

The Positive Alternative Learning Supports Program

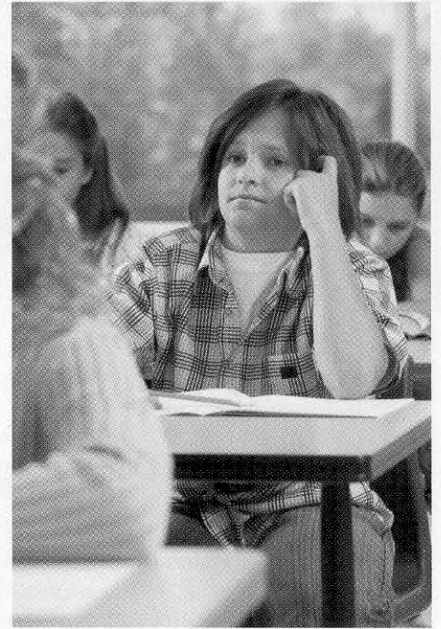
Collaborating to Improve Student Success

Patricia S. Arter

Scenario 1: Dominique is failing all of his content area classes; he misses at least 1 or 2 days a week, and he has numerous office referrals for class cutting and insubordination. Today, Dominique enters class 5 minutes late. When the teacher asks if he has a pass, he goes into a 2-minute explanation about how his locker was jammed and then he couldn't find his notebook. The teacher asks Dominique to take his seat, and he walks slowly across the room, talking to a student in passing, hitting another on the head. He finally reaches his seat, and the teacher reminds him to start the drill. He has no pencil. Another student lends him a pencil, and he raises his hand to ask if he can sharpen it. By the time Dominique has returned from sharpening his pencil, the class has moved on to the lesson. Dominique sits to read his assignment but instead stares off into space. When the teacher reminds him again to complete his work, he asks if he can use the restroom. When told that he can't at this time, Dominique shuts his notebook and refuses to read. Ten minutes later, Dominique asks to go to Guidance.

Scenario 2: Andy is failing social studies, language arts, and math. He has had numerous suspensions for classroom disruption and insubordination. Today he is returning from the office as the class reads silently. He enters the room singing and slams the door. As he crosses the room to his seat, he yells loudly across the room, "Wha'd? Somebody die?" All the students begin to laugh. The teacher asks him to take his seat and he says, "No problem, Mr. F. I'm really sorry." As he is saying this he is strutting and making faces. Again the class begins to laugh. Mr. F. says that he is disrupting the class and that if he does not stop, he will have to call home. Andy says, "My dad's number is 367-8695 or 367-9586 . . . or . . . I don't remember." The class again laughs.

Imagine these scenarios in every class, every day. How are teachers to handle the disruption and ensure that not only the class, but also these students, demonstrate adequate yearly progress? How are students like those described to be successful learners if they are constantly removed from class because of inappropriate behavior?



No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that *all* students, not just well-behaved and academically motivated students, make academic progress. Unfortunately, about 10% of students with chronic behavior problems make this goal difficult for themselves and others (Sprague & Walker, 2000; Sugai, 2000). The Positive Alternative Learning Supports (PALS) program was developed to address the targeted needs of this 10%. Classroom teachers, administrators, and support personnel used a collaborative school-based approach to conduct functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and implement a multi-component intervention program in an urban middle school setting. The PALS program sought to reduce problem behavior of the school's "frequent flyers," while enabling these students to remain in the classroom successfully and receive increased learning opportunities. This article discusses the program's critical features, implementation, and evaluation results.

Teachers at all levels of mastery cite classroom management issues as their number one concern. Moreover, approx-

imately four of every five incidents of classroom disruption can be traced to some dysfunction in school organization and management or staff training (Mayer, 2001). Many teachers in urban-setting schools are ill prepared to deal with diverse academic and behavioral needs of students with chronic misbehavior. Consequently, nearly half of classroom instructional time may be devoted to discipline problems (Ohlund & Nelson, 2001). Recent analyses of discipline referral patterns in elementary and middle schools indicate that 6% to 9% of students account for more than 50% of the total discipline referrals and that school administrators must deal with the chronic offenders or "frequent flyers" daily. Furthermore, suspensions and expulsions are disproportionately associated with male students, minority students, students with developmental delays, and students from low-income homes (Mayer). Not surprisingly, these groups of students are often in the subgroups that tend to do poorly on state assessments. When schools take a reactive approach to discipline by giving students office referrals and suspensions, it directly affects students' academic performance (Sprague & Walker; Sugai). Students who are sent out of class or removed from the school environment by out-of-school suspension tend not only to have difficulty in relationships with teachers and school personnel, but also to miss important instructional time. Consequently, any student with 10 or more disciplinary referrals during a school year is at an increased risk for academic failure and related negative outcomes in school and the community (Sprague & Walker).

