

School Values & Expectations

Tier 1

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There are a wide variety of strategies that have been developed to improve student behavior in school settings. One of these is to find ways to better communicate to both staff and students the standards for behavior which will be expected in the school environment. Once these standards are made explicit, they can guide the staff to teach, model, and shape the desired student behavior.

What are School Values or Expectations?

Many schools have chosen to identify a set of school-wide value statements that are intended to provide a school wide base of expectations for student behavior. Sometimes these are simply called school “expectation statements.” School value statements are a list of positive characteristics that all faculty and students can accept as desirable goals for student (and adult) behavior. A school value identifies something intrinsically valuable or desirable for students and adults which can be reflected in one’s behavior. School value statements are often positive characteristics that serve as broad goals for faculty and student behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2003). Value statements can also clarify educational and behavioral objectives, and may reflect broader community or district values (Boerema, 2006).



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In some cases, these value statements are a part of a larger character education program that includes citizenship education, social-skills instruction, and service learning. One example of values embedded within a character education program are the six pillars of character of the “Character Counts!” program which includes trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Another example might be the seven virtues identified by Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1995) which included: honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance, and giving. However, in many cases the set of values which a school develops may not be part of such a separate program but may be formulated locally at the school or district level (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Although the exact wording may vary, there tends to be considerable overlap in the values content identified by various schools. This is not unexpected if they truly represent a core of values to which the larger community ascribes.

Value statements are helpful in clarifying expectations for behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2003). When student behavior exemplifies the defined values, the student can be recognized and the behavior reinforced. When it does not, the student can be given instruction in alternative behavior or social skills. Consequences should not result in only punitive actions. Successful

value statements will be clear, focused, and will inspire students by appealing to values they believe are important.



Distinguishing mission, vision or goal statements. Value statements for staff and students are different from school or district vision, mission, purpose, or goals. With pressure for school reform efforts within the last two decades, many schools have chosen to develop tailored mission statements in order to fit the needs of their school, guide policy, and create expectations. These mission and goal statements are intended to determine how resources are divided, how to implement programs, and to guide other crucial policy decisions (Stemler, Bebell, & Sonnabend, 2010). In addition, vision, mission, or goal statements assist leaders in running the institution and bring about organizational change (Slate, Jones, Wiesman, Alexander, & Saenz, 2008). An example of this type of vision statement is “Baker Elementary School will strive for quality education through innovative and creative methods of service, respect for all people, and collaboration through shared participation and mutual responsibility.”

(downloaded from http://qsite.aasdcat.com/vision_values_statements.htm). While school vision, mission, or goal statements are useful for a variety of purposes, they rarely are specific enough to be useful to guide student and staff behavior from day to day.

Distinguishing school or classroom rules.

School value or expectation statements are also distinguished from school or classroom “rules” in that they identify positive traits and goals for staff and students, rather than specific appropriate or inappropriate behaviors for specific environments which represent rules. Rules identify what is or is not allowed. Rules should be specific to a particular environment (e.g., classroom, hallway, cafeteria, playground, etc.). Good practice in behavior management also suggests that lists of rules for a classroom or other environment should be short (3-5 rules), with each rule being clear, specific, reasonable, and enforceable. Traditionally rules have been lists of things which should not occur such as “Don’t speak out, don’t leave your seat without permission, etc”. However good practice suggests it is better to word rules positively and identify appropriate or desired behavior rather than lists of “don’ts”. While there should be clearly identified consequences for violations of rules, appropriate behavior in accord with rules should also be acknowledged and reinforced.

