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NeMTSS Research Brief

Reducing Classroom Disruptive Behaviors to Improve Academic Performance

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CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES & SCHOOLS**

Reducing Classroom Disruptive Behaviors to Improve Academic Performance: An NeMTSS Research Brief

Key Points:

- Student engagement is essential for learning and plays a crucial role in student academic success (Kahu et al., 2014).
- Disruptive student behaviors negatively affect student learning and lower students' academic performance (Gómez Mármol et al., 2018; Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020).
- When teachers spend time reacting to disruptive behaviors in the classroom, time is taken away from instruction and student engagement in academic tasks is reduced (Riley et al., 2011).

Mission of Schools

Schools are charged with meeting their students' academic, behavioral, physical, and social needs and for meeting state assessment standards. Schools serve as places for learning and educators are expected to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the future (Mishra & Close, 2020). Students perform lower on standardized tests when they exhibit disruptive and off-task behaviors (Kostyuk, 2018). Evidence-based classroom behavior management strategies, such as Tier 1 core interventions, can be effective in reducing disruptive behaviors and increasing student involvement in learning.

Impact of Disruptive Behavior on Learning

Attending to and addressing disruptive behaviors as they arise reduces the amount of time teachers have to deliver high quality instruction. Furthermore, disruptive behaviors result in decreased student engagement in academic tasks (Riley et al., 2011). In the 2020-2021 school year, 32% of teachers in public schools reported that student behaviors interfered with their teaching (NCES, 2023). Researchers have found that teachers lose about 2.5 hours of classroom instruction each week due to disruptive behaviors (Education Advisory Board, 2019). In addition to teachers losing classroom instruction, disruptive behaviors often result in students being removed from the classroom. When students are removed from the classroom, they lose the chance to engage in classroom instruction.

Disruptive behaviors can negatively impact students' academic performance (Gómez Mármol et al., 2018; Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020). When disruptive behavior occurs, it causes the classroom to be less productive, it inhibits students' ability to focus and follow instructions, and achieve learning tasks (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020). Disruptive behaviors can have immediate as well as long-term negative implications on students' social, emotional, and physical well-being (Chaffee, 2017). For example, students may experience difficulties building peer relationships and making academic progress (Chaffee, 2017). Other implications include being more at-risk for externalizing behaviors and lacking self-efficacy (Chaffee, 2017). Negative implications for teachers exist as well. For teachers, disruptive behaviors can adversely shape their attitudes toward teaching and reduce their job satisfaction (Cameron and Lovett, 2015). When teachers' attitudes shift negatively in their teaching, it can hamper student learning processes and decrease student motivation to learn (Han and Yin, 2016).

Interventions and programs focused on improving student behavior and classroom management have shown positive social-emotional and academic outcomes for students, including improvements in peer relationships and social skills (Witvliet et al. 2009; Fossum et al., 2017), prosocial behaviors (Chuang et al., 2020), reduction in externalizing behaviors and conduct problems (Witvliet et al., 2009; Muratori et al., 2017), decreases in aggression and hyperactivity and inattention (Crean and Johnson, 2013; Muratori et al., 2017), and increased overall emotional regulation (Ialongo et al., 2019). Student academic outcomes have also been shown to improve through classroom management interventions, including increased readiness to learn (Ialongo et al., 2019) and increased math achievement (Chuang et al., 2020).

Student Engagement and Academic Success

Student engagement is essential for learning and plays a crucial role in student academic success (Kahu et al., 2014). Student engagement is more than simply paying attention in the classroom. It includes how students interact physically with learning, their thinking process as they learn, and how they feel about learning (Zepke, 2017). Student engagement models developed by Kahu and Nelson (2018) and Wang et al. (2019) both highlight academic achievement as a key outcome of positive student engagement (Wong et al., 2024). Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Lei et al. (2018) found behavioral, emotional, and cognitive student engagement positively correlated with academic achievement. Specifically, math achievement has been found to positively increase in relation to affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (Fung et al. 2018).

Implications for Educators

When engagement increases, students show improvements in academic performance and their learning. When teachers use fundamental classroom management strategies, they promote student engagement and reduce disruptive behaviors which set up their students for success (Mitchell et al., 2017). Examples include setting clear expectations, creating predictable routines, frequent and active supervision, and reminding students of behavioral expectations (Mitchell et al., 2017). Educators should consider using multi-tiered systems of support to increase classroom management and promote student engagement, which includes particular attention to the school and classroom environments in order to enhance the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being of students.

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