The disciplinary measures of IDEA '97 emphasize the use of FBAs to understand why students are motivated to misbehave. From these assessments a team can develop positive behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) targeted to the individual student's needs. The main reason to conduct FBAs is to improve understanding of problem behavior and guide the development of an effective, efficient, and relative BIP. A large body of research supports the effectiveness and utility of the functional analytic approach (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, &

Hagan-Burke, 2000). In fact, more than 40 years of applied research has documented the effectiveness of identifying antecedent and consequences in designing effective behavioral supports (March & Horner, 2002). Although most of these studies were conducted with students with moderate to severe developmental delays, the studies substantiate that once antecedents, consequences, and setting events are identified using FBAs, the interventions developed reduce or eliminate specific problem behavior (Quinn et al., 2001). To date, there is little research related to the use of FBAs and function-based support in a typical school context. Nor has there been any research on the extent to which FBA procedures may hold importance for targeted group interventions (March & Horner; Quinn et al.).

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Traditionally, educational programs tend to treat conditions associated with academic achievement as separate from those associated with antisocial behavior (McEvoy, 2000). However, it is helpful to relate academic performance to aspects of classroom instruction that precede and follow student performance, much like understanding the events that precede and follow student behavior when conducting an FBA. Poor academic performance can be functionally related to the arrangement of the instructional environment, sequence of instruction, frequency of response opportunities, and structured contingencies (Daly, Witt, Martens, & Dool, 1997). The use of FBAs and BIPs is beginning to be expanded to academic contexts with the development of

effective academic and behavior intervention supports (EABIS). Although EABIS is based on the effective positive behavioral supports model developed by Sugai and colleagues, EABIS focuses not only on improving student behavior but also academics. The effectiveness of the EABIS study indicated a significant decrease in office referrals and an increase in student test scores as a result of the schools' participation in an EABIS program (Ohlund & Nelson, 2001).

The PALS program was an action research project that evolved from

- A need to improve student outcomes.
- An awareness of best practices in behavior management.
- Data-based decision making.
- Administrative support and empowerment of school-based personnel.
- Collaboration of an interdisciplinary team of practitioners willing to implement change in order to improve student outcomes.

Setting and Participants

The PALS program was designed and implemented in an urban middle school that serves students in the sixth through eighth grades and has a total of 898 students. The school's demographic data indicate that of the total school population, approximately 59% are African American, 34% are Caucasian, 4% are Asian, and 3% are Hispanic. Forty percent of the students receive free and reduced meals, and 15% are identified as needing special education. In addition, the school is located in close proximity to a military base, a trailer park, and a homeless shelter, and has about a 33% mobility rate each year (see Figure 1).

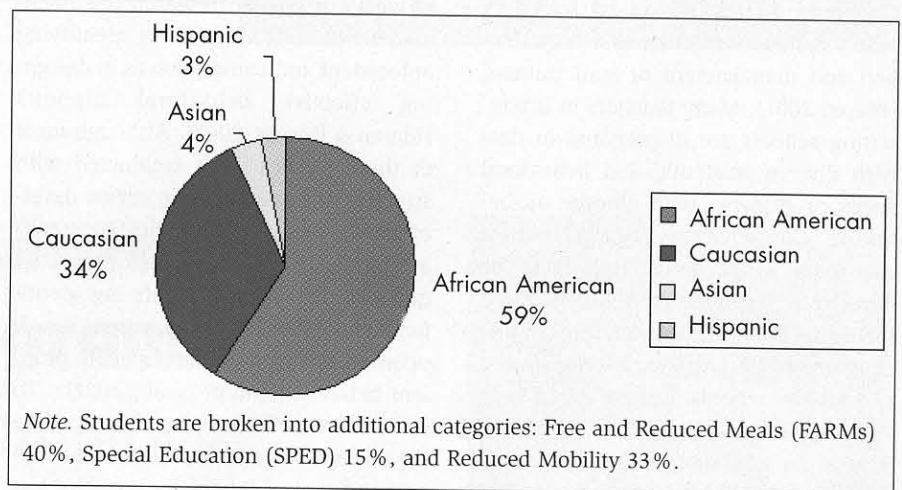
In an attempt to follow best practices, the school has shifted away from aversive measures to control behavior and toward emphasizing preventive and positive approaches in a schoolwide behavior program (Sugai & Horner, 2002). At the time of PALS development, the school had implemented a schoolwide behavior program of *Prevent, Act, Resolve* (PAR). PAR is designed to *prevent* the occurrence of misbehavior, *act*

