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School-to-Home Notes: Getting Parents Involved in Teaching Social Skills



Michael Adams, Sue Womack, Ryan Shatzer, & Paul Caldarella

Brigham Young University Positive Behavior Support Initiative (BYU-PBSI)

Introduction

- Many agree that schools should be attending to the social and emotional needs of all students (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007).
- With the increasing recognition of school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS), social skill instruction has begun to address this issue.
- Social skills instruction often has problems with generalization (Gresham, 1998).
- Including parents in the instruction and reinforcement of social skills may improve generalization (Armstrong & McPherson 1991; Budd & Itzkowitz, 1990).

Social Skills Program

Month	Grade Level				
	Kindergarten	1 st and 2 nd	3 rd and 4 th	5 th and 6 th	
September	Following Directions				
October	Accepting Responsibility				
November	Showing Appreciation				
December	Following Directions	Listening			
January	Accepting Responsibility	Following Directions	Resolving Differences		
February	Showing Appreciation	Accepting Responsibility	Review 3 Core Skills	Decision Making	
March	Following Directions	Showing Appreciation	Listening		
April	Accepting Responsibility	Listening	Resolving Differences		
May	Showing Appreciation	Review 3 Core Skills	Decision Making		

Instructional Schedule

- **Week 1:**
 - Social skill introduced by teacher in the classroom
- **Week 2:**
 - Parent volunteer teaches social skill lesson in the classroom
 - Home notes are distributed to students
- **Week 3:**
 - Librarian teaches social skill lesson using a library book

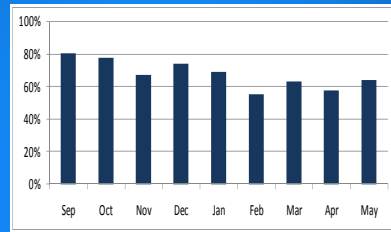
Research Aim:

Evaluate stakeholder perceptions of a school-to-home note program used to involve parents in teaching and reinforcing social skills as part of a universal level Positive Behavior Support intervention.

Setting and Participants

- This study examined a suburban elementary school in central Utah that is currently in its fourth year of PBS implementation.
 - 436 Students, K-6
 - Over 50% Free and Reduced Lunch
 - Ethnicity: 75% Caucasian
 - 21% Hispanic
 - 2% African American
 - 2% Other
 - 107 Parent Participants
 - 20 Teachers

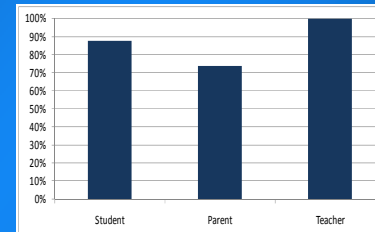
Home Note Return Rate



Data Collection

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Survey | Respondents |
| ➤ 7 Point Likert-type scale | ➤ Students |
| ➤ Perceptions of: | • Completed in Class |
| • Favorability | |
| • Time Commitment | ➤ Parents |
| • Effectiveness | • Stratified Sample |
| • Ease | • Paper/Phone Survey |
| • Continued Use | |
| ➤ Three versions | ➤ Teachers |
| ➤ 12-15 questions | • Completed in staff meeting |
| ➤ Open-ended comments | |

Survey Return Rate



Sample Home Notes

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

School Pride Begins With Me!

Dear Parents: We are excited to have you involved in your child's social skills instruction. The social skill for December is: **HOW TO LISTEN**.

The steps for this social skill are:

During discussions:

1. Look at who is talking
2. Think about what is being said
3. Wait your turn to talk
4. Say what you want to say without changing the subject

Learning how to listen is very important to succeed in school and relationships with others. This is what we want you to be teaching your child about this social skill.

• **Teach the steps to this social skill to your family.**

• **Play the Telephone Game with your family.** Have everyone sit in a line. Think of a sentence (can't be too short) and whisper it to the person next to you. Have them whisper what they heard to the person next to them, and so on, until you get to the end of the line. Have the last person say out loud what they heard and see if you end up with the same sentence that you started with.

• **Talk about why you could start and finish with different sentences.** Tell your family what happened when you played this game with your class. Discuss the importance of listening well when someone is talking to you so that there are not misunderstandings.

Have a parent sign below and bring this note back by this Friday to receive credit for your class.

Parent Signature: _____

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

School Pride Begins With Me!

Dear Parents: We are excited to have you involved in your child's social skills instruction. The social skill for January is: **HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS**.

The steps for this social skill are:

1. Listen at all times
2. Say "O.K." (or show you understand)
3. Do not interrupt
4. Report back, if necessary

This month we are reviewing the social skill: **HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS**. We have discussed these steps at school, but we hope that you will also review the steps to this social skill at home.

