Strong Classrooms, Stronger Supports: *Behavior, RTI, and Student Success in Tornillo ISD*



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Agenda

- Understanding Student Behavior
- Building Effective Classroom Management Systems
- Reducing Office Referrals Through Classroom Systems
- Scenario-Based Learning & Collaborative Case Studies



Think about one student who challenged you last year.

What behaviors did you observe and what do you think the student was trying to communicate?

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Think about one student who challenged you last year. What behaviors did you observe and what do you think the student was trying to communicate?

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Behavior referrals have increased nationally

Teachers report:

- More anxiety
- Less resilience
- Reduced attention
- Greater emotional needs

Behavior referrals have increased nationally

Students don't always need stronger consequences.

They often need stronger systems.

3 Minute Table Discussion

What classroom routines have prevented the most behavior issues?



Six Essential Concepts For Understanding Behavior

1. MISBEHAVIOR IS A SYMPTOM OF AN UNDERLYING CAUSE
2. BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION
3. BEHAVIOR HAS A FUNCTION
4. BEHAVIOR OCCURS IN PATTERNS
5. THE ONLY BEHAVIOR TEACHERS CAN CONTROL IS THEIR OWN
6. BEHAVIOR CAN BE CHANGED

Developmental Behavior vs. Disability-Related Behavior

Understanding What Is Developmentally Expected vs. When Additional Support May Be Needed

No single behavior confirms that a student has a disability. Consider the **frequency, intensity, duration, impact on learning, developmental expectations, and whether the behavior occurs across settings**. A pattern of behaviors that persists despite high-quality instruction and interventions may warrant further evaluation through the school's RTI/MTSS and referral processes.

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Pre-K through Grade 3

These behaviors are commonly observed as young children develop social, emotional, language, and executive functioning skills.

Attention & Self-Regulation

- Short attention span during independent work
- Frequent need for movement
- Difficulty sitting still for extended periods
- Easily distracted by people or classroom activity
- Requires frequent reminders to stay on task

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Pre-K through Grade 3

These behaviors are commonly observed as young children develop social, emotional, language, and executive functioning skills.

Social Skills

- Difficulty sharing materials
- Interrupting conversations
- Blurting out answers
- Trouble taking turns
- Difficulty accepting losing during games
- Seeking frequent teacher reassurance or attention

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Pre-K through Grade 3

These behaviors are commonly observed as young children develop social, emotional, language, and executive functioning skills.

Emotional Development

- Crying when frustrated
- Difficulty managing disappointment
- Emotional outbursts after losing a game
- Becoming upset when routines change
- Needing adult assistance to calm down

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Pre-K through Grade 3

These behaviors are commonly observed as young children develop social, emotional, language, and executive functioning skills.

Executive Functioning

- Forgetting directions
- Difficulty organizing materials
- Losing pencils, folders, or supplies
- Needing visual reminders for routines
- Difficulty transitioning between activities

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Pre-K through Grade 3

These behaviors are commonly observed as young children develop social, emotional, language, and executive functioning skills.

Academic Behaviors

- Avoiding difficult tasks occasionally
- Giving up before asking for help
- Working slowly when learning new concepts
- Becoming frustrated during challenging work

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Grades 4-6

As students mature, behaviors begin to reflect increased independence, peer influence, and emotional awareness.

Attention & Organization

- Occasional forgetfulness
- Difficulty managing multiple assignments
- Becoming distracted by peers
- Needing reminders to stay organized
- Procrastinating on long-term projects

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Grades 4-6

As students mature, behaviors begin to reflect increased independence, peer influence, and emotional awareness.

Social Development

- Increased concern about peer opinions
- Occasional conflicts with classmates
- Testing boundaries with adults
- Wanting increased independence
- Becoming embarrassed when corrected publicly

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Grades 4-6

As students mature, behaviors begin to reflect increased independence, peer influence, and emotional awareness.