or respond to instances of rule compliance and noncompliance, and resolve the issues that underlie the misbehavior (Rosenberg & Jackman, 2003). The PAR model uses positive reinforcements for rule compliance and a hierarchy of negative consequences for noncompliance. The PAR program was implemented with all students in the school. Attendance, referral, suspension, and academic data were analyzed regularly at school improvement team meetings and shared at faculty meetings with the entire school. In 2001, of the 19 middle schools in the county, the school was ranked seventh in the number of office referrals given to students. The school was ranked second highest in the county for referrals for classroom disruption and fifth for fighting, class cuts/truancy, and insubordination. Data also demonstrated that a small percentage of students accounted for most of the referrals. Five percent of the total student population had received more than 10 office referrals. The most frequent reasons for these referrals were classroom disruption (28%), insubordination (20%), fighting (10%), and cutting class or truancy (5%). Apparently, many of the chronic offenders were resistant to the PAR program and needed more targeted interventions and supports.

Consequently, a collaborative behavioral study team was formed. The team was comprised of two administrators; a school psychologist; one conflict resolution counselor; two guidance counselors; one mentor teacher; one parent volunteer; one encore (special areas such as gym, music, or art) teacher; the alternative learning placement (ALP) coordinator; five content (science, math, social studies, and language arts) area classroom teachers; the student investigator; and one special education teacher. Although there were no specific criteria necessary to participate on the behavioral study team, the teachers and support personnel were directly or indirectly in contact with students and were concerned with improving student behavioral and academic outcomes at the school. Participation in the group was voluntary.

The PALS program focused on 40 sixth-grade male students. Students

Figure 1. Demographic Data



were randomly assigned to one of two grade-level teams. One group of students received the individually selected interventions of the PALS program, and the others served as a control group, receiving the schoolwide behavior program of PAR. To be included in this study the male students had to have met one or more of the following criteria during the previous school year: (a) 10 or more absences from school, (b) three or more office referrals for inappropriate behavior, (c) Ds or Es in two or more content area classes, and/or (d) three or more suspensions. In addition, students had to have been nominated by at least one fifth- or sixth-grade teacher, counselor, or administrator. Students with and without disabilities were included in both groups (see Table 1).

Intervention Components

The PALS program targeted chronic behavior problems that were not responsive to the schoolwide behavior program of the PAR model. Although all students in the study received PAR, the experimental group also received the targeted intervention of PALS. A school-based team developed individualized plans according to the students' needs, which included conducting FBAs and developing behavioral intervention plans with the following components (a) behavioral supports, (b) academic supports, (c) counseling and social skills, and (d) mentoring.

The PALS program assessed the students' behavioral and academic performance during the time of the inter-

vention. Student performance was measured by (a) the number of days present per marking period; (b) the number and intensity of office referrals; (c) the number of days of suspensions from school; and (d) the GPA in content area classes (science, math, social studies, and language arts). Baseline data were gathered during the first and second marking periods while the intervention data were gathered in the third and fourth marking periods of the school year. (See Figure 2 for assessment variable definitions.)

Procedures

1. After the behavioral study team was formed, the team was trained to (a) conduct student, teacher, and parent interviews; (b) review archival records; (c) conduct FBAs; (d) develop BIPs; and (e) administer the four components of the PALS program.

