Getting Students to School on Time Using Teacher Written Praise Notes

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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.

Method
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Academic Behavior</th>
<th>Social Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tib</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design
- Multiple baseline across students

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

Results

Severely Tardy Students

Moderately Tardy Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Minutes Late per Week</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Average Number of Notes/Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>97.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>142.95</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>89.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gey</td>
<td>63.99</td>
<td>33.92</td>
<td>47.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tib</td>
<td>108.65</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>84.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Minutes Late per Week</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Average Number of Notes/Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>73.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wade</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>74.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>13.98</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>78.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.*