Emotional Development

- Mood fluctuations
- Increased sensitivity to criticism
- Anxiety before tests or presentations
- Frustration with challenging assignments
- Needing support managing peer relationships

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Grades 4-6

As students mature, behaviors begin to reflect increased independence, peer influence, and emotional awareness.

Executive Functioning

- Difficulty planning larger projects
- Forgetting homework occasionally
- Inconsistent organization
- Difficulty prioritizing tasks

Developmentally Appropriate Behaviors
Grades 4-6

As students mature, behaviors begin to reflect increased independence, peer influence, and emotional awareness.

Academic Behaviors

- Avoiding difficult work from time to time
- Reduced motivation in non-preferred subjects
- Needing teacher encouragement to persist

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Attention & Executive Functioning

- Unable to attend to instruction for even brief periods despite interventions
- Extreme impulsivity that creates safety concerns
- Inability to follow simple one-step directions consistently
- Significant difficulty completing routine classroom tasks

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Communication

- Limited expressive language compared to same-age peers
- Difficulty understanding simple directions
- Frequent inability to communicate wants or needs
- Difficulty engaging in reciprocal conversations

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Social Interaction

- Limited eye contact that significantly impacts communication
- Consistent difficulty interacting with peers
- Limited interest in social play
- Difficulty understanding social cues beyond developmental expectations

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Emotional & Behavioral Regulation

- Frequent aggressive behavior that is disproportionate to the situation
- Severe emotional outbursts occurring daily despite intervention
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Extreme anxiety that interferes with participation
- Frequent elopement (running from the classroom)

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Academic Learning

- Significant difficulty acquiring foundational reading or math skills despite targeted interventions
- Consistent inability to retain previously taught concepts
- Persistent struggles well below developmental expectations

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Pre-K through Grade 3

The following behaviors may indicate the need for additional intervention or evaluation when they are persistent, significantly interfere with learning or relationships, and do not improve with appropriate classroom supports.

Sensory Processing

- Extreme sensitivity to sounds, lights, or touch
- Intense sensory-seeking behaviors that interfere with learning
- Difficulty tolerating everyday classroom environments

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Attention & Executive Functioning

- Inability to independently complete routine classroom tasks despite supports
- Persistent difficulty initiating or completing work
- Severe organizational challenges that significantly impact academic performance
- Difficulty following multi-step directions despite repeated instruction

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Emotional Regulation

- Frequent emotional outbursts beyond developmental expectations
- Persistent anxiety affecting school participation
- Significant withdrawal from peers and classroom activities
- Ongoing difficulty recovering after minor frustrations

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Social Skills

- Persistent conflict with peers despite social skills instruction
- Difficulty understanding age-appropriate social expectations
- Limited reciprocal friendships
- Significant challenges interpreting social cues

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Academic Performance

- Minimal response to evidence-based academic interventions
- Large discrepancy between effort and performance
- Significant regression in previously mastered skills
- Difficulty generalizing learned skills across settings

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Behavior Concerns

- Chronic refusal to participate despite interventions
- Frequent verbal or physical aggression
- Repeated classroom elopement
- Persistent disruptive behaviors that significantly affect learning

Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support or Evaluation
Grades 4-6

Sensory & Regulation

- Sensory sensitivities that interfere with daily participation
- Strong need for repetitive movements or sensory input throughout the day
- Difficulty transitioning between activities despite structured supports

KEY DIFFERENCES

Developmental Behaviors	Behaviors That May Indicate the Need for Additional Support
Improve with teaching, practice, and maturity	Persist despite evidence-based interventions
Occur occasionally	Occur frequently and consistently
Mild impact on learning	Significant impact on learning or relationships
Similar to many same-age peers	Noticeably different from same-age peers
Respond to classroom management strategies	Require increasingly intensive supports and data collection
Typically limited to certain situations	Often occur across multiple settings or contexts

Behavior is Communication

Instead of asking
"Why is this student behaving this way?“

Ask
"What is this student trying to communicate?"



