Getting Students to School on Time Using Teacher Written Praise Notes

Lynnette Christensen
lynette_christensen@byu.edu

Paul Caldarella
Paul_Caldarella@byu.edu

K. Richard Young
Richard_Young@byu.edu

Colleen Densley

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Original Publication Citation
TECBD Conference, Tempe, AZ. (November 21)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Christensen, Lynnette; Caldarella, Paul; Young, K. Richard; and Densley, Colleen, "Getting Students to School on Time Using Teacher Written Praise Notes" (2010). Faculty Publications. 17. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/17

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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.

**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>Mobility</th>
<th>Academic Behavioral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Respect, Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Responsibility, Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Respect, Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Respect, Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Design**
- Multiple baseline across students

**SWPBS Context**
- Clear expectations
- Character development program
- Student recognition system
- Teacher written praise notes for respect, responsibility, service, and learning

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

**Dependent Variable**
- Number of minutes late per week

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severely Tardy Students</th>
<th>Moderately Tardy Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Minutes Late per Week</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average Number of Notes/Week</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>119.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>142.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>63.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>108.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>103.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average Minutes Late per Week**
- Gary: 119.00
- Ron: 142.95
- Peter: 63.99
- Elle: 108.65

**Average Number of Notes/Week**
- Gary: 3.29
- Ron: 14.87
- Peter: 33.92
- Elle: 17.19

**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.*