In any given year, the overall percentage of young people with emotional and behavioral disorders “is estimated to be between 14 and 20 percent.” ¹ Problem behaviors, “including antisocial or aggressive behavior, and violence—have enormous personal, family, and societal costs. The annual quantifiable cost of such disorders among young people was estimated in 2007 to be $247 billion.” These disorders may interfere with a young person’s ability “to accomplish normal developmental tasks, such as establishing healthy interpersonal relationships, succeeding in school, and transitioning to the workforce.” ²

Because behavior is central to school success, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that students with disabilities must be supported in behaving appropriately and how schools must address certain behavioral challenges. The law specifically mentions that IEP teams must consider positive behavioral interventions and supports for any student whose behavior impedes his or her learning or the learning of others. As an approach to addressing behavior, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), provides a consistent, schoolwide response to students with such behavioral challenges. PBIS provides direct instruction in how to behave appropriately, and it gives those who exhibit challenging behavior the supports they need to learn why and how appropriate behavior is in their best interest (see page 11). By establishing a system of PBIS, schools support the learning of all students.

California has been especially conscientious in its mandates for addressing student behavior. Prior to July 2013, some of the state’s special education regulations far exceeded the behavioral intervention and management requirements of IDEA. However, those additional requirements were expensive and unfunded. Some educators and policymakers also saw them as cumbersome, restrictive, and too focused on compliance.

Last summer Governor Brown signed into law Assembly Bill 86, which was written in order to implement the state’s budget. One part of that bill calls for significant changes in schools by repealing behavioral intervention regulations that had been in place since 1990 (these regulations had often been referred to as simply “the Hughes Bill,” after author and then-Assemblymember Teresa Hughes). The legislative intents behind the repeal of these regulations were

1. to reduce costs,
2. to more closely align California law with IDEA, and
3. to maintain important protections for students with disabilities.

Notes
2. Ibid.
The Special EDge focuses on behavior: positive behavior intervention systems and the integration of restorative justice practices within these systems; strategies for carrying out instruction related to executive function; classroom behavior management; and, with the adoption of Assembly Bill 86, the changes to California’s longstanding behavior legislation.

These informative articles are timely and useful as we work to make changes that support the success of students with disabilities—and all students. They focus on what to do when “behavior that impedes a child’s learning or that of others” occurs. They also expand our view and explore interventions that are sustainable and have positive, systemic impact over time.

However, what happens in school represents only one part of a young person’s life. The interventions discussed in these pages—interventions that incorporate effective, research-based practices—cannot alone stem the waxing tide of behavior-related challenges that too-often impede a student’s learning or that of others and affect an individual’s entire life; the best interventions alone are not enough.

As I worked on this letter, President Obama announced, along with the Council of the Great City Schools, the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, part of his administration’s effort to help “more of our young people stay on track [by] providing the support they need to think more broadly about their future.” This initiative is bringing together parents, business leaders, athletes, mayors, members of Congress, and educational leaders from the largest 60-plus school districts across the country, including several from California, to build coordinated ladders of opportunity for young people. Because issues of problem behavior disparately affect boys and young men of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos, the president is urging schools “to partner with local businesses and foundations to connect these boys and young men to mentoring, support networks, and skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way up into the middle class.”

To make these connections, we must significantly change other behaviors—that of the adults in our schools and communities. What we as educators must first do is embrace our collective responsibility for all of our students. We can be leaders in this effort by convening our local community organizations and leaders to create a “system of care” for students who are at risk or in need of intensive behavioral supports. By developing and supporting community partnerships, we can better support access to health care and social services for students and their families and address the larger issues of school and community climate.

This kind of integrated vision requires all adults in a community to make connections, nurture relationships, and build the collaborations needed to establish consistent and coherent supports for appropriate behavior—in school and out—and to ensure that all students of any color, ability, gender, or race have ready—and realistic—models of achievement and access to opportunities that lead to career success.

We have seen the change that is needed, and it is in us.

— Fred Balcom
Early Intervention: Supporting Student Success

Research has established the effectiveness of early intervention and continues to strengthen the argument in favor of its proven results and its financial wisdom. What do innovative early intervention efforts currently look like in California?

A child acts out in the classroom by regularly screaming at the teacher and hitting other students. Or is simply uncooperative. Or withdrawn. Or can’t sit still or pay attention. The implications of these kinds of challenging behaviors are significant—and how teachers respond to them is critically important.

Until recently, the method commonly used to deal with inappropriate behavior was punishment in the form of office disciplinary referrals, suspension, and expulsion. But “the notion that by punishing students they will act better is an out-of-date model,” says Barbara McClung, director of behavioral health initiatives for the Oakland Unified School District. “This exclusionary model is deeply entrenched and based on the idea of what’s good for the whole. But the outcome for the student is bad.” She cites research that shows that even “one suspension means a child is 10 times more likely to drop out of school.”

That’s why in district after district, educators are shifting their focus toward promoting positive behavior and away from reacting to negative behavior: modeling and teaching in all classrooms, both general and special education, the behaviors that are expected, and creating for all students a supportive environment that is consistent and clear about rules and expectations. This approach has become the early intervention standard for effectively addressing behavioral problems. And when schools adopt this approach, “the number of inappropriate referrals to special education goes down,” says Virginia Reynolds, director of WestEd’s Center for Prevention & Early Intervention.

Effective Models

Challenging behavior can be a problem at any age. So educators from preschool to high school are implementing a tiered system of supports, such as the Teaching Pyramid,¹ which promotes the healthy social-emotional development of young children, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS),² a proactive approach for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors.