The Four Functions of Behavior

- *ACCESS (Obtain Something Desired)*
- *ESCAPE (Avoid or Get Away)*
- *ATTENTION (Gain Social Interaction)*
- *SENSORY (Meet an Internal Need)*



Functions of Behavior

ACTIVITY



Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student blurts out jokes during whole-group instruction, causing classmates to laugh.*

- *Primary Function: Attention*



Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student cries and throws materials after being told they cannot use the classroom tablet.*

- *Primary Function: Access (to a preferred item or activity)*

Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student rocks back and forth while reading independently and becomes upset when asked to stop.*

- *Primary Function: Sensory*



Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student frequently interrupts conversations between the teacher and other students.*

- *Primary Function: Attention*



Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student becomes frustrated when recess ends and refuses to come inside.*
- *Primary Function: Access (continuing a preferred activity)*



Functions of Behavior ACTIVITY

- *A student asks to visit the nurse almost every day just before reading intervention begins.*

- *Primary Function: Escape*



Trauma, Structure, and Self-Regulation

Think about a time when you were under a great deal of stress.

Were you thinking clearly?

Were you patient?

Did you make your best decisions?



Our students experience the same thing.

When children experience stress or trauma, the parts of the brain responsible for learning, attention, memory, and self-control are less available.

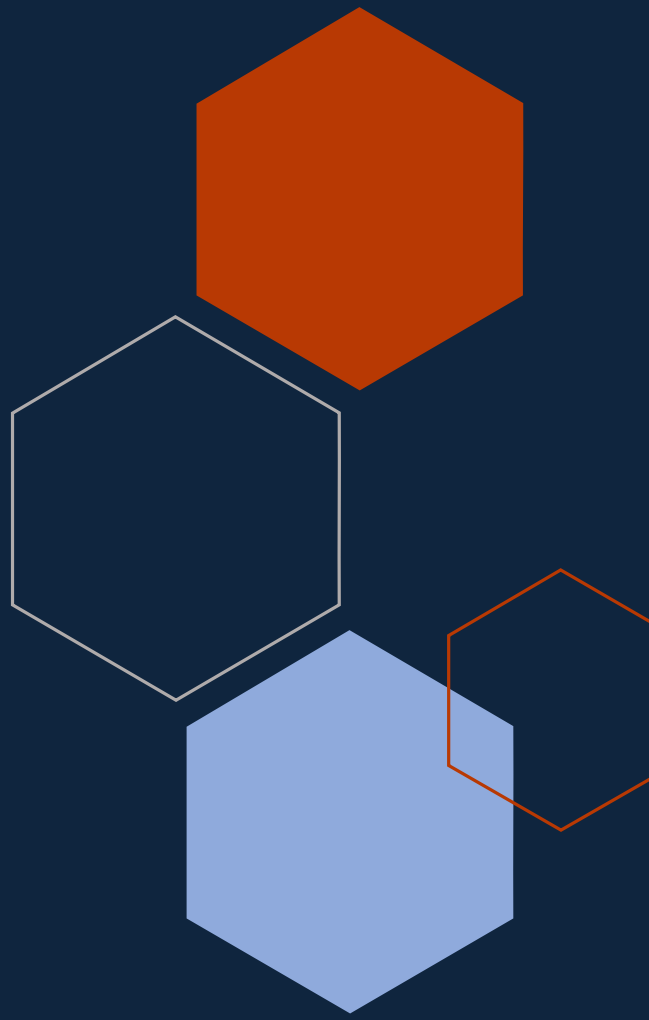
Before we can expect students to learn, we often need to help them feel safe, supported, and regulated.