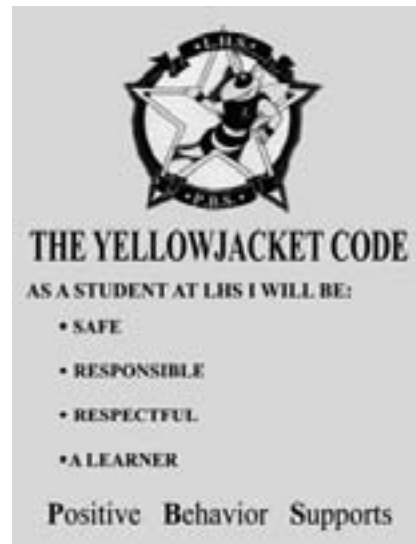
For example the following three specific classroom rules “Be in position; keep hands and feet to self; and, start work on time,” can be distinguished from value or expectation statements such as those employed in many schools implementing PBIS which are “Be safe; be respectful; and, be responsible”. The former are much more specific to the classroom situation, and focus on identifying appropriate specific behaviors or expectations for that classroom. The PBIS statements of expectations are broader and are presumed to be appropriate across environments and circumstances. Ideally rules should all fit within the scope of the values statements. As a result, schools often use the value statements as the justification for the creation and implementation of more specific rules for various situations or locations in school.

Implementing School Values or Expectations

To implement these value statements, many schools have established a “values committee” of students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and clergy from various faiths to attempt to devise a list of values. Including all relevant stakeholders on school value committees and assemblies is important to ensure that school values are held and can be endorsed by the school community and do not represent the values of only a particular group (e.g. a religious group; Peterson & Skiba, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 2003). Sometimes these are then discussed in school assemblies, homerooms, and in public hearings to obtain input and to develop a sense of community and school consensus around the values; such a discussion also permits parents not only to be informed but to support these values in their children. In an era when the boundaries between school, religious, as well as family responsibilities may be controversial, most schools have attempted to develop and include only those values that all faiths and families are likely to be able to fully endorse.

Classroom teachers can emphasize the importance of school values and offer examples of real world applications. Teachers and all staff members should work to recognize and praise students for displaying a core value (i.e., eliciting behavior that coincides with one or more of the school values).

The values are usually prominently displayed in key locations in the school and are sometimes included on stationery, newsletters to parents, and assembly programs. In some schools these value statements become a part of the school logo and identity, and are referred to and used in a variety of situations. In addition to simply being posted or distributed, most schools that implement these value statements also encourage all teachers to employ them in working with students in their classes. Many suggest that class instruction be devoted to ensuring that students understand the values and related rules and also strive to build consensus on their importance.



Most schools also attempt to recognize and reward students whose behavior exemplifies one or more of these school values. This is often done by posting names prominently in the school hall near the office, recognizing these students in honors or awards ceremonies or assemblies, providing recognition certificates, providing special privileges such as lunch with the principal, or a special parking spot. It may also be by distributing tangible awards such as small prizes or other items donated by local businesses or certificates for free or discounted food items. Additionally, many schools integrate their values into their overall district “Codes of Conduct” and school discipline system, by reinforcing behavior in accord with the values



and by creating consequences for behavior in contradiction to the values.



What do we know about School Value or Expectation Statements?

Although value statements and the attitudes and behaviors that they advocate are supported from a common sense perspective, there is little specific empirical evidence regarding the impact of these types of statements on student outcomes. The empty research arena may be influenced by the lack of clear methodology for analyzing school value statements, since the content of these statements may vary widely across schools, and the methods for teaching or implementing these with students also varies. Even when not explicitly stated, many schools may informally teach and implement similar values.

Probably the strongest research support for the explicit establishment and use of these types of value or student expectation statements comes from schools implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

"...students, staff and community members identify a set of school expectations that (a) are few in number (i.e. three to five): (b) are stated

positively and succinctly; (c) focus on all staff, all students and all settings; (d) emphasize support for academic and behavioral outcomes; and (e) are contextually/cultural appropriate.." (Sugai & Horner, 2009, p. 312).