Whatever the age and degree of behavioral challenge, problem behavior is a form of communication that children use when they don’t have the words or the awareness to articulate what they want or need, or their emotions are overwhelming and they can’t make sense of them. Children’s actions then typically run in one of two directions: (1) they want to get something (such as attention), or (2) they want to get away from something (a difficult or painful activity or an environment that is uncomfortable, difficult to manage, or inappropriate). “Either the conditions in the classroom [the environment] trigger the behavior (e.g., a teacher shows favoritism) or the student lacks the social-emotional skills to meet the behavioral expectations of the class,” says McClung. This complicated dynamic points to the importance of teacher awareness and training in creating a positive classroom climate and addressing student behavior.

Teachers who are trained to promote positive student behavior employ a

(Effective Intervention, continued on page 4)

2. PBIS. Office of Special Education Programs. http://www.pbis.org

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number of early intervention strategies:
• being intentional about building relationships with individual students (“It all comes down to relationships, from toddler to age 22,” says Reynolds);
• helping students build relationships with each other;
• modeling—adult to adult—the kind of relationships that students should work to develop;
• developing and teaching school- or program-wide rules;
• anticipating what will trigger inappropriate behavior and rehearsing the correct conduct prior to the event (thus “pre-correcting” the behavior);
• dealing with minor or infrequent behavioral issues by linking them to rules and expectations;
• teaching the appropriate behavior/skill to replace the problem behavior; and
• increasing the frequency of authentic positive recognition.

The strategies work (see also page 16). Research shows that schools that actively and faithfully implement a tiered system of interventions such as PBIS report reductions in problem behaviors, improved perceptions of school safety, and improved academic outcomes.³

Social and Emotional Learning

The best early intervention is true to its name: it happens early. And since most serious behavioral problems have their roots in early childhood, the prekindergarten years are critical to a child’s later school success. The Center for Social and Emotional Development at Vanderbilt University has made this connection through its Teaching Pyramid, which demonstrates the interactions among a child’s social and emotional health, resulting behavior, and school success. If a child doesn’t know how to cope with anger and disappointment, for example, the child will have problems navigating the emotional landscape of a classroom—the normal challenges of creating relationships with teachers and classmates, of managing the frustrations inherent in a difficult task or the disappointment of not always being able to do well. The earlier a child develops these skills, the more likely he or she will succeed in school—and in life. Similar to what has now been established about behavior, social and emotional health can be nurtured and taught. The Teaching Pyramid is a model for early childhood educators to do just that.

Bridging the Gap

Recognizing the importance of preschool years for later school success, some school districts in California are instituting programs that bridge the gap between preschool and the elementary grades. “What’s happening in pre-K affects children in kindergarten,” says Carol Barton, early childhood education project manager in the Marin County Office of Education. “For early school success, we need to focus on pre-K.”

And that often means focusing on teacher training. Many risky behaviors in children can be prevented or mitigated when adults know how to teach social-emotional skills. Linda Brault, a project director at WestEd, uses the Teaching Pyramid to train staff in early childhood programs. In 2010–2011 she brought the pyramid to six schools in Los Angeles County with funding from the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. Analysis of that project indicated that for many teachers and administrators “the training and technical assistance produced a paradigm shift as they came to understand that healthy social-emotional development is as crucial to academic success as are pre-literacy skills and that social-emotional skills can be taught in the classroom.”⁴ Teachers reported that children learned behavioral expectations, were better able to express their emotions, and were able to resolve conflict with less teacher intervention.

Staff at Oak View Preschool in Huntington Beach also participated in Brault’s training, and Principal Joyce Horowitz agrees that “teachers now feel empowered to handle behavioral issues that might have frustrated them before.” They learned to teach the vocabulary of emotions along with acceptable behavior and to model—daily and frequently—the language and behavior with their students, sometimes using puppets for those children who are visual rather than auditory learners.

Oak View’s teachers learned to look for “hot spots”—where and when behavioral issues kept occurring. Horowitz cites the example of inappropriate behavior in the area of the classroom where children played with blocks. “Just by moving things around and making more room for them, the teacher dealt with the issue.” Others set
up specially designated spaces, such as the “calm down area” where children can go to gain more control over their emotions.

The majority of the preschool’s three- to five-year-olds feed into an adjacent K–5 elementary school. Representatives of the kindergarten staff also participated in the Teaching Pyramid training, and, Horowitz says, “the consistency of behavioral standards and expectations create the same supportive environment” for the children as they move from preschool to elementary.

Using the Teaching Pyramid, Marin County is pushing beyond kindergarten in its pre-K-to-grade-three program. This program is still unique in education. “Preschool and elementary school have been two different cultures,” says Barton. “We need to find one culture, and with the pyramid, the preschool and the general education worlds are using the same language.” Interventions that have worked in the preschool setting are shared with the elementary staff.

The program focuses on four districts with a high percentage of students who are children of color, English language learners, and/or economically disadvantaged. Tanya Myers, the early intervention program coordinator in the Novato district, says many preschoolers come to class with behavior issues rooted in their out-of-school lives. They may be acting out because they are sleep deprived, witnesses to domestic violence, or missing a parent who is deployed abroad. With early intervention, “We want to be able to avoid having kids who are distressed or hungry being referred to special education,” Myers says. And since the program was adopted, “we’ve seen a decrease in the number of referrals.”

The five-year program, funded by the Marin Community Foundation, has just completed its fourth year. Consultant Jan Latorre-Derby has examined the results to date and reports that when interventions are matched to specific behavioral issues and a more appropriate and acceptable “replacement skill” is taught, the students “are doing better on self-regulation and social expression” (staying focused, following directions, negotiating with peers, handling frustrations). “It’s prevention versus punishment.”

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.
—Frederick Douglas, 1852

Transitions

While these programs focus on easing the transition from preschool to elementary school, transitions can be difficult for students at any age; how the transitions are managed can have a noticeable effect on behavior. Moving from the casual or chaotic environment of home to the formal environment of school where children are expected to follow unfamiliar rules, routines, and expectations; moving from one activity to another in preschool and kindergarten; or transferring from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school—all create stress points for students and can precipitate challenging behavior.