Possible Sources of Trauma

Avoid assuming trauma is caused by one specific event. It can result from:

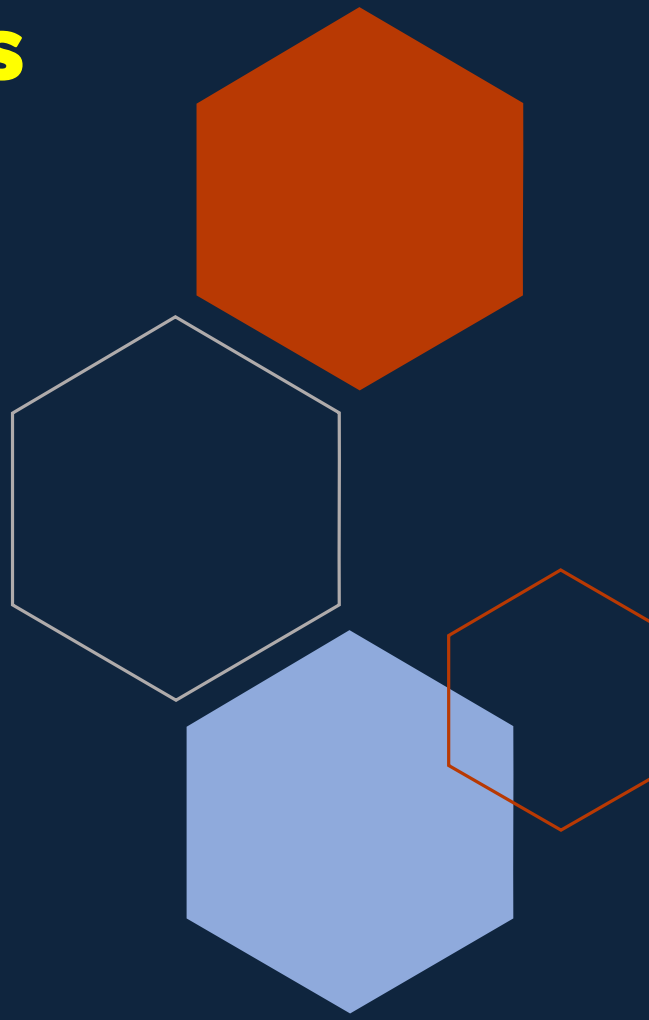
- Family instability or conflict
- Loss of a loved one
- Housing or food insecurity
- Community violence
- Chronic illness
- Exposure to substance abuse
- Natural disasters
- Immigration-related stress
- Repeated adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)



Trauma-Informed Classrooms

Students thrive when classrooms provide:

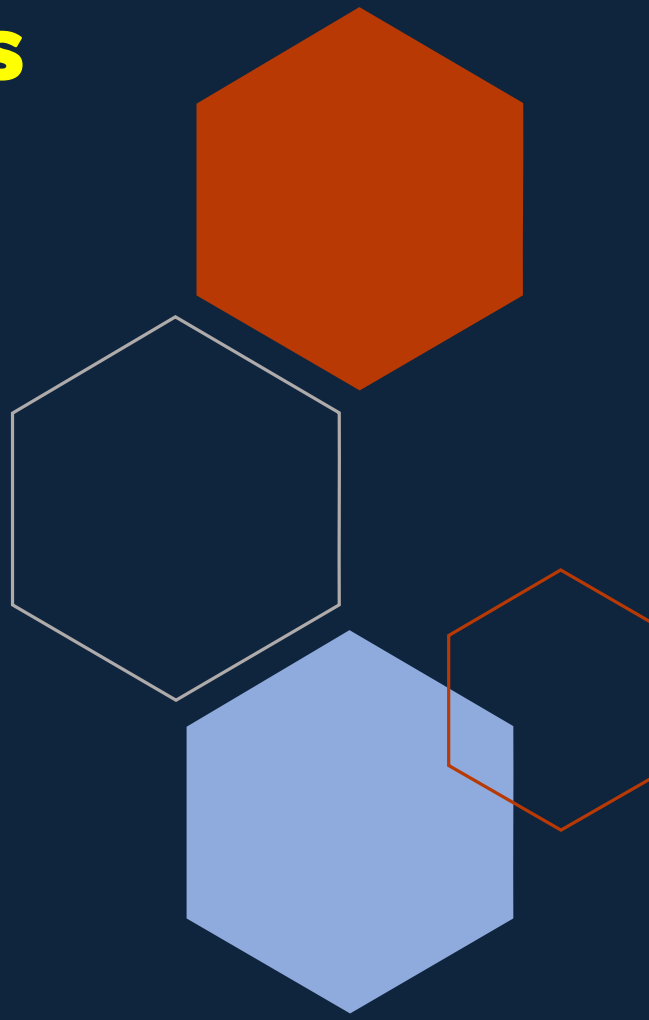
- Predictable routines
- Clear expectations
- Positive relationships
- Emotional safety
- Consistency
- Opportunities for success





