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*

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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>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, No, Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, No, Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design
- Multiple baseline across students

Results

Severely Tardy Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Minutes Late per Week</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Average Number of Notes/Week</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>97.74%</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>142.95</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>89.74%</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>83.99</td>
<td>33.92</td>
<td>58.47%</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>108.65</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>84.18%</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moderately Tardy Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Minutes Late per Week</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Average Number of Notes/Week</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>63.10%</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wade</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>54.23%</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>13.98</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>78.12%</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Procedures

SWPBS Context
- Clear expectations
- Character development program
- Student recognition system
- Teacher written praise notes for respect, responsibility, service, and learning
- Students on time for the whole month received a reinforcer

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.