits and continued implementation of PBIS. After all, as one teacher stated, “We have provided academic support for students with Learning Disabilities, and now we’re doing the same for those who struggle behaviourally.” As a whole, school staff found that there is now greater focus on the positive and on being proactive rather than reactive. There is also attention to pre-teaching expectations. As students know the expectations of them, they can make deliberate choices about their behaviour in specific settings, giving them ownership of their own behaviour. Reinforcing specific displays of positive behaviour has resulted in entire classes of students internalizing and making that behaviour a habit, something that they do automatically.

Staff also realized that they are handling discipline differently in that they now tend to bring each issue back to the positively stated expectations and ask students, “How does this fit with our High Fives?” Ultimately, PBIS offers a systematic, consistent method by which we teach, respond to, and redirect behaviour. Some staff and students opt to wear lanyards to keep the High Fives close at hand. There was an appreciation for the consistency in the High Five language that is used from year to year. Even students mentioned this accessibility of language, saying that it was easier to stand up to a bully when you could just recite one of the High Fives (e.g., “Be Respectful and Caring”). In each situation, students realized that particular behaviours weren’t an issue because the teacher said to behave a certain way; rather, students behaved positively because it’s what we at Hepburn School believe.

In addition to discussions set aside specifically for the review of PBIS at a school-wide level, opportunities were provided and events planned throughout the year focussing on the provision of on-going review and reinforcement of PBIS and the Hepburn Hawks High Five Behavioural Expectations. These events were initially planned by staff and consisted of stations at each of the locations specified in the Behavioural Expectations matrices. Students visited each station where staff members reviewed the High Fives particular to that venue. At a later event, a group of high school students, as part of their class time, designed a Behavioural Field Day. Again, all students visited each location, where a presentation had been prepared (video, role play, etc.) to illustrate each of the High Fives. It provided not only an effective review for all students, but also allowed for peer teaching and learning as well as demonstration of creativity and presentation skills by the hosting class.

Recommendations

PBIS continues to evolve, and as with any best practice, it continues to be adapted to the needs and norms of our school and its individual classes. As a learning community, we continue to reflect on and communicate about its changes, effectiveness, and benefits. We have been deliberate about its implementation and have imbedded it into the very way we “do school”, both academically and behaviourally, in our building. As one student stated, “Kids are more encouraged to do the right thing instead of being punished for doing the wrong things.”

However, as with any instrument of change, especially one that depends wholly on “buy-in” from all staff and students, PBIS does continue to present some challenges. For example, although we wish to retain the structural integrity and consistency of our K-12 setting, feedback from teachers and students alike indicates a need to treat elementary and middle/high school students very differently in the PBIS process. While students are identical in their need for and appreciation of being recognized for their positive behaviour, the display or public recognition of this achievement requires vastly different approaches. We continue to seek out ways to accomplish this for our middle/high school population.

We have been deliberate about evaluating the effectiveness of PBIS and have been profoundly affected by the results of that evaluation. It has affirmed our proactive work with our students and has reinforced our belief that we can, and indeed do, support all students to be successful. In so doing, we have witnessed a school-wide cultural transformation that extends from individual teachers to the students in their classrooms, and out into the entire school, effecting change throughout our entire learning community and the community beyond.

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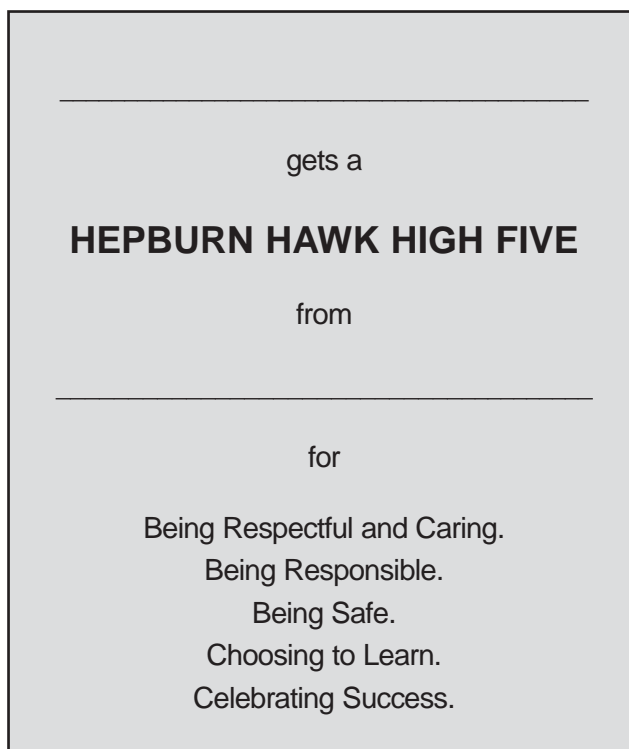
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Appendix A: Hepburn Hawks High Five Behavioural Expectations – A Poster for the Classroom

	CLASSROOM
Be Respectful and Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Listening and Eye contact • Listen and Speak in turn • Use appropriate Language, Tone, and Volume • Be Polite and Kind • Accept that others' Opinions are Valuable too • Be Helpful and Sharing • Take Care of School Property • Discuss without Condemning or Criticizing • Recognize rules specific to the Teacher and Classroom
Be Responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look after own Belongings • Arrive on Time • Bring Necessary Materials • Be Prepared • Do Assignments and Homework • Work hard
Be Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands off • Use Equipment Appropriately • Follow classroom and Teachers' Rules • Four on the Floor • Walk
Choose to Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on time and Prepared • Have materials ready • Do Assignments and get them in On Time • Ask Questions • Participate • Listen Attentively • Use Time productively and stay on task
Celebrate Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your Best • Take pride in your effort and work • Display work • Recognize successes of others • Encourage self and others

Appendix B: High Five Recognition Cards – Original and Adapted



Be Respectful and Caring	Be Responsible	
AB	EF	
CD		
Be Safe	Choose to Learn	Celebrate Success
GH		

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