Helping children through transitions by providing clear instructions and modeling or rehearsing the expected behavior can minimize problems. Once students are in elementary school, the transition to middle school “is the first big change,” says Oakland’s McClung, “and we see a spike in suspensions then. We need to create transition routines and rehearse them.”

High School

By the time students reach secondary school, behavioral issues can become serious, involving bullying and violence. To track problem behavior, Oakland will begin this fall to implement a new, detailed Office Disciplinary Referral form that will show school officials where interventions are needed. Before completing the form, a teacher is required to have employed at least three classroom interventions. These might include teaching and rehearsing behavioral rules and expectations, prompting or re-teaching a specific desired behavior, consulting with a parent, or simply changing the student’s seat.

The form includes the nature of the disruptive behavior, the possible motivation behind it, and where it occurred. “This information is anecdotal now,” says McClung. But the new form, she says, “will show us which problems are system problems, and which are student problems.” If most disruptive behavior occurs in the lunchroom, for example, “that is a system problem, and we need to address it. If one teacher is submitting a lot of forms, we may need to provide extra training in classroom management for that teacher.” And if a student is referred frequently by several staff members, that student may require targeted interventions.

Oakland is completing its third year of PBIS. All pre-K and transitional kindergarten staff have been trained in the Teaching Pyramid, and PBIS has been implemented in more than a third of the district’s public schools. According to McClung, “we’ve seen a dramatic decrease in suspensions across the board.”

In all of these programs, educators from preschool to high school say the ultimate goal of early intervention is to prevent behavioral problems. When students master the social and emotional skills that lead to better behavior, research shows that academic gains follow. It’s clear that early interventions help to create the conditions for learning that support all students.
(Law continued from page 1)

AB 86

AB 86 amends California’s Education Code in two general ways: (1) children who exhibit “serious behavioral challenges” must be assessed in a “timely and appropriate” manner to determine whether or not the behavior is a result of a disability; and (2) schools and districts must use “positive supports and interventions in accordance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act . . . and its implementing regulations” [EC 56520(b)(1)].

With the repeal of the Hughes Bill regulations, the following changes also took place:
1. A functional analysis assessment (FAA) no longer exists in the law.
2. “Problem behavior” is now defined as “behavior that impedes a child’s learning or that of others.”
3. A “Behavior Intervention Case Manager” (BICM) is no longer required for conducting assessments.
4. California no longer
   • defines the terms “behavioral intervention plan” or “serious behavior problems,”
   • requires a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) or a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to be in writing or to be a component of the IEP,
   • provides specific guidance for what types of behaviors trigger the need to develop a BIP,
   • specifies the type of information the IEP team must consider in determining whether a student requires a BIP,
   • mandates the information that must be included in a student’s BIP,
   • maintains procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of a BIP, or
   • has explicit requirements for including a behavioral specialist on a student’s IEP team.

Moving Forward

Yet what schools do matters. Research shows that whether or not students ultimately succeed in school can depend upon how teachers and school staff address the students’ problem behavior. So the Governor also signed into law Assembly Bill 110, which provided money for the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education to convene a work group of stakeholders (the Behavioral Intervention Stakeholder Work Group) to provide clarity, assistance, and guidance to schools and local education agencies (LEAs or school districts) on the changes brought about by AB 86. The ultimate goal of the group is to help ensure continued, effective, and appropriate behavioral supports to students with disabilities.

Participants in the work group represented a wide range of special education stakeholders: parents, members of advocacy groups, educators, university professors involved in teacher preparation, general and special education administrators, and others.

Protections

Krista Rose, a member of this group, is a parent of children with disabilities. “I knew that California had gone beyond what was required in IDEA,” she said in a phone interview. “But I had kids who benefited from the kinds of behavioral analyses required in the Hughes Bill. I was afraid that the new law would diminish what California had in place . . . that protections and services would go away and that the new assessments wouldn’t be thorough enough. But the work group has alleviated my concerns and fears, and I am left hopeful. It’s been a great relief to be able to see that the people at the Department of Education and in the field are continuing to honor the spirit of the law and working to keep kids in school.”

Robert Hamilton, who represented California’s Organization for Special Educators (CARS+) in the work group, also had concerns about maintaining “protections for kids” in light of the AB 86 changes. “How do you monitor what plan is being done?” he asked. “Is the plan being carried out with fidelity? What is the proof that it does or doesn’t work?”

While AB 86 did remove certain strict requirements, the state has maintained important protections for students by placing the mandates for those protections (which previously had been in state regulations) in the California Education Code. Students are still protected from any interventions that can result in pain, such as verbal abuse and inadequate supervision (EC 56521.2). The Education Code also now limits a school’s use of emergency interventions in a “behavioral emergency” to control only “unpredictable, spontaneous behavior that poses clear and present danger of serious physical harm” (EC 56521.1[a]); in addition, emergency interventions “shall not be used as a substitute for the systematic BIP [behavioral intervention plan]” (EC 56521.1[b]).

According to Hamilton, “discussions we’ve had [in the work group] addressed my concerns. People have come in with clear, concise plans and recommendations that are practical and feasible. That’s important. You’ve got to be able to do them.” Hamilton is referring to the time the work group spent studying and recommending best practices as well as grappling with policy issues. The group hosted educators from throughout the state who explained how their model programs worked under the new law. These presentations were recorded and are available for online viewing at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/bip.asp. Hamilton also described FAQs that the group developed as “very helpful” to parents and educators. Those documents are at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/bipleafaq.asp.