Trauma-Informed Classrooms

- Behavior is often a response to stress, unmet needs, or skill deficits—not simply a choice.
- Predictable routines and strong relationships are proactive behavior supports.
- Students who feel emotionally safe are more available for learning.
- Regulation is a skill that can be taught and practiced.
- Trauma-informed teaching is not lowering expectations—it is providing the support students need to meet high expectations.





SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in order to achieve goals, solve problems, and interact appropriately with others.

SELF-REGULATION



It includes the ability to:

- Recognize emotions
- Manage impulses
- Shift attention
- Persist through challenges
- Recover after frustration
- Solve problems appropriately

Self-regulation is not about students never becoming upset. It's about learning healthy ways to respond when they do.

SELF-REGULATION BEGINS WITH CO-REGULATION

Students cannot consistently self-regulate until they have experienced repeated co-regulation with caring adults.

"Children borrow our calm before they can create their own."

TEACHING SELF-REGULATION

Just like academics...

- *We model.*
- *We practice.*
- *We provide feedback.*
- *We reteach.*

Students need opportunities to practice regulation when they are calm—not just during moments of crisis.

Classroom Strategies

Morning Emotional Check-Ins

Examples:
Mood Meter
Emoji Check-In
Color Cards
"How are you feeling today?“

Purpose:
Helps teachers identify students who may need support before behaviors escalate.

Classroom Strategies

Visual Schedules

Examples:

Students feel more secure when they know:

- *What is happening now*
- *What comes next*
- *When transitions occur*

Purpose:

Visual schedules reduce anxiety.

Classroom Strategies

Other Examples:

- *Calm Corners*
- *Breathing Strategies*
- *Movement Breaks*
- *Choice*

"When we teach students how to regulate their emotions, we're not just improving classroom behavior—we're giving them lifelong skills for learning, relationships, and success."

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Share some self-regulation strategies that work well for either of these groups: Pre-K to 3rd OR 4th to 6th.

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CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Classroom systems are the intentional, consistent structures, routines, procedures, and expectations that organize the learning environment and create predictable conditions for student success. These systems help students know what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, allowing teachers to spend more time teaching and less time managing behavior.

CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

One of the biggest misconceptions about classroom management is that it's about reacting to behavior. Effective classroom management actually begins long before a behavior occurs. It starts with the systems we put in place.

CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Think of classroom systems like the operating system on a computer. When the operating system runs smoothly, everything else functions more efficiently. When there are no systems—or they're inconsistent—even small problems can become major disruptions.

Do not edit
How to change the design



Which of the following causes the most classroom disruptions?

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CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Systems matter because students thrive with

- *Predictability*
- *Consistency*
- *Relationships*
- *Structure*

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Routines: *Predictable sequences for daily activities (arrival, morning work, dismissal).*

Procedures: *Step-by-step instructions for completing classroom tasks (turning in assignments, requesting help, transitioning).*

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Expectations: *Clearly taught behaviors for different settings and activities.*

Consistency: *Adults respond to behaviors in predictable and equitable ways.*

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM SYSTEMS

Accountability: ***Students understand both the expectations and the natural or logical consequences for meeting or not meeting them.***

Positive Reinforcement: ***Appropriate behaviors are acknowledged and reinforced to increase the likelihood they will occur again.***

