

## Evidence Connecting Academic Success and Behavior

- The relationship between academic and behavior problems is a long recognized phenomenon (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Hinshaw, 1992). In their meta-analysis, Maguin and Loeber (1996) found that poor academic performance appears to be related to frequency, persistence, and seriousness of delinquent activity. A more recent study (Joffe & Black, 2012) revealed that those with low academic performance had significantly greater social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. Educators can clearly see this in their schools and classrooms, yet we continually try to add more rigor to academic instruction without always trying to work on the barriers that many of our students have to reaching academic success. While many kids need help with their social and emotional skills, one of the worst things we can do for a child is lower our expectations because we feel bad or sorry for them. Instead, have high expectations for them and give them the additional supports and scaffolds needed to get there. High expectations are needed for ALL. Be who kids need you to be, which can be different for each child. We can complain about what parents didn't instill in them, or we can change their trajectory.
- **Behavior is key** “Clearly, the relationship between academics and behavior exists and is powerful, and problems in either area are a risk factor for problems in the other, but in this study problems in behavior seemed to have a greater impact on problems in academics,” they write. “This indicates that the presence of low academic skills often interfered with social behavior, but the presence of problem behavior nearly always interfered with academic learning.”  
“There is a common public perception that middle and high school students do not need to be taught how to behave according to teacher expectations, but these results provide evidence that student problem behavior directly predicts academic achievement,” they say. “If teachers are expected to provide successful academic instruction, it may be necessary to provide behavior instruction to lay the groundwork for effective teaching to take place without distraction.”  
For the study of 330 students in a small district in the Pacific Northwest, researchers tried to predict problems in behavior and/or academics in Grade 9 by examining ODRs from Grade 8 and students’ scores on the state assessment (Oregon State Assessment). Because students in Grade 9 do not take the OSA, Grade 9 GPA was used to measure academic performance. Only grades from the three core academic courses—language arts, mathematics and science—were used to compute Grade 9 GPA; electives were not taken into account. The researchers wanted to look for “crossover effects,” that is for the effects of academics on behavior and behavior on academics.  
When they controlled for direct effects, that is the effect of Grade 8 behavior on Grade 9 behavior and the effects of Grade 8 academics on Grade 9 academics, the researchers found that there was a significant crossover effect from behavior problems to academic problems, but not vice versa. Students with more ODRs had lower GPAs in the spring than in the fall, they report.
  - One common method of using ODRs to make decisions about what support individual students need is to consider the number of ODRs received per year, the authors write. Previous researchers, using descriptive criteria from more than 400 schools at all levels, found that: Students with 0 to 1 ODR per year were determined to be adequately supported by the schoolwide system of behavior support (primary support)
  - Students with 2 to 5 ODRs were determined to need moderate additional support to be successful (secondary support)
  - Students with 6 or more ODRs were determined to need intensive, individualized support (tertiary support).

- The GPAs of students with 2 or more referrals dropped from fall to spring whereas the mean GPA of students with up to 1 referral was stable. Students with 6 or more ODRs in Grade 8 had a Grade 9 fall GPA of 1.18 and a spring GPA of 0.82. The study found that most Grade 9 students (65%) did not have problems in either academics or behavior. However, 35% of students did have challenges and needed support in one or both areas:
  - 18% had academic challenges
  - 12% had both academic and behavioral challenges, and
  - 5% had behavior challenges only.

Yet, it is sobering that a significant percentage of students (35%) need support, the authors write.

“That number is daunting, especially given the smaller numbers reported in the same district’s elementary schools, and speaks to the challenges facing high school personnel in supporting student success. Clearly, there is a great need to assess and support the academic and behavior needs of students as they start high school.”

The ethnic composition of the district was 2.4% African American, 2.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 83.6% European American, 9.2% Hispanic or Latino and 2.3% Native American. The percentage of students in the district receiving free or reduced lunch was 53%. The district implements both schoolwide positive behavior support (SWPBS) and a schoolwide reading improvement model.

There is preliminary evidence that implementation of SWPBS may produce crossover effects on academic achievement, the authors write. The results of this study indicate it may be necessary to add academic support to behavior support to help students become engaged in academics, they conclude. During the critical transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9, understanding the interplay between behavior and academics is very important, the researchers write.

- “Relationships Between Academics and Problem Behavior in the Transition from Middle School to High School,” by Kent McIntosh et al., *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, Volume 10, Number 4, October 2008, pp. 243-255.
- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pits.20177>
  - **The relationship of school-wide Positive Behavior Support to academic achievement in an urban middle school** - *Stephen R. Lassen Michael M. Steele Wayne Sailor* Abstract - An emerging literature on school-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) in urban settings suggests the utility of PBS in addressing student social development while decreasing the need for disciplinary actions (i.e., office disciplinary referrals [ODRs]). This research represents a significant addition to, and expansion of, this literature by examining the relationship of school-wide PBS-induced reductions in out-of-class referrals to student academic achievement. School-wide PBS was implemented in an urban, inner-city middle school in the Midwest over a 3-year period. Data on ODRs, suspensions, standardized test scores, and treatment fidelity were gathered and analyzed. Results demonstrated significant reductions in ODRs and suspensions and increases in standardized math and reading scores. Additionally, regression analyses suggested a significant relationship between student problem behavior and academic performance. Treatment adherence to PBS procedures was significantly correlated with reductions in problem behavior. These findings are discussed in terms of helping urban schools address challenging behavior. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. *Psychol Schs* 43: 701–712, 2006.
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