Renzo Bernales, a consultant at CDE, also developed, with “input from members of the work group,” a flowchart (on page 7) of “the Local Educational Agencies’ responsibilities . . . when a Manifestation Determination is required for a student,” explained Bernales. This
When a child with a disability is removed from his or her current educational placement for 10 or more days, the IEP Team must follow the requirements of 34CFR 300.530(e)(1) and determine if the student’s conduct is a manifestation of the disability.

Yes. The behavior/conduct is a manifestation of the disability.

No. The conduct/behavior is not a manifestation of the child’s disability.

If the child has had an FBA . . .

The IEP Team must conduct an FBA.

If the child does not have a BIP . . .

Convene an IEP Team meeting to review the FBA and develop a BIP.

If the child has a BIP . . .

Convene an IEP Team meeting to review and modify the BIP as needed.

The child shall receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention services and modifications that are designed to address the behavior violation so it does not recur.

IEP: Individualized Education Program
BIP: Behavior Intervention Plan
FBA: Functional Behavioral Assessment

**Greater Discretion**

Jonathan Lenz, SELPA director in Marin County, acknowledges that “the previous law did require a higher level of accountability. Before [AB 86], we had to assess. Now we don’t have to. But the previous regulations surrounding positive behavioral programming were extremely rigid and scripted.” Lenz sees the loss of the tightly scripted requirements of the Hughes Bill as ultimately a good thing: “LEAs for the first time have the freedom—and discretion—to identify their continuum of positive behavioral programming for students with IEPs.” Anjanette Pelletier, SELPA director in San Mateo County agrees. “IEP teams will have full discretion in the majority of the cases about the breadth and scope of behavioral assessments, strategies, and techniques that can be used to support students. And we are no longer burdened by a lengthy compliance checklist. We can focus purely on individualizing behavior plans to best support educational outcomes for students.”

“However,” Lenz said in a phone interview, “our SELPA’s work is grounded in best practices. I suppose there are some people who might now say that ‘we don’t have to do this [referring to the repealed portions of the Hughes Bill], so we won’t.’ But the current law does not remove a district’s obligation to provide services to support the child. That obligation is still there.”

The new law also allows more flexibility in personnel. The Hughes Bill regulations, in requiring schools to use a board-certified Behavior Intervention Case Manager to assess students for behavioral problems, had created a burden for schools in remote regions and made it more difficult for all schools to quickly assess students. AB 86 allows a greater range of qualified individuals to conduct behavioral assessments.

**(Law, continued on page 15)**
Executive Function: 
What Does It Mean? Why Is It Important? How Can We Help?

Mark Katz, PhD, Clinical and Consulting Psychologist, San Diego, CA

The term “executive function” is being used throughout educational circles, from preschool classrooms to university research labs. But what exactly is it and how does it influence school success?

To complete tasks, reach goals, solve problems, and successfully navigate our social world, we rely on our executive function, a family of mental processes that includes working memory; skills in organization, planning, and time management; and self-control and emotional self-regulation, among others. While we typically see these mental processes discussed separately, they actually work in harmony. In fact, it’s our ability to successfully synchronize these processes that allows us to navigate the world. Experts in the field have used different metaphors to describe this process and its coordination: our brain’s orchestra conductor, air traffic control system, or chief executive officer.

Executive function is getting a great deal of attention lately for good reason. How well it works is an important predictor of who will succeed in school and who will not. And if we can predict problems of executive function, we can prevent them.

Confusing Features

Students with weak executive function skills can also exhibit exceptional strengths—in their intellect and creativity, for example. This unevenness can be very confusing to parents, teachers, and to the students themselves. These students may excel at doing tasks most would consider difficult and complex, yet struggle at tasks most consider simple, if not automatic.

Even more confusing perhaps is that students with executive function challenges will often know what they’re supposed to do but have difficulty with consistently, predictably, and independently doing what they know. Many parents and teachers—with the best of intentions—treat the problem as one of “knowing”: if we simply teach a child ways to be organized and manage his time, for example, then he will be . . . organized and manage his time. And when the child “knows” but doesn’t “do,” then he must not care, or be lazy, or passive aggressive, or willful—the blaming possibilities go on. But the problem is not one of knowing; it’s a problem of performance, of execution. Helping students who have trouble executing a task goes beyond teaching them what to do. It also requires teaching them to execute what they know through coaching, cuing, prompting, reinforcing, guiding, and reminding in actual situations—sometimes referred to as the “point of performance”—where these skills are required and where students can practice.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that features of an executive function challenge are responsive to context. Students with these challenges may, on occasion, execute a certain task successfully and at other times not; but they typically will do far better (and sometimes very well) in situations they find interesting and stimulating. So interest will often trump importance, even with tasks that the student knows are critical—related to earning a passing grade, for example, or getting into college.

While delays in areas involving executive function are frequently associated with ADHD, researchers have identified these challenges among students struggling with other conditions as well, including those related to learning disabilities, autism, mood disorders, and extreme stress.

Whether or not a student has a

1. To date, experts in the field have not arrived at a universally accepted definition of executive functioning, nor of the precise number of mental processes under the executive function umbrella. There’s little argument among the experts, however, that these functions do indeed help us to plan, organize, manage, and emotionally regulate our lives.

2. Researchers have identified other mental processes as well, among them, self-monitoring and mental flexibility.


specifically identified disability, everyone struggles at some point with issues of executive function; and everyone (children and adults) benefits from direct instruction, coaching, and encouragement.

A Systems Response

Efforts to strengthen the processes associated with executive function lend themselves well to a multitiered system of support (MTSS)/response to intervention (RtI) paradigm, with all students benefiting from ongoing coaching of these mental processes at a universal/tier 1 level. Those who show early signs of struggle can benefit from additional coaching, as well as a number of specific programs, practices, and accommodations at tier 2. Those whose executive function challenges are significantly eroding their school performance can benefit from more intensive coaching, programs, practices, and accommodations at the more targeted and intensive tier 3 level.