2. The team began by reviewing a list of students who met the selection criteria. In addition, teachers were requested to nominate their "Top Five"—five additional students from their teams that they felt were challenging academically and/or behaviorally. From the student list, each member of the group selected two students to mentor from the PALS group. Teachers were encouraged to choose students with whom they had established relationships. Once teachers had chosen the students they would mentor, they completed parent, student, and teacher interviews for those students, as well as an archival record review. This proce-

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Variables	Control	Experimental
6th Grade Boys	17	23
African American	76.5%	69.6%
Caucasian	23.5%	26.1%
General Ed	88.2%	65.2%
ED	5.9%	4.3%
LD	5.9%	8.7%
504	0	8.7%
Other Special Ed	0	4.3%
Referred Special Ed	0	8.7%

dures allowed the teachers to know their students in a more personal and informed way than might normally occur in daily classroom interactions.

3. A functional behavioral assessment was used to formulate hypotheses regarding the antecedents and functions of the misbehavior to determine why students were not succeeding behaviorally and academically. According to behavior theory, all misbehavior has a function. There are four common functions for misbehavior: avoidance, attention, revenge, and/or power (March & Horner, 2002). Within each of these four functions, there are numerous subcategories. For example, a student's misbehavior may result from avoidance of task demand (high demand task or low demand task), particular people (certain peers or teachers), or sensory conditions (loud noises, cold temperatures). Moreover, each function can result in a variety of inappropriate behaviors depending on the individual. A student may choose to avoid something by sleeping, cutting class, or acting insubordinate. Negative consequences delivered without addressing what the student accomplishes by engaging in the misbehavior may not only fail, but may even exacerbate the misbehavior (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2000). The scenarios at the beginning of this article are composites of actual students the team worked with in order to determine what antecedents triggered the behavior and what consequences were reinforcing the behavior. For example, in Scenario 1, a student who has inefficient learning skills for a

class may want to escape or avoid that class. He may escape or avoid the class by sleeping, coming in late to class, and/or acting out. Sending the student to the office for misbehavior does not reduce the problem behavior, but might in fact increase it, because it allows the student to escape or avoid the class by removing him. In Scenario 2, the student acts out in class in order to get

teacher and peer attention. Despite the teacher's negative reaction, the attention reinforces the behavior. Therefore, it was essential for the teachers to understand why the student was misbehaving before choosing and implementing an intervention.

Content area teachers were asked to conduct FBAs by observing and recording data on students' behavior for 10 days. A form was developed (see Figure 3) to enable teachers to quickly and easily record data on the type of behavior as well as when the behavior occurred without stopping their instruction. Additionally, encore area teachers conducted FBAs for 5 days. To help the teachers establish a pattern of behavior for each target student in their classes and develop a hypothesis of why the behavior was occurring in that setting, the classroom teacher rather than outside team members conducted the FBAs.

4. Once the FBAs were completed, a team-based problem-solving approach was used to develop a BIP that included

Figure 2. Definitions of Dependent Variables for PALS Study

1. **Attendance.** Students are required to attend school 180 days in a school year. There are approximately 45 days per marking period and four marking periods in a school year. Student progress was measured by the number of days they are present during marking periods three and four.
2. **Discipline Referrals.** Students are typically referred to administrators on office referral forms for serious or recurrent disciplinary offenses. Reasons for an office referral include tardiness, truancy, fighting, insubordination, and classroom disruption. In addition to a simple frequency count of referrals, the reasons were rated according to the seriousness of the offense on a 3-point scale. Intensity I offenses were considered minor such as tardiness. Intensity II offenses were considered serious and included class disruption, class cutting, or disrespect. Intensity III offenses were considered very serious and included assaults, possession of weapons or drugs, or arson. Student performance was assessed by both the frequency and intensity of the behavior leading to the office referrals for marking periods three and four.
3. **Suspensions.** Students were suspended when they received recurring office referrals or if the reason for an office referral was severe (Intensity II or III) or a minor offense that was repetitive. The number of days of suspensions was determined by the seriousness of the offense. Student performance was assessed by frequency of the suspensions for marking periods three and four.
4. **Grade Point Average (GPA).** The grade point average or GPA measures the students' academic performance. Students received grades of A (outstanding), B (very good), C (average), D (needs improvement), or E (failure). Each letter grade was converted to a numeric grade: A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and E = 0. Grades were then added up and divided by the number of classes for a grade point average with a numeric equivalent.