Establishing these types of values and explicitly teaching them to students is an essential component of PBIS. Although there are some variations in the values identified in PBIS schools, and although there may also be variations on the ways that these values are taught and reinforced in those schools, these are essential elements of PBIS implementation. There is strong research support for the effectiveness of PBIS in improving both academic success and behavior in schools where it is implemented (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Although there is little direct research on school value statements or expectations, as we have described them, there has been an array of research on the broader types of school vision, mission, and goal statements. While this research does not have a direct relationship to school values or expectations, it may provide indirect support for the potential of integration of these statements.

In a promising study, Stemler et al. (2010) analyzed 421 high school mission statements, conducting interviews with principals of the high schools, and found that mission statements could be successfully coded for educational research. Furthermore, interviews with principals suggest that administrative personnel within the school view these statements as a critical component of communicating the school's core values.

Several other studies have started to investigate this topic. For example, Slate et al. (2008) analyzed the mission statements from a group of 100 high and low performing elementary schools in Texas and found several themes encompassed within these statements. Schools were categorized as high and low performing schools based on their ratings by the Texas Education Agency. The highest performing schools were more likely to include the themes of academic success, challenge, citizenship, empow-

erment, partnership, and social development. The mission statements of high performing schools focused on a challenging environment which emphasized academic success. In fact, the concept of academic success was included in only 18% of the low performing schools, and a “challenging environment” was mentioned in just 4% of low performing schools’ mission statements. Overall, academic success was included in only 54% of the schools in the study sample, leading the researchers to hypothesize that the missions of many schools may facilitate academic success, but not explicitly prioritize it.

In another study, Boerema (2006) examined school value statements of 81 secondary schools in British Columbia. One hundred and twenty themes were identified and sorted into five concept categories. Key points that emerged from the analysis included “concepts that declared the school’s distinctive beliefs, concepts that presented the school’s goals and objectives, concepts outlining the environment, services offered, and parental involvement” (p. 180). Nearly all schools identified development of academic skills (e.g., lifelong learning, critical thinking skills), personal development (e.g., self-confidence, self-worth, self-esteem), social development (e.g., social responsibilities, preparing for a place in society, service to others), and physical development as goals for students. Although many of the statements included similar ideas, such as community outreach, these ideas had different meanings depending on the type and demographics of the school (e.g., alternative

school, religious school, public school). Therefore, even though value statements are often used to clarify and guide students and staff, they still may appear subjective without examining the broader school and community context.

Doolittle, Horner, Bradley, Sugai, and Vincent (2007), examined the mission statements of all 50 State Departments of Education, as well as the department from the District of Columbia. The researchers reported that only 16 (31%) states included guidelines for student social behavior in the mission statements. Meanwhile, individual behavioral support practices were integrated into the curriculum for general education teachers in only 30 (59%) states and for special educators in 39 (76%) states. Character education was the most often named initiative for improving social behavior within schools. Thus, there should be an impetus towards including student guidelines for social behavior in individual school mission statements, which should be guided by policy from State Departments of Education. As discussed earlier, the higher performing schools tended to have value statements that did incorporate social behavior and/or expectations for academics leading to the conclusion that value statements that don’t incorporate social behavior or academic performance may not be as strong.

Clearly these studies of broader vision, mission, and goal statements may not directly address the use of specific value statements for use in guiding student behavior in school. Nevertheless, they appear to suggest that these broader goals and mission statements do have a measurable impact on the school climate and attitudes of staff. As a result, it may suggest that an analysis of specific behavioral values or expectations in the future provide evidence of being a useful component in improving student behavior in school. It will remain for future research to examine this hypothesis.

Conclusion

At present, school value statements are believed to be a useful component of efforts



to improve student behavior and school climate. These statements of values or expectations have been particularly emphasized as one of the key components of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Although there is strong research related to the overall outcomes of PBIS, there has been virtually no research about these values or expectations independent of PBIS. However, there has been some research on

more global school mission statements, which appears to provide promise for future research on these more specific behavioral expectations. Based on the PBIS research, the use of school values or behavioral expectations is a useful component of efforts to improve student behavior.



Related Briefs

Character Education; Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports; Program-Character Counts!; Reinforcement.

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