The What, Why, and How

Once aware of the basic aspects of executive function, teachers and parents can do a great deal to support students and help them strengthen these skills. Working memory, organization, planning, time management, self-control, and emotional self-regulation all directly influence school success. Challenges in each can also be identified early and, once identified, can be improved and accommodated.

► Working memory. This involves our ability to keep information in mind long enough to reach a goal or solve a problem. When the demands of a task, academic or otherwise, exceed what we can fit into this “mental workspace,” we don’t have the information we need to successfully complete the task. Working memory involves work (or effort): repeating the numbers 7-4-2-3 involves short-term memory; repeating them in order, from lowest to highest, involves working memory. Teachers and parents will want to look for the following common signs of working memory overload:

- Poor or incomplete recall. A student starts to write a sentence, then forgets the remaining words midway through.
- Problems following instructions, especially those involving several steps.
- Place-keeping errors. The student keeps losing track of steps already completed.
- Task abandonment. The student just stops trying, a common consequence of the previous errors.

What Can We Do to Help?

To help students at risk for working memory overload,
- reduce the number of steps necessary to successfully complete a task;
- increase familiarity with the information that needs to remain in the student’s mental workspace (unfamiliar or non-meaningful information is harder to maintain);
- provide visual reminders of the steps needed to complete a task successfully;
- use a variety of memory aids (visual posters, for example, of multiplication tables, or of the correct spelling of commonly used words or of directions);

► Organization, Time Management, and Planning (also known as OTMP).

Some students have no difficulty organizing the materials they need to complete assignments, find the time to fulfill their obligations, and plan their next day and even week. Others have great difficulty; they mishandle materials, rarely if ever get assignments in on time, and don’t seem to be able to think beyond the present moment, let alone plan and complete a complex project.

OTMP problems usually become apparent by the third grade and can grow increasingly more serious in later grades, when OTMP demands increase. Homework can be particularly challenging for students with weak OTMP skills and sometimes a serious source of family stress. Common OTMP difficulties—forgetting to write down homework assignments, misplacing or forgetting to bring home necessary materials, taking an inordinate amount of time to complete homework, and sometimes just simply forgetting to turn in a completed assignment—look entirely willful, which is why they are often such a common source of stress. But they may not be willful. These are common difficulties experienced by students with weak OTMP/executive function skills.

What Can We Do to Help?

- Both teachers and parents can help children with OTMP weaknesses by providing structure: writing things down, color-coding assignments, following daily routines, and providing reminders for work to be done. Modeling effective OTMP skills can be very helpful as well, as is including some component of interest and fun in homework assignments.
- The Organizational Skills Training Program, geared toward students in grades three to five who struggle with both ADHD and OTMP, also shows effectiveness for middle school students. See http://www.aboutourkids.org/families/care_at_the_csc/ADHD/organizational_skills.

► Behavioral Inhibition (self-control). Children with poor self-control often react on impulse and without thinking through the consequences of their actions. In class, they may begin a task without first reading the instructions, or they may become disruptive if a task is too difficult.

(Executive Function, continued on page 10)
What Can We Do to Help?

- Play the research-proven PAX Good Behavior Game in class regularly with all children during their early grades. http://goodbehaviorgame.org
- For young school-aged children showing early signs of self-control and/or emotional self-regulation challenges, implement First Step to Success, an early intervention program for young children with challenging behaviors. http://www.firststeptosuccess.org

Emotional Self-Regulation. Some students with weak self-regulation skills become upset quickly in response to minor triggers. Others are also prone to angry and explosive outbursts.

Because the majority of mental health conditions are characterized by problems with emotions or emotional regulation, helping children learn to regulate their emotions and control their behavior will have far-reaching positive effects.

Psychologist Russell Barkley sees emotional self-regulation as a two-stage process. The ability to inhibit ourselves from reacting impulsively to emotional upsets (stage one) allows us then to access strategies that help us manage our emotions (stage two). One strategy that helps us divert attention from emotional triggers involves learning to avoid people or situations likely to lead to an emotional over-reaction or provocation.

However, regulating emotions involves more than controlling what upsets us. It’s also about accessing the positive emotions that help us cope with and regulate the more negative ones. Positive emotions play an important role in our ability to manage our feelings by giving us moments of relief in situations that may be upsetting or stressful; and positive emotions can potentially over-ride what might otherwise be hard-to-regulate emotions once these emotions are triggered.

Accessing positive emotions includes finding ways to calm and soothe ourselves when we find our emotions starting to get out of control, using such strategies as mindfulness practices, for example, or relaxation techniques and physical exercise.

What Can We Do to Help?

- Consider implementing Zones of Regulation, a curriculum designed to help K–12 students with lagging self-regulation skills learn how to better regulate themselves at school, at home, and in social situations. Some teachers are now applying the Zones classwide. www.zonesofregulation.com
- The PAX Good Behavior Game (http://goodbehaviorgame.org) and First Step to Success (http://www.firststeptosuccess.org) can also help to improve emotional self-regulation skills among young school-age children.

Replenishing Our Executive Function Fuel Tank

Some students—and adults—have to work much harder than others to control emotions, stay focused, and remain organized; these individuals risk depletion and exhaustion as they move through their day at school or work. The good news is that their “fuel tank” can be replenished throughout the day.

What Can We Do to Help?