Figure 3. Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

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(a) strategies for minimizing, preventing, or neutralizing the impact of setting events; (b) removing antecedents that trigger inappropriate behavior; (c) teaching appropriate replacement behaviors, social skills, and responses; and (d) removing consequent events that maintain problem behavior. It is important to point out that although there were team members with expertise in behavior management, they acted

mostly in the capacity of facilitators, allowing the classroom teachers to critically analyze the data and generate solutions. After all data had been collected, the behavioral study group discussed the data and formulated hypotheses about the function of each student's misbehavior. Using the FBAs, the team tried to determine whether individual student behavior arose from the need for attention, power, revenge,

or avoidance. The FBAs allowed the team to look at a pattern of behavior over time and across settings. Individual teachers were able to see that the challenging behavior that was present in his or her setting may or may not have been present in other settings. This led to valuable discussion between team members about what might be triggering behavior or maintaining behavior in particular settings. Additionally, the team analyzed the patterns of misbehavior to determine at what point during classroom instruction the students' behavior was most problematic (e.g. whole group instruction, independent work, transitions, group work, etc.). Again, this discussion was paramount to the success of the behavioral intervention plans in that teachers were able to share what worked in their classrooms and offer instructional and behavioral suggestions for the team to consider for each specific student. See Figure 4 for team discussion points.

Once the function of the behavior was defined, the team decided what individualized components of the PALS program (behavioral support, academic support, counseling, and mentoring) would best address the functions of specific student behavior, and an individualized BIP was written and implemented for the student. See Figure 5 for examples of possible strategies in each individualized intervention component.

5. Each individualized component of the intervention was implemented as needed and designated on the BIP. Individualized behavioral supports were implemented as designated in the BIP by all teachers on the team. These supports included additional positive reinforcement, behavior contracts, and self-monitoring sheets. Additionally, teachers focused on instructional and man-

Figure 4. Team Discussion Points

Team Discussion Points

The following are examples of questions/talking points used during the team analysis of FBA data and development of BIPs:

- Is the challenging behavior occurring in more than one setting?
- If so, what setting events are common that could be maintaining misbehavior?
- If not, what happens in the settings in which the behavior is NOT displayed?
- What seems to be working in these settings?
- When (day and/or time) does the challenging behavior occur?
- What happens prior to the challenging behavior?
- What is happening instructionally during the time the challenging behavior is exhibited?
- How does the teacher react to the behavior?
- How does the class react to the behavior?
- How does the student react to the consequence of the misbehavior?
- What might the “pay-off” be for the student?
- How can he get the same “pay-off” in a more appropriate way?
- What academic skills is the student lacking that may lead to the misbehavior?
- How might the teacher remediate the missing academic skills?
- What instructional strategies can be used that will help the student be more successful?
- What school personnel have a good relationship with the student?
- What are the characteristics of this relationship?
- How can this relationship be used to improve behavior in other settings?
- In what ways can the teacher help develop rapport with the student?
- How can student interests be used to improve academic and behavioral outcomes?
- What social skills is the student lacking?
- How might these missing social skills be taught and practiced in the setting?
- How might the teacher reinforce appropriate social and academic behaviors in a way that is meaningful to the student?

agement components that enabled students to be more successful academically and behaviorally. The academic support component was implemented as needed within the classroom by the classroom teachers, with additional after-school tutoring as needed. The counseling component was administered as needed by the conflict resolution counselor. Individual and group counseling sessions included development of social skills, organization, study and test-taking skills, time management, self-advocacy, and anger management. Each mentor was responsible for meeting with students as indicated on the BIP. Mentoring consisted of meeting

the student informally to discuss the team’s findings and helping the student set individual goals and self-monitor behavior. Additionally, mentors were responsible for meeting with students for follow-up discussions on behavior/achievement, meeting with teachers to discuss student progress, assisting students in academic areas, cueing students in school situations on personal goals and appropriate behavior, contacting parents on student progress, and positively reinforcing successful behavior/achievement.

The intervention components were implemented in the third and fourth marking period, which lasted approxi-

mately 18 weeks. Data were collected and analyzed weekly to determine whether the intervention procedures were effective. The team met monthly to determine whether the BIPs were effective. However, if a subject received three referrals at any time during the intervention period, the team reevaluated the BIP and made appropriate adjustments immediately.