TABLE DISCUSSION

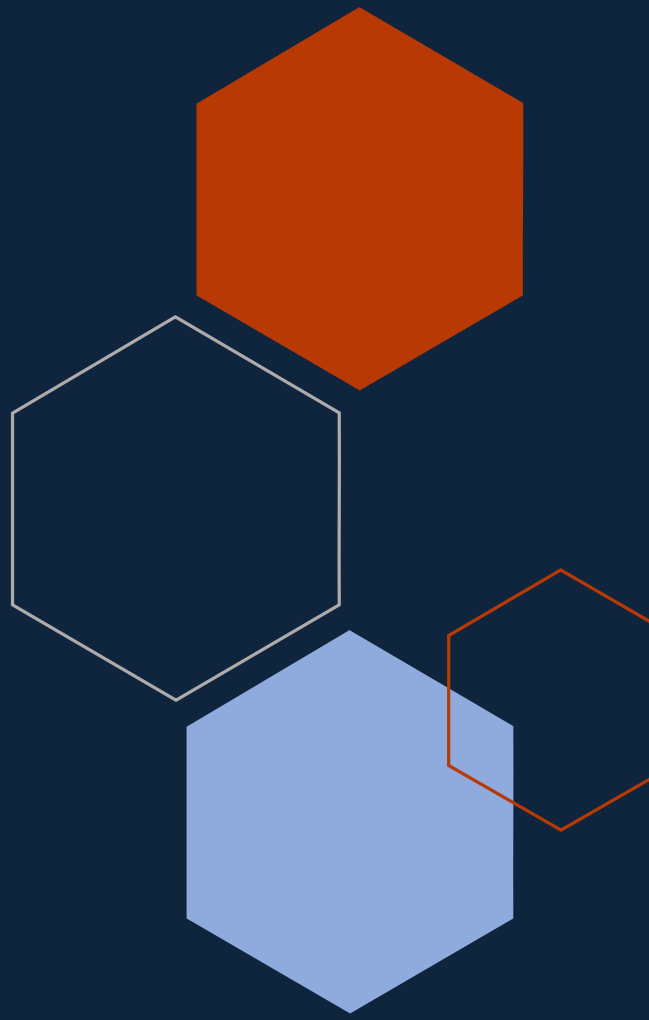
Discuss TWO classroom systems that you would be committed to implementing consistently this school year.



OFFICE REFERRALS

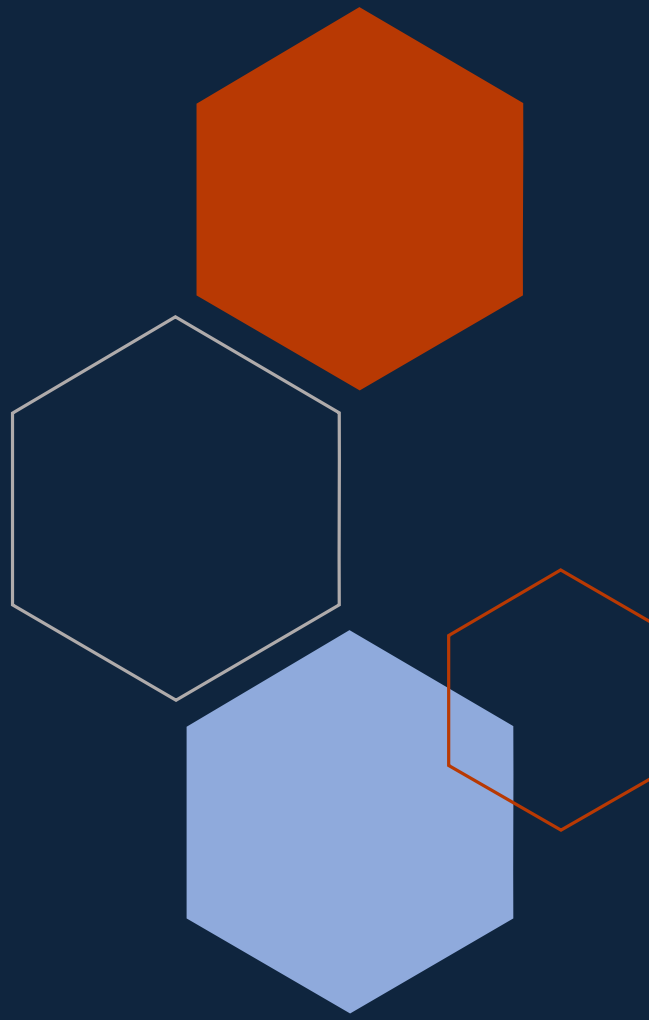
When a student is sent to the office, what is our goal?