- Give students an opportunity to take breaks from difficult tasks.
- Encourage children to devote short periods of time to relaxing or calming activities.
- Model or promote some form of aerobic exercise, which appears to be particularly effective in replenishing executive function fuel tanks.
- Be careful not to require students to use recess as a time to complete unfinished work. Recess provides an important opportunity for students to re-fuel.
- Learn more about Girls on the Run to see if it’s a program you might want to bring to your school or community. The program helps girls ages 8 to 13 learn how to celebrate their strengths, create positive connections, and successfully handle life’s challenges. www.girlsontherun.org

Final Thoughts

They’ll focus for hours on projects they’re interested in, but only minutes on those they’re not; figure out creative solutions to complex problems, but fail to carry out a simple request; struggle for hours to complete a 15-minute homework assignment, then forget to turn it in. They can seem so responsible and thoughtful one moment, yet so irresponsible and thoughtless the next. And if you happen to be on the other end of a relationship with a person with these challenges, you know better than most just how confusing their behavior can be—confusing and at times infuriating. That’s why executive function challenges, when misunderstood, not only prevent individuals from effectively managing their lives. Theses challenges can also do serious harm to our most important relationships.

But if misunderstanding can seriously harm our relationships, then greater understanding can repair and strengthen them. We now know how to identify executive challenges and how to help those impacted by them—loved ones included—to understand and address them in a new and hopeful light. 

Notes


Integrating PBIS and Restorative Discipline

Jeffrey Sprague, PhD, Co-director, Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, University of Oregon

“What happened? Who’s to blame? What’s the consequence or punishment?”—from traditional discipline practices
“What happened? What harm has resulted? What needs to happen to make things right?”—from restorative discipline

During the past 15 years, the use of certain “consequences” for disruptive behavior in schools—office referrals, in- and out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions—has skyrocketed. Paradoxically, these practices have been shown to actually increase aggressive behavior, truancy, vandalism, and school dropout/disengagement; these practices are also disproportionately used with students of color, with a disability, and from lower-income families.

At first glance, it makes sense to remove students from the classroom or school if their disruptive behavior doesn’t quickly improve. It also makes sense for students to experience the consequences of their behavior and for school staff to alert parents and to protect other students and school staff members. Office behavioral referrals, in- and out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions serve to accomplish all of these things. Yet any temporary “relief” that settles in when a student is removed from a school or classroom just as quickly vanishes when the student returns with the same challenging behaviors. In fact, these kinds of consequences to inappropriate behavior come with their own unintended consequences, because referrals, suspensions, and expulsions fail to teach students appropriate ways to behave. As detrimentally, they cause students to miss out on instruction so that they typically fall further behind academically and become increasingly marginalized. When students are given no educational alternative in the wake of disruptive behavior, schools may actually be contributing to serious short- and long-term negative outcomes: alienation, school failure, delinquency, mental health problems, and substance abuse.

Rather than just excluding students who persistently behave inappropriately, schools can better serve their entire student bodies by transforming the disciplinary process so that it

- helps students accept responsibility for their actions,
- places high value on academic engagement and achievement,
- teaches alternative ways to behave, and
- focuses on restoring damage to the environment and social relationships in the school.

From Restorative Justice to Restorative Discipline

A general interest in restorative justice in society at large has contributed to the development of restorative justice practices in schools and the ways that these practices might address ongoing concerns about discipline and school violence. When applied to schools, restorative discipline emphasizes repairing any harm caused by destructive behavior. This restitution and repair in the process of administering school discipline includes sanctions, but the approach does not focus on punishment as the sole solution. In fact, restoring the relationships damaged (Restoration, continued on page 12)

by the misbehavior becomes the priority. The fundamental value is that any damaged relationship can and should be repaired and that the offending individual can and should be reintegrated into the school community—not only for the good of that individual but also for the good of the community as a whole. This approach has led to reduced rates of office disciplinary referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. Anecdotal reports also document increased satisfaction with the disciplinary process by everyone involved—including students.

**Practices**

Restorative practices work to address the needs of those harmed (e.g., other students, teachers, community members), and they work to ameliorate the harm through a balance of appropriate sanctions, restitution, and restorative processes, such as peacemaking circles and mediation. The person who caused the harm is held accountable, and the practices allow her or him to be “restored” to the school community. Restorative practices help:

- focus on repairing the harm done rather than only on who’s at fault for breaking rules,
- give voice to the person(s) harmed,
- use collaborative problem-solving methods,
- enhance responsibility, and
- reintegrate the offending student into the school community.

Readers of this publication are familiar with the tenets of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS), which reframe school discipline in a model of prevention, not simply reaction. As within a system of SWPBIS, restorative discipline includes schoolwide prevention practices, where teachers provide instruction in (and model through their own behavior) skills in relationship building, reframing, conflict resolution, mindfulness of personal stress points, and the importance of seeing things from another person’s point of view. School policies and practices that focus on restoring relationships, repairing any damage, and assigning consequences or other responses to the problem do so in ways that are flexible and appropriate to the harm caused and the unique needs of all affected. This use of “differentiated discipline” gives administrators and other members of the school community opportunities to focus on repairing harm and moving forward rather than just dwelling on the severity or duration of a consequence.

**How SWPBIS and Restorative Discipline Can Work Together**

Both SWPBIS and restorative discipline attempt to change the way schools address issues of discipline, shifting the focus away from reacting to misbehavior with punitive consequences and toward strengthening and supporting desired behavior through positive relationships and repair. Both contribute to a positive school climate, one that emphasizes prevention and positive responses to problem behavior (e.g., teaching expected behaviors and supporting ways to make amends for our actions). The multitiered framework of SWPBIS provides a structure for making data-based decisions regarding the level of support or intervention that is needed. SWPBIS also offers a system of data collection and analysis to inform decisions regarding behavior.

Within a SWPBIS system, some restorative discipline interventions, such as negotiating alternatives to exclusionary discipline, typically apply at the second or third tiers of prevention. However, some restorative discipline practices—such as relationship and community building (making affective statements, asking affective questions, active listening, and reframing), class meetings, or circles—can be used as universal prevention practices at tier one. For example, a class meeting may be held to discuss how all students are affected by the theft of one student’s property and to explore what everyone can do to prevent this behavior.