Major Findings and Discussion

The team hypothesized that additional support (i.e., behavior, academics, counseling, and social skills training) would increase the students’ success in the classroom and motivate the students to attend classes regularly. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was done to determine whether results were statistically significant when controlling for prior absences, referrals, suspensions, and GPA in the baseline condition. The results indicated that after adjustment of the covariate (prior absences, referrals, suspensions, or GPA), a significant main effect was found for the group in the areas of absences and GPA but no significant difference in the areas of referrals or suspensions.

In regard to behavior, the results of the study demonstrated no significant difference between groups in the number of office referrals or suspensions as compared to the control group. Students who participated in this study had chronic behavior problems for many years. These inappropriate behaviors had provided a “payoff” for the students. The PALS program began to teach them more appropriate replacement behaviors, but it often requires extensive time to replace one behavior with another. If the intervention were given more time, it would have been possible to provide students more opportunities to develop and practice appropriate replacement skills for their inappropriate behavior. More practice time would not only allow new behaviors to become more routine, it would also provide students with the necessary time needed to generalize these behaviors to other settings. Additionally, these students were not only learning more appropriate social behaviors, they were also learning more appropri-

Figure 5. Individualized Components for Behavioral Intervention Plans

- 1. Behavioral Supports.** Behavioral supports are designed to assist students in demonstrating appropriate and positive behavior. Examples of possible behavioral supports included (a) individual behavior contracts, (b) proximity seating, (c) self-monitoring sheets, and (d) tangible reinforcers for reaching behavior criteria.
- 2. Academic Supports.** Academic supports are designed to assist students in becoming more efficient learners and are used to promote academic success. Academic strategies were integrated into BIP plans for those students who were not receiving a “C” or better in the content area classes of math, science, social studies, and language arts. Students received academic supports for up to 60 minutes weekly as needed. Examples of academic supports included (a) after-school tutoring, (b) peer buddies, (c) modified assignments, (d) assistance in obtaining make-up work when absent, and (e) organizational assistance.
- 3. Counseling.** Counseling occurred as needed for students in a small group and individually. Counseling sessions focused on individual needs in conflict resolution and social skills training (SST) as indicated by the BIP. The group counseling component provided students with an opportunity to work on skills that they lacked which may have prevented their success within the school and community. Subjects received up to 40 minutes per week of group counseling and individual counseling as needed. Examples of counseling lessons included (a) anger management, (b) cooperative group work, (c) appropriate communication, and (d) self-esteem building.
- 4. Mentoring.** The mentoring component was designed to allow the student to develop a positive relationship with a caring adult and become more integrated within the school community. Members of the behavioral study team served as mentors in order to further develop positive adult relationships with the targeted students. As needed and indicated on the BIP, a mentor was provided for students. Mentors provided the students with support and guidance in academic, personal, and behavioral domains. Students received mentoring time each week as needed. Examples of mentoring activities included (a) positive recognition for appropriate behavior and academic success, (b) lunch with student, (c) contact with parent or guardian, (d) goal setting, and (e) positive incentive activities outside the academic domain (e.g., playing basketball, time on the computer, a hands-on project).

ate academic behaviors. The results of this study suggest that although there were positive outcomes for the students overall, chronic behavior may be resistant to change.

However, students in the PALS program were present significantly more days (see Figure 6) and demonstrated significantly higher achievement as measured by GPA (see Figure 7) than the students in the control group. In addition, 47% of the control group was retained in sixth grade, whereas 52.9% were promoted, compared to 13% retained in the experimental group and 87% promoted. These results suggest that the additional supports increased the students' motivation to attend

school with greater regularity and that their attendance increased achievement.

Taken together, the results of this study lead to two broad conclusions: (a) The PALS multicomponent program is effective in creating positive outcomes for students, and (b) adult support contributes to student success. We discuss each of these conclusions in the following sections.

The Multiple Supports of the PALS Program Positively Impacted Attendance and Academic Achievement

Student success is often associated with having both academically and socially appropriate models available that moni-

tor actions and give meaningful feedback. The overall goal of PALS was to help students be more successful in the school environment by providing them with additional supports (i.e., academic, behavior, counseling, and mentoring). PALS helped the students to be more successful.

