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 9% Hispanic
- 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>Grade</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Academic Behavior</th>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
<td>No</td>
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</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>Time (Days)</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 7</th>
<th>Day 9</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.*