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Transformative Behavior Change at Monroe Public Schools

HOW POWERSCHOOL BEHAVIOR SUPPORT HELPED REDUCE SUSPENSIONS BY 25%

With eight school campuses scattered throughout Monroe County, MI—five elementary schools and three secondary schools—ensuring consistent teacher and staff response to student behavior is a significant challenge.

So Jackie Lenderman, the district's PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support) coordinator for elementary schools, and Andrew Hoppert, the district's PBIS coordinator for secondary schools, are grateful their district had selected PowerSchool Behavior Support, part of the PowerSchool Student Success Cloud, to help them foster positivity and kindness in their student body. Lenderman and Hoppert spent the '23-'24 academic year devoting their energy to reinvigorating their PBIS program.

As a result of their efforts, the district experienced a 25% reduction in suspensions and a significant increase in student-earned positive behavior points. At the secondary level, suspensions were reduced by 42%, and expulsions were reduced by 62%. Hoppert offers a succinct summary of the tool: "The introduction of Behavior Support has been incredible."

Seeking a Proactive Approach to Student Behavior

Looking to target peer-to-peer mistreatment "from a proactive standpoint," Monroe Public Schools sought a digital tool that could serve two significant purposes: act as a data collection system to ensure consistency across the district, and award positive behavior points rather than using points only as a disciplinary response.

Says Hoppert, "We wanted to make [peer-to-peer mistreatment] a really public thing. We really thought about what we wanted to tackle and really have kids and every stakeholder working on it. We wanted a structured response to behavior, both positively and

AT A GLANCE

Challenges

- Effectively addressing peer-to-peer mistreatment
- Consistently and equitably maintaining PBIS frameworks post-pandemic
- Data siloes for data on behavior, discipline, and referrals
- Delivering timely communication to relevant stakeholders and closing all feedback loops

Solution

- PowerSchool Behavior Support

Results

- Implemented clear and consistent district-wide PBIS expectations and response protocols
- Centralized digital hub to track data and manage a digital token economy for incentivizing positive behavior
- 25% reduction in district-wide suspensions
- 42% reduction in suspensions and 62% reduction in expulsions at the secondary level
- Updated all relevant stakeholders in a timely fashion to close feedback loops

in re-teaching those behaviors and if any consequences or restorative justice needed to happen. So before we even implemented [Behavior Support], we were making sure everybody in the district had a clear understanding about what we were doing. We implemented peer-to-peer behavior rubrics across four different grade level spans."

Lenderman notes that the rubrics "got into the minutiae around peer-to-peer mistreatment. And that was intentional because the idea and the guiding force was really sweating the small stuff... Because students had this rubric, they knew to think, 'Hey, if I make this choice again, here's what happens.'"

Aligning students and staff on behavioral expectations and repercussions was essential for two reasons: ensuring that teachers and staff felt empowered to respond to behavior, and clearly articulating to students the norms for interacting with peers and the repercussions for transgressing those norms.

Once every stakeholder had a "clearly identified strategy and role," says Hoppert, they felt confident bringing a formalized PBIS strategy into the district.

Implementing PowerSchool Behavior Support

The district opted for a slow, measured rollout of Behavior Support. Teachers were trained in small group professional development settings to use the software in November 2023, and paraprofessionals were trained in March 2024 with limited capabilities: they could reward positive points but could not write disciplinary referrals.

During implementation, there was one significant hurdle that Lenderman and Hoppert coached the district through, particularly the elementary teachers: "There was a concern that little kids need tangible paper cards, they need coins, they're too little," Lenderman recounts in reference to the electronic tokens awarded in Behavior Support. "And the argument we posed there was that our children are growing up in a digital world. [Some schools] opted for a 'rip the band-aid off' approach." Other schools transitioned more gradually, using paper tokens in conjunction with Behavior Support points. Each school was encouraged to make the changeover at the pace that worked best for the staff and students.

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PBIS Coordinator for Secondary Schools
Monroe Public Schools, MI

"We learned as we went and we took baby steps," Lenderman says. Hoppert adds, "It was really nice how everyone was learning at the same time. Everybody had grace for everybody else because there was this real understanding that we were all learning together."