Before the intervention, students in the PALS program experienced repeated academic failures. Lauchlan (2000) noted that academic-related concerns are one possible reason for chronic nonattendance. When additional academic and behavior supports were added, students in the PALS program began to experience more success in the classroom. In part, the increase in attendance may be attributed to the fact that students were experiencing academic success rather than academic failure. Therefore, students were more motivated to attend school because academic failure was no longer a concern that warranted missing class.

Clearly, missing instruction negatively impacts students' performance. Students who do not attend school cannot achieve their full academic potential. Previous research demonstrates that there is a significant positive relationship between student attendance and student achievement (Carroll, 1963; Easton & Engelhard, 2001; Roby, 2004). Students who attend classes have more opportunities to acquire knowledge and therefore to improve achievement. Additionally, chronic misbehavior often leads to poor teacher-student relationships that, in turn, may have a negative effect on a student's academic achievement and attendance. When students consistently respond to instruction with noncompliant or disruptive behaviors, research demonstrates that teachers call on these students less, allow them shorter wait times to answer, and provide less corrective and positive feedback (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). Repeated academic failures provide little motivation to attend school. Students with chronic behavior problems lack the instructional opportunity and positive adult attention given students who demonstrate appropriate behaviors, often leading to limited successes in and out of the classroom.

Conversely, academically successful students are afforded opportunities to respond, adequate wait time, and both corrective and positive feedback. Moreover, students who have developed a caring relationship with teachers are more inclined to meet established behavioral and academic expectations (Lunenburg, 2000). Providing students in the PALS program with needed supports (i.e., academic, behavioral, and mentoring) helped to increase attendance and academic achievement.

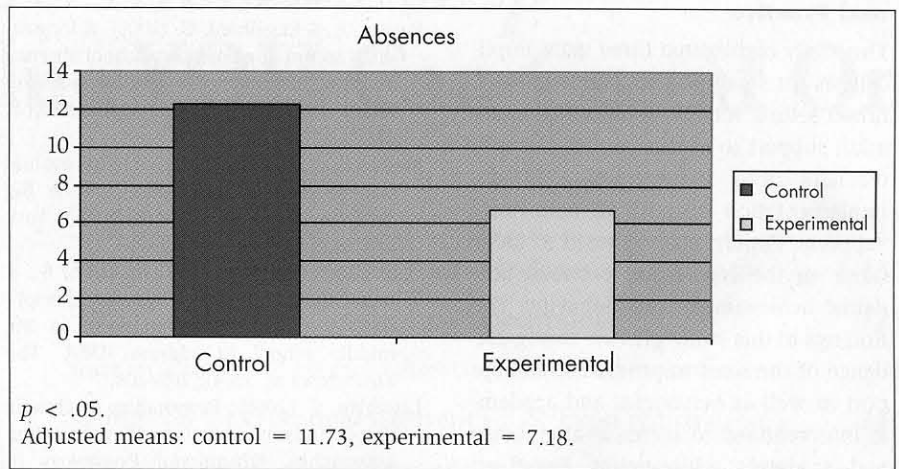
Students in the PALS program significantly increased their GPAs and attendance as compared to students in the control group. Students attended school more often during the intervention. By increasing attendance, students also improved their achievement in class because they were present for learning. The academic support taught students better study skills, test taking strategies, time management, and organization. As a result of the support students received, they began completing homework, handing in long-term projects, completing class work, participating in class, and improving quiz and test scores. Becoming more successful in these academic areas resulted in higher GPAs for students. Clearly, by providing students with the needed supports, the PALS program was able to affect student attendance and achievement positively.

Adult Support Contributes to Student Success

A major component of the PALS program was adult mentoring. Each student was assigned a teacher mentor. Mentors provided support for students by checking in with them several times a week to discuss academic, social/emotional, and behavioral concerns. Additionally, all content area teachers were aware of the targeted students' behavior and/or academic goals and positively reinforced the students for appropriate behavior. The mentoring component was one possible motivating factor that contributed to the increase in student success in the areas of attendance and achievement.

