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Using Teacher-Written Praise Notes to Decrease Tardiness in Elementary School Students

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Using Teacher-Written Praise Notes to Decrease Tardiness in Elementary School Students*

Paul Caldarella, Lynnette Christensen, and K. Richard Young
Brigham Young University Positive Behavior Support Initiative

Introduction
- Principals and teachers consider student tardiness to be a serious issue.
- Especially challenging with elementary children often dependent on an adult to get to school on time.
- Frustration that late students disrupt instruction and require re-teaching.
- Tardiness is widespread and associated with:
  - Lower academic achievement
  - Use of drugs/alcohol in secondary school
  - Employment difficulties later in life
- School policies often punitive, but ineffective.
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) interventions may help.
- Teacher praise is a positive strategy shown to be effective for problem behavior.

Purpose
To evaluate the effect of teacher written praise notes on elementary school student on-time behavior.

Methods
Setting
- Urban K-6 elementary school
  - 646 students
  - 80% Caucasian
  - 25% low SES
  - 18% mobility
  - 6% Asian
  - 5% Other

Participants
- Each teacher selected a student exhibiting moderate to severe tardiness

Demographics

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Design
- Multiple baseline across students

Results
Severely Tardy Students
Moderately Tardy Students

Independent Variable
- Principal letter to parents
- Teachers wrote praise notes for students arriving on time

Dependent Variable
- Number of minutes late per week

Recommendations
- Important to select students who show a pattern of being late over several recent weeks.
- Reasons for tardiness and whether this would be an appropriate intervention should be discussed.
- To be implemented effectively, praise notes should:
  - Include specific statements about being on time
  - Be written consistently
  - Be used with reminders or reinforcers to help teachers be more consistent
  - Other interventions (e.g., punishment) should be removed to decide if notes cause improvement.
- More research is needed in elementary schools.

*This study will soon be published in the journal Intervention in School and Clinic.