In order to help you review these steps, we are asking that you play a matching game as a family. Separate your child into two teams by starting the game, but you might need to help them by reading what is on each card. The game is simple. Cut apart the cards found on the opposite side of this sheet. Lay out the match game cards, upside down, on the floor or on a table. Family members take turns flipping two cards over to try to get a match. To get a match you need to match the skill with which step it is describing. The card that says "Look at the person" will match with the card "Step 1". There is also a match for the name of the social skill (How to Follow Directions) and the month (January's social skill). Have fun!

Thank you once again for your help with our School Pride program. When you have finished the activity, please sign below, and send this portion of the home note back by Friday to receive credit on the School Pride classroom chart. Remember, if at least 80% of the notes are returned, the class earns a reward.

Parent Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

How to Follow Directions	January's Social Skill
Step 1	Look at the person.
Step 2	Say, "O.K." (or, show you understand)
Step 3	Do the task immediately.
Step 4	Report back, if necessary.

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

School Pride Begins With Me!

Dear Kindergarten Parents:

The December social skill in our School Pride character program is How to Follow Directions.

The steps for this social skill are:

1. Look at the person
2. Say "O.K."
3. Do not interrupt
4. Report Back, if necessary

You will probably notice that we are now repeating the first of the three social skills that our kindergarten students will focus on throughout the year. We have reviewed these steps at school with your student, but we hope that you will also review the steps to this social skill at home.

Explain to your child that it is important to follow directions, when everyone follows directions right away it saves more time for other fun activities.

Please spend a few minutes on our family activity to reinforce this social skill. Please play **HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** with your family. It is fun way to practice following directions. We have asked your kindergarten student to take the lead in beginning the game, and then to be cooperative in the family like a team being "Senior".

When you have finished the activity, please sign below and send this note back with your child's **Friday Friday**. At least 80% of the notes are returned. The class earns the chance to participate in an activity of their choice.

Thank you once again for your support as we try to encourage positive social skills among our students. Without reinforcement from home, our efforts will be less effective.

Parent Signature: _____

Results

Percentage of Participants who Agreed on Home Note Perception Survey Items

Questions	Teachers	Parents	Students
Students enjoy doing the home note activities	69.0%	77.6%	56.5%
Home notes should continue to be used next year	65.0%	91.5%	51.6%
Home notes help students improve their social skills	35.0%	79.4%	65.9%
Home notes take too much time	10.0%	9.3%	30.6%
Social skills should be taught in school	92.4%	94.3%	-
Home notes should be used more often than once a month	5.0%	44.9%	-
I wish there were more home note activities	-	29.0%	38.0%
Families continue to use the social skills	-	77.6%	51.0%
It was easy to get home notes signed	-	69.8%	81.2%
It was easy to (distribute/take home) home notes	90.0%	-	85.0%
It was easy to (collect/bring back) home notes	75.0%	-	72.0%
It was easy to track home notes	57.9%	-	-
Home notes help me communicate with families	30.0%	-	-
I like the home note part of the school PBS program	55.0%	-	-
Home notes help me talk to my child about school	-	94.4%	-
It is important to know the social skills my child is learning in school	-	98.1%	-
I like getting information about the social skills	-	91.5%	-
I like the suggestions of activities to do with my family	-	89.7%	-
Parents assisted with the home note activities	-	-	65.9%
Home notes help students learn the steps of the social skills	-	-	71.4%

Differences Between Stakeholders for Overlapping Survey Items (N = 506)

Questions	Teacher M (SD)	Parent M (SD)	Student M (SD)	F
Students enjoy doing home notes	4.30 (1.34)	5.36 (1.45)	4.63 (2.09)	6.39**
Home notes should be used next year	4.70 (1.69)	6.11 (1.26)	4.39 (2.40)	25.82***
Home notes improve social skills	4.00 (1.34)	5.45 (1.29)	5.17 (1.83)	6.10**
Home notes take too much time	2.50 (1.57)	2.66 (1.43)	3.33 (2.16)	5.74**

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Conclusion

- All stakeholder groups tended to rate home notes positively, with parents being particularly supportive. The use of home notes appears to be a feasible and acceptable approach to increase parental involvement and potentially improve generalization of social skills taught in schools as part of a universal level PBS intervention.
- **Parents**
 - Inform early about scope of the program
 - Consolidate across grade levels
 - Keep parents involved in the process
- **Teachers**
 - Get teachers more involved
 - Share what is learned
- **Students**
 - Integrate with homework assignments
 - Be consistent in procedures
 - Use activities that appeal to a broad age range