**Recommendations**

Child and adolescent behavior problems are a major public health issue. To address this issue in a way that actually helps students—and that doesn’t provide a quick fix that only hides the problem—schools must do the following:
• Establish a “system of care” for students who need intensive behavioral supports.
• Support access to health care and social services for students and their families if there is a disciplinary action or if a student is at risk of such action.
• Conduct a full assessment for social, medical, and mental health problems for any expelled or suspended youth (or any youth at-risk for suspension or expulsion).
• Limit out-of-school placement for suspension or expulsion to the most egregious circumstances, and implement processes for successful reintegration and restoration.
• Develop and implement restorative practices and alternatives to out-of-school suspension or expulsion.
• Explore with parents matters related to safety and supervision whenever their child is barred from attending school.
• For out-of-school suspension or expulsion, be able to demonstrate how attendance at a school site, even in an alternative setting with a low ratio of highly trained staff to students, would be inadequate to prevent a student from causing harm to himself or herself or to others.

We know that social, emotional, and mental health support for students can decrease the need for referrals, suspension, and expulsion. Restorative justice, ideally implemented within a system of SWPBIS, offers one promising approach to creating a school that embodies an effective way to provide that support.


(Behavior continued from page 16)

supports are established: At the first tier, all students are given clear, consistent, positive instruction on how to behave. At the second, students who show signs of challenging behavior are given those next-level supports, usually in groups. The third tier is reserved for those students whose behavior requires intensive intervention.

Even if a school doesn’t have a system of PBIS, there is a great deal teachers can do at the classroom level to create a healthy climate, promote positive behavior, and ensure success—for themselves as well as for their students.

The following specific practices are proven to be effective in supporting positive behaviors and reducing or eliminating challenging behavior for all students, with and without disabilities.

**Comprehensive Classroom and Behavioral Management**

This first-tier approach requires careful planning and effort. It’s designed for and shared with all students, typically at the beginning of the school year, and regularly and consistently reviewed throughout the year. But the time spent in preparation and in direct instruction will set expectations for a successful school year and decrease the likelihood of many behavioral challenges. A comprehensive plan includes several components:

1. A statement of purpose that is brief, positive, and clear; one that conveys the goal of the plan and communicates why the plan is important.
2. Rules that are positively stated, direct, and observable and that state expectations for students while they are in the classroom.
3. Procedures that address both daily routines and less frequent activities and that identify the steps students should take to successfully complete each task.
4. Consequences that clearly articulate what happens when the rules and procedures are violated or ignored and that are designed to encourage appropriate behavior and discourage inappropriate behavior.
5. An action plan that determines how the behavior management plan will be implemented, shared, and maintained.

While a comprehensive classroom management plan will help teachers successfully address most behaviors, some students may demonstrate disruptive and noncompliant behaviors that require additional intervention.

**The Acting-Out Cycle**

When students act out, teachers often think that the inappropriate behaviors “came out of nowhere.” Yet these kinds of behaviors—from shouting or defying instructions to fighting or destroying property—typically occur in a predictable cycle. A calm student is disrupted by some kind of trigger that leads to agitation, which accelerates if the trigger isn’t interrupted, leading to more extreme behaviors.

By understanding this cycle, teachers can effectively intervene before the behavior becomes extreme, minimizing or preventing the results. For example, a teacher may notice a student tapping his pencil or showing other signs of agitation. At this point, the teacher can give the student individualized instruction, allow the student to take a break, or redirect the student in some other way.

**Evidence-based Behavioral Interventions**

“High-probability requests” represents another strategy that promotes compliant behavior in potentially volatile situations. Teachers first prompt students to engage in behaviors in which they are likely to comply (e.g., passing out papers), then immediately follow this kind of request with one they are less likely to perform (e.g., independent academic tasks). Research shows that students are more likely to comply when they are already doing what they are supposed to do.

(Behavior continued on page 14)
“Choice making” also increases compliance. For example, if a student struggles with a particular learning task, the teacher can allow her to choose from a number of different ways to complete it. This list might include the option to either write or type an assignment or to work either independently or with a peer. Teachers may also allow students to choose when to complete a task within the school day. Choice making promotes a sense of control and autonomy for the student and has also been shown to increase compliance.

For the majority of students, a comprehensive management plan and evidence-based behavioral interventions provide adequate support for appropriate classroom behavior. In some cases, however, more focused interventions may be necessary.

**Individualized Interventions**

Students with severe and persistent behavioral challenges will need individualized supports. These supports include helping students learn self-regulation strategies if they struggle to stay on task—how to monitor and manage their own classroom behaviors (e.g., bringing required materials to class or listening to directions for assignments)—and set goals for improvement.

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is another individualized strategy for addressing problem behaviors that threaten to become serious. Through FBA, teachers and other education professionals, such as school psychologists, work to determine the reasons for the challenging behaviors by analyzing the antecedents to problem behavior (i.e., conditions that precede the behavior) and the consequences (i.e., responses that follow the behavior). Educators then develop a behavior intervention plan (BIP) to address these behaviors by