The mentoring was important because it helped break the cyclical effect of reactive behavior in both stu-

Figure 6. Days Absent



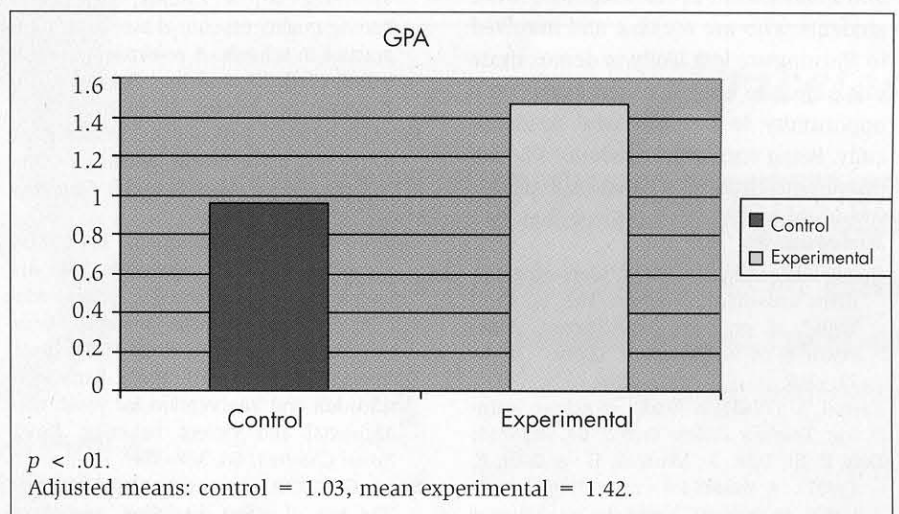
dents and teachers. Previously, students in the PALS program had demonstrated behaviors that were problematic to their teachers, such as academic failure, chronic disruptive behavior, poor peer and adult relationships, and poor attendance. These undesirable classroom behaviors often elicited negative attention from school personnel. As a result, the negative adult attention often led students to respond with inappropriate behaviors such as noncompliance, insubordination, and classroom disruption.

Through the PALS program, both teachers and students were made aware of their part in the reactive cycle. The PALS program increased opportunities for positive adult-student interaction. Teachers as participants and mentors in the PALS program became more aware of the students' behavior and the "pay-

off," or function of those behaviors for the students, as well as their role in the reactive process. The teacher mentors learned ways to address inappropriate behaviors proactively as well as ways to reinforce appropriate behavior positively in order to help students be more successful.

Studies indicate that supportive adult relationships are linked to positive outcomes for at-risk youth including increased attendance, self-esteem, social skills, and achievement (Cambell-Whatley, 2001; Frecknall & Luks, 1992; McPartland & Nettles, 1991). Students in the PALS program received more positive adult attention through individual mentoring and group counseling. This additional adult support for students in the PALS program increased student success in attendance and academic achievement.

Figure 7. GPA



Implications for Research and Practice

The study highlighted three main implications for research and practice. First, urban setting schools should offer more adult support to at-risk youths. Second, teachers need more training in the implementation of positive behavioral supports. Finally, schools need to focus more on the connection between academic achievement and behavior. The findings of this study provide strong evidence of the need to provide adult support as well as behavioral and academic interventions to increase attendance and academic achievement. Based on the findings of this study, providing students who exhibit chronic misbehavior

Additional adult support for students in the PALS program increased student success in attendance and academic achievement.

with adult mentoring and both behavioral and academic support can increase attendance and academic achievement. The results indicated that attendance and academic achievement are related dynamically. Providing students with support and motivation to attend school offers opportunities to improve academic achievement. Students who are at school have more time for instruction and involvement in learning. Moreover, students who are on task and involved in learning are less likely to demonstrate inappropriate behavior and have more opportunity to be successful academically. Being successful academically can provide motivation to attend school.

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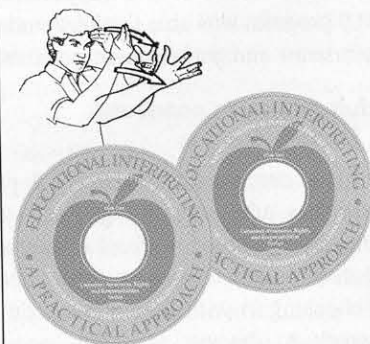
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