



ASSOCIATION FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

# Newsletter

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## APBS Board Update

Congratulations to Mark Durand, Randal De Pry, Bobbie Vaughn, and Jennifer Zarcone on their election to the Board of Directors.

## APBS Conference Update

The Fifth International Conference on Positive Behavior Support will be held at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago, IL,

March 27–29, 2008, and will feature over 200 oral presentations, posters, and skill-building workshops highlighting empirical findings, assessment and intervention methods, current topics, and other aspects of positive behavior support in the following areas: School-Related, Developmental Disabilities/Children and Adults at Risk, and Cross-Area Issues. For more information, visit the Web site (<http://www.apbs.org>) and click on the conference link at the left or contact Ilene Alvarez ([ialvarez@fmbi.usf.edu](mailto:ialvarez@fmbi.usf.edu)).

## Positive Behavior Support:

A Potentially Important Strategy for Dropout Prevention

Sandra Covington-Smith  
*National Dropout Prevention Center for  
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*University of Texas at El Paso*

## The Process of Dropping Out

With an incidence rate reaching nearly 1 million students per year, dropping out of high school has immense personal, communal, and societal ramifications. Most students who drop out of high school have limited job choices and tenuous economic futures. Recent studies suggest that even receiving a General Education Development (GED) certificate does not provide workers in today's job market with financial rewards equal to those obtained with a regular high school diploma (Viadero, 2001). The evolving labor market has become such that a standard high school diploma is a minimal requirement to access suitable post-school employment (e.g., jobs offering benefits, adequate wages, and opportunities for advancement) and most forms of post-secondary schooling or training (Kortering et al., 2005).

The process of dropping out of school is not a new phenomenon. Dropping out is a process of disengagement that begins early, sometimes even in elementary school. Students at risk of dropping out show signs of disengaging and pulling back from school long before they actually leave. Students develop negative attitudes toward school and skip classes or do not attend school altogether (Covington-Smith, 2007). Often, students earn low grades, are faced with academic failure, and engage in disruptive behavior—key risk factors predictive of school dropout (Dunn et al., 2004). Frequently, a reactive approach to behavior

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("Positive Behavior Support . . ." continued from p. 1)

management is emphasized, and the assumption is that if the student "decides" not to improve his or her behavior, the privilege of being at school is removed, resulting in lost instructional time and increased academic difficulties. The repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension has been identified as one of the major factors leading to dropout (Skiba, 2000).

As educators and practitioners continue to seek effective interventions to prevent dropout, they must focus on identifying, monitoring, and addressing effects and risk factors that lead to dropout and are easily influenced by educators (e.g., academic performance, attendance, problem behavior, school climate, peer and adult interactions), such as reduction in problem behavior through positive behavior supports (Sinclair et al., 2005).

## Positive Behavior Support

*Positive behavior support* (PBS) refers to the culturally appropriate application of positive behavioral interventions and systems to achieve socially important behavior change (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Considerable research has demonstrated the effectiveness of PBS for addressing risk factors linked to dropout, including poor academic performance, problem behavior, negative school climate, and problematic peer and adult interactions (Dunn et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2002; Warren et al., 2003). School climates that promote clear and high academic and behavior expectations, maintain a sense of order, and actively involve parents are associated with math, science, and writing achievement (Ma & Klinger, 2000). Additionally, Horner et al. (2005) demonstrated increased reading scores when PBS was implemented with fidelity.

PBS allows schools to offset risks associated with dropout by incorporating protective factors on multiple levels within the school system. Such protective factors include instructional programs based on the results of major research programs (Lyon, 1995; National Reading Panel, 2000); curricula that allow for variations across the learning continuum so that individual differences can be addressed, as well as curricula that access and support student interest areas (Keogh, 2000); enhancement of teacher perception toward students with problem behavior through skills training in effective management (Keogh & Burstein, 1988), social problem solving skills, and mentoring; and, development of an ecology of class-

rooms and school settings to incorporate a continuum of proactive interventions (Keogh, 2000).

Moreover, high school personnel may see benefits from viewing PBS as a broad effort, encompassing all academic and social goals rather than simply reductions in school discipline problems. With this view, the domain of targeted group interventions may be expanded to include dropout prevention, truancy prevention, academic remediation, and young parent programs (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004).

## PBS at Work with Dropout Prevention

A number of state and local education agencies are addressing the issue of dropout at the elementary, middle, and high school levels through positive behavior supports (see, e.g., Cortez, 2006; Martinez & Morrison, 2006). The process of dropping out begins early, so intervention efforts also must begin early.