Lenderman and Hoppert hosted PBIS office hours so staff could drop by with questions or concerns. "We talked a lot about the learning curve," says Lenderman. "So we started sending out what we call 'weekly paddles.' Paddles, you know—kind of like paddling through rocky waters, we're paddling through the learning curve." The "paddles" highlighted quick tips and tricks to help Behavior Support users become more familiar with the software.

Transformative Change

Though Monroe Public Schools has been using Behavior Support for less than a complete academic year, the district has already seen significant change in student behavior.

"The kids just ate it up," Lenderman enthuses. "We set a school-wide points goal, so if you earned 500 points, we would get a pajama day. . . When we set the next campus-wide behavior goal, [the students] blew past it. They had roughly four weeks to earn the reward and with the incentive, they met it in a week."

The data backs it up: since implementing Behavior Support in November 2023, the district reduced district-wide suspensions by 25%. At the secondary level, suspensions were reduced by 42% and expulsions by 62%.

"That's incredible," Hoppert muses as he looks at the data. "We're really, really happy."

Lenderman and Hoppert also cite other contributing factors to the student body's significant behavior change. Says Lenderman, "It's all about kindness, right? Teaching kindness, teaching empathy, raising awareness for those things and creating opportunities to demonstrate kindness."

Hoppert mentions two significant "kindness initiatives" that served as community engagement work. "The first Thursday in May, [we took] a two mile walk from one school building to our middle school football field. That had about 400 people or so. There were kids and teachers, families and community leaders and people who had nothing to do with the district, they just

District-wide suspensions	**-25%**
Secondary level suspensions	**-42%**
Secondary level explusions	**-62%**

wanted to join, which was really cool. Every sixth of a mile, we discussed a different empathy prompt. 'What is empathy?' 'How does it feel to ask for help?' 'What's a barrier you have from telling someone that you're struggling?'"

Inspired by the Great Kindness Challenge, a nationwide initiative that empowers students to create cultures of kindness in schools, the district also created its own spin-off of the Challenge to celebrate acts of kindness in its community. Says Hoppert, "Kids got to see they were involved in something bigger than themselves."

Indeed, kindness is at the heart of Lenderman and Hoppert's work. Says Lenderman, "We believe empathy is the catalyst for kindness. When we experience empathy, we demonstrate that by acts of kindness." By intentionally configuring a system to teach students empathy and then creating opportunities for students to demonstrate kindness, Lenderman and Hoppert ensured that "everyday behaviors that reflected respectful, responsible, and safe choices were recognized with [behavior] points, which underscores acknowledging the positive behaviors we want to see."

Planting the Seed

Lenderman and Hoppert have no plans to sit back despite their impressive accomplishments. They're working with district bus drivers to teach them the Behavior Support tool, as well as identifying campuses where certain behaviors are more common than others to drill down by class and age.

"The language we're using over and over is, 'We're planting the seed,'" Lenderman explains. "This is not a miracle product. This is not an instant fix. You need to know that we are planting the seed, and we are going to need to water it and grow it. We continue to offer support, we continue to offer professional development, and every time we say, 'We're planting the seed.'"

Hoppert makes a point to praise the communication abilities in Behavior Support. "The communication tool is almost as, if not more, valuable than the data tracker, because we're able to have conversations about what a student is doing without needing to call every teacher and talk to every administrator. The communication loop is closed, and that ability is the unsung hero of Behavior Support."

Adds Lenderman, "With discipline, there are always so many communication loops. And every single time I processed a referral, it didn't matter how small or big the infraction was, the amount of time that went into the documentation and the communication was significant and laborious. So to have a tool like this one is really huge."

Though Monroe Public Schools hasn't yet opened the parent portal, it plans to after teachers have a little more time to practice writing referrals. Opening the portal will completely close the communication loop for all necessary stakeholders for every referral.

Lenderman and Hoppert are eager for what's ahead. "We want to knock down the idea that PBIS is just giving kids things for doing things. Let's talk about the other components we're teaching them. We're monitoring

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them, we're acknowledging the positives, we have a redress for the negatives, we reteach, and then we use the data to make decisions and start the cycle over," says Hoppert.

Lenderman nods in agreement. As she reflects on how the district will continue to use Behavior Support, she smiles and says, "We just keep building."

Reduce suspensions and referrals and promote positive school culture with PowerSchool Behavior Support.

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