### Free and Online: Resources for Classroom and Behavioral Management

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<th>Early Childhood/ Early Intervention &amp; Prevention</th>
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<td>The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL):</td>
<td><a href="http://iriscenter.com/module/beh2/">IRIS</a></td>
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<td>• Strategies to Achieve Success with Difficult Learners: Effective Strategies for Successful Teaching—<a href="http://www.pent.ca.gov/pos/cl/classroom.html">http://www.pent.ca.gov/pos/cl/classroom.html</a></td>
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<th>Functional Behavioral Assessment</th>
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<td>• Classroom Checklists, Effective Classroom Plan, Inventory Checklist, Classroom Management Self-Assessment (Revised)—<a href="http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary_level/default.aspx">http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary_level/default.aspx</a></td>
<td><a href="http://iriscenter.com/module/fba/">IRIS</a></td>
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<td>• PBIS TA Center</td>
<td>• Behavior Planning—<a href="http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/default.aspx">http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/default.aspx</a></td>
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<td>• Funds for behavioral trainings (awarded on a “first come, first served” basis) are available for schools from CalSTAT—<a href="http://www.calstat.org/ta.html">http://www.calstat.org/ta.html</a></td>
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[http://www.pent.ca.gov/beh/behplan.htm](http://www.pent.ca.gov/beh/behplan.htm)
adjusting antecedents (triggers, such as a frustrating assignment) and consequences (the rewards or results, such as being removed from class so the child doesn’t have to deal with the frustration) that contribute to the problem. The student then learns appropriate replacement behaviors.

California educators interested in learning and mastering these practices have a wealth of supports available to them. Both the IRIS Center and PENT (Positive Environment, Network of Trainers) offer free online training modules and resources to support the implementation of these effective methods (see table on page 14). Several national projects also provide invaluable information and support for educators.

The IRIS Center

The IRIS Center, funded through Vanderbilt University, is dedicated to improving school outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities. The center develops and makes available at no cost interactive training modules, case studies, activities, and other instructional materials through its Web site: www.iriscenter.com. This national center has a branch in California at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, IRIS@CGU provides training to teacher educators and professional development providers across the nation through Web Tours, Webinars, Faculty Seminars, and Work Sessions. IRIS@CGU coordinates these training and outreach services.

PENT

A California Positive Behavior Initiative, PENT has been providing information and resources to educators in the state for more than 20 years. The organization’s goal is to help educators achieve high educational outcomes through the use of positive, proactive strategies. PENT’s Web site disseminates evidence-based behavioral practices and helpful information, as do PENT’s widely established network of trainers.

National Centers

Two national centers also offer online, evidence-based resources and training for teachers interested in improving their practice relative to student behavior: (1) The National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports at http://www.pbis.org and (2) the Center on Social and Emotional Development for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu.

Conclusion

Classroom and behavior management can be one of the most challenging aspects of a teacher’s job; it is also a critically important one. Students cannot learn in a chaotic environment—whether it is of their own making or caused by others. By understanding the essentials of an evidence-based behavioral approach and accessing the many available resources, teachers can build the knowledge and develop the skills they need to effectively manage their classrooms and support optimal learning for every student.

Law

Continued from page 7

Hamilton particularly likes the new law’s emphasis on “intervening before [behavior] becomes a full-blown problem” through PBIS and bringing “everyone, all staff members—from teachers and school administrators to bus drivers and office help—on board so a consistent response is in place.”

Lenz uses a multilitered system of supports (MTSS) such as PBIS to explain the logic of the new law. In a tiered system, he says, “everybody gets something. But we were at the top of the pyramid with the Hughes Bill [regulations]. Not everyone needs that kind of intense support.” With MTSS and AB 86, “we get to work our way up there, and only if necessary. . . . The law now doesn’t limit what a district can do. This is a whole new and exciting world for LEAs. [The new law] aligns well with a multitiered system of supports—and it should translate directly to positive outcomes for students.”

Challenges

Some parents still voice concerns, however, that go well beyond any new law or regulation. Jane Floethe-Ford, director of education for Parents Helping Parents, a parent training and information center (PTI) in San José, says that “mental health and behavior issues are simply not being addressed in too many schools, whether it’s before AB 86 or after.” Specifically, according to Krista Rose, “Too many suspensions are not being documented. And then the FBAs aren’t happening, and appropriate supports and services are not being provided for the student and staff involved. Parents are often unaware of what suspension means,” Rose says, “and of the ramifications for their child’s education. For parents to be effective IEP team members, education in this area is crucial. They then can be part of the process—know the requirements related to suspension and when and how to get documentation.” Floethe-Ford adds that “any time students are removed from the classroom because a behavior issue is overlooked, it’s a problem. They lose instructional time. It’s not intentional, but it’s happening.”

Behavior is central to learning. And children need to be in school and in class in order to learn. This issue of The Special EDge examines some of the broader concerns that Rose and Floethe-Ford raise by highlighting effective ways to address student behavior, both before and after it becomes a problem.
Managing Classroom Behavior: Learning How

Sara Werner, Cammy Purper, Taryn Vanderpyl; The IRIS Center at Claremont Graduate University

The prospect of managing student behavior can make any teacher anxious. Certainly novice educators and even many experienced ones approach a new school year with some trepidation about the behavioral challenges they might face. With teacher attrition directly linked to the complications of behavior management, all teachers need—and deserve—support, mentoring, and resources to help them conduct successful classrooms. But the primary purpose of this desired success is not so much to ensure that teachers experience a good school year. Students need to know how to behave appropriately if they are going to learn.

Yet many students come to school lacking the skills, information, or awareness they need to behave appropriately. What can be done?

Extensive research shows that school climate profoundly influences student behavior. When this climate is intentionally created to be positive and supportive, research shows that students respond favorably—their behavior is more positive and they learn more. This influence is particularly powerful for students with disabilities. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has developed general guidelines for how students with disabilities should be supported in school, how their behavioral issues can and should be addressed, and how to create this kind of positive school climate: “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by—(F) providing incentives for whole-school approaches … [to] positive behavioral interventions and supports, and early intervening services” [IDEA, Section 1400].

Both law and research identify school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as a proven approach to establishing the kind of climate needed to promote student success. Within a PBIS system, three levels (or tiers) of

Notes

4. See https://schoolclimate.org/climate/