Is the goal to remove the behavior temporarily, or is the goal to teach the student a more appropriate behavior?



OFFICE REFERRALS

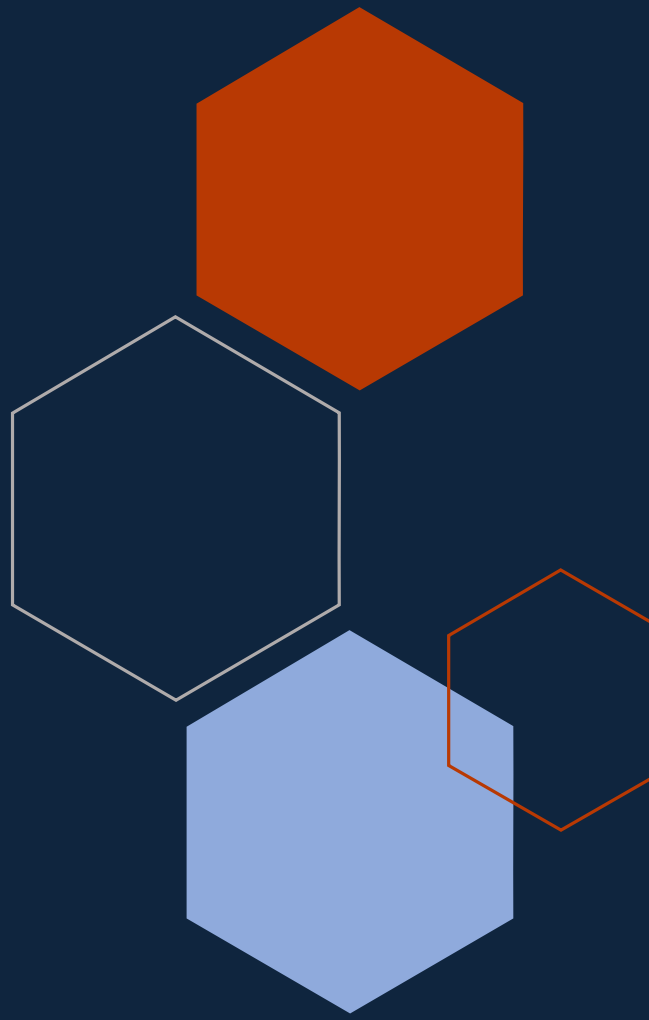
Office referrals are an important tool when used appropriately. However, the strongest behavior systems are designed so that teachers have the tools, strategies, and supports to address many behaviors before they escalate to the office.



OFFICE REFERRALS

A behavior problem is not automatically a discipline problem. Sometimes it is a skill deficit, a communication need, an academic struggle, or a regulation challenge.

Therefore, not all behaviors require the same response!



The Referral Decision Game

This activity is not about deciding whether teachers are referring too many or too few students.

The goal is to practice professional decision-making: determining what behaviors can be addressed through classroom systems and what behaviors require additional support or administrative involvement.

The Referral Decision Game

Each table choose two scenarios to discuss. For each, decide if the situation should be:

- **Classroom Managed**
- **Office Referral**
- **Needs More Information**



Explain your reasons and discuss any interventions that should occur before (or after) an office referral.

CASE STUDY

FINAL ACTIVITY

CASE STUDY FINAL ACTIVITY

Everything we've discussed this morning—understanding behavior, classroom systems, the functions of behavior—comes together in this activity.

At your tables, you will work like an RTI/MTSS problem-solving team to analyze a student case and develop an intervention plan





THANK YOU!

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