In 2002, through a collaboration involving the New Hampshire State Department of Education, the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability, and the Alliance for Community Supports, Inc., the Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) was implemented as a dropout prevention model based on the philosophy that school can play a significant role in lowering the dropout rate and that all students should have the individual supports they need to succeed. The APEX model is designed to (a) significantly reduce high school dropout rates; (b) implement a school-wide positive behavioral system in high schools that lowers suspension and expulsion rates; (c) provide an intensive and individualized school-to-career service to significantly increase the number of students successfully completing high school, and (d) strengthen the state education agency's capacity to implement these proven dropout prevention strategies through comprehensive and high-quality professional development and technical assistance. At its core, the New Hampshire APEX model combines two evidence-based practices: Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education and Work (RENEW), both of which are based on the belief that students on a path to failure will likely drop out unless schools provide focused, organized interventions that are preventative and flexible.

In 2002, the Iowa Department of Education developed the Iowa Behavioral Supports for Children and Youth

to provide support and technical assistance to 14 schools implementing PBS, to identify model sites with effective dropout prevention programs, and to promote the development of the wrap-around planning process for students with significant behavioral or mental health needs. In 2003, a contract between the Iowa Department of Education and the Drake Collaboration created the Iowa Behavioral Alliance. The Alliance began work on three project elements: positive behavioral supports, dropout prevention, and school-based children's mental health (wrap-around). The Iowa Behavioral Alliance is a state-wide partnership that (a) changes how we think about discipline/behavior in schools, (b) fosters respectful relationships among youth and adults, (c) addresses all levels of student need, including mental health and dropout concerns, and (d) brings school staff, youth, families, and communities together to work at the local level.

Similarly, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is presently in the initial stages of expanding its PBS initiative to focus on dropout prevention. M-DCPS will leverage the success in PBS schools as a foundational strategy in dropout prevention for students with disabilities. Given the high numbers of students who exit school prematurely as a result of deficits in prosocial behaviors that typically result in excessive suspensions and expulsions, a focus on dropout prevention within this context is a logical next step.

## Conclusion

The long-term outcomes for dropping out of school have been well established in the literature. The literature indicates a fairly stable process by which students begin to disengage and pull back from school (Covington-Smith, 2007). Further, there is considerable information on risk factors associated with dropout. Recently, PBS has begun to evolve as a potentially vital component of dropout prevention in several states. PBS is well suited to address the needs of potential dropouts, as it provides a systems approach in which protective factors can be incorporated at universal, targeted group, and individual levels; however, more research is needed to identify how protective factors can be adopted and adapted across the three tiers of PBS to prevent dropout and increase school completion rates.

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## Board Approves Changes to Family Membership Category

Randall L. De Pry and Jennifer Zarcone

The APBS Board of Directors is pleased to announce a change to the “family” membership reflecting an increased emphasis by the board on attracting family members to the organization. The new fee structure for families is \$35.00 per year or 3 years at \$100.00. To qualify under this category, the applicant will need to indicate that he or she has an immediate family member who has individualized behavior support needs and who receives direct support from the applicant. Board members concluded that the former qualifications under this category may have had an adverse impact on families who could not meet some of the requirements, including creating an unfair financial burden on families who were required to have one family member join via the regular family membership fee before receiving the discounted rate for the second membership. Please let family members who are part of your communities and social support networks know about this change and encourage them to take advantage of our new family membership fee structure. If you have additional ideas that might enhance APBS memberships, please feel free to contact us at these e-mail addresses: Randall De Pry ([rdepry@uccs.edu](mailto:rdepry@uccs.edu)) and Jennifer Zarcone ([Jennifer\\_Zarcone@URMC.Rochester.edu](mailto:Jennifer_Zarcone@URMC.Rochester.edu)).

### Did You Know . . .

As a member of APBS, you receive free online access to the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* as a member benefit.

Please follow the registration process as outlined on Ingenta Connect (<http://www.ingentaconnect.com>). Partway through the registration procedure you will be prompted for your subscriber number. Enter APBS.

Once you’ve completed the registration, Ingenta will e-mail the Hammill Institute on Disabilities to confirm and activate your subscription term. If you encounter a problem during the registration process, contact Ingenta’s Help desk ([help@ingentaconnect.com](mailto:help@ingentaconnect.com)).

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## STAY INFORMED!

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<http://www.apbs.org>

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### APBS Newsletter

Please consider contributing to the APBS Newsletter. The newsletter is a mechanism for sharing perspectives on PBS. Please consider submitting:



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- Member Perspectives
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If you would like to submit to the newsletter, please contact:

**Carie English**, (813) 974-1898  
or via e-mail ([cenglish@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:cenglish@fmhi.usf.edu))

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**([rdepry@uccs.edu](mailto:rdepry@uccs.edu)) or Jennifer Zarcone**  
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