



ASSOCIATION FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

# Newsletter

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Association for  
Positive Behavior  
Support

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## APBS President's Update

As the new President of APBS, I would like to thank all of our members and the volunteers who helped make this year's 2009 conference a big success. I am really pleased to be able to serve as your president during an important time in the history of the Association. The APBS budget is strong and stable, we have an increasing number of APBS Networks—with more petitions coming in soon, and more members are participating on committees within the Association. We have a new Executive Committee that includes myself, Don Kincaid (Vice President), Randall De Pry (Treasurer), and Heather George (Secretary), and we have a group of dynamic full board members who are very sensitive to making sure that everyone's voice is heard in this Association. This is an optimal time to serve as president, and I will be working hard with the board, the conference coordinator, and other APBS members to ensure that we continue to prosper. I would like to share some of the highlights from the conference and information from the board that you may find interesting.

## Conference Updates

This year we had 1,196 people register to attend the conference. Although this is slightly lower compared to prior years, it is not unexpected during these difficult economic times. There was a lot of dialogue at the board meeting on March 23rd about this issue. We anticipate that it will be challenging for many of our members and regular conference attendees to cover the costs of travel. This means that APBS must be able

to be more flexible and to consider different types of opportunities that can be made available to members.

For instance, the APBS Website Committee has been working very hard to build a members' site that will provide information for those individuals who are unable to attend the annual conference. The goal will be to increase the value of becoming a member beyond the conference by making the website a place where individuals interested in positive behavior support (PBS) can network, obtain resources, and share information. The APBS Board has allocated more funds to the website operations this year in comparison to previous years, so you can expect more progress from the Website Committee.

The Website Committee has already established an organizational structure for the site ([apbs.org](http://apbs.org)), although some improvements are still in progress. Website data indicate that a large number of downloads from the site are related to conference presentations. Right now there are 60 presentations on our site in the 2009 conference section.

Rob Horner's 2009 keynote was videotaped this year and is posted on the website as well. We expect to provide videos of a larger number of invited and featured presentations and panels next year that will be of particular interest to members. The board also is working on scheduling a series of smaller regional workshops, which could make it easier for members to participate in events that may be closer to home.

Remember, conference presentations are available to the general public for only 60

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*(President's Update, continued from page 1)*

days after the conference this year. Beginning May 20, 2009, the conference pages will be available for 60 days in the password-protected section of the website. If you attended the conference but are not an APBS member, be sure to visit the website soon! Better yet, become a member!

### Website Updates

The Website Committee has a number of goals for this year. The members' site will include an opportunity for individuals who are considering becoming a member to receive a certain number of free visits to the website. A program will be available for online member voting, not only for the board but for other issues that require membership participation. The Website Committee is working with the APBS Network Committee on expanding the section of the website dedicated to networking to increase opportunities for members to discuss issues and share tools, materials, and ideas. Funds are also dedicated to organizing networking events this year.

### APBS Networks

At this year's conference, a series of events dedicated to networking topics were held. Marla Dewhirst from Illinois and Debby Boyer from Delaware facilitated an event dedicated to statewide planning, while Chris Borgmeier and Sharon Lohrmann presented on coaching systems in PBS. A large number of individuals attended the Structured Networking session at the APBS conference, including people from already established networks as well as those interested in creating new networks. This group will be meeting three times a year to

- create the APBS Network policies that will focus on encouraging collaboration within states, within countries, and across regions;
- establish a data-based reporting system that requests evaluation summaries for each network;
- discuss how the APBS website can become a vehicle for expanding networking among members; and
- share important updates and information as it becomes available.

Please consider forming an APBS Network in your area. You can find out what APBS Networks may already be organized in your state by going to the APBS Network finder:

[http://www.apbs.org/network\\_preview.aspx](http://www.apbs.org/network_preview.aspx)

More detailed information about each APBS Network is available in the member's site on *apbs.org*.

### APBS Evaluation and Long-Term Planning

The APBS Board has formed a new committee focused on the development of a logic model describing the inputs, outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts expected from the Association. This logic model is in development, and the board is seeking members interested in participating in assisting in the design of the APBS logic model. If you are interested in joining us on this very important endeavor, please contact me via email ([rffreeman@ku.edu](mailto:rffreeman@ku.edu)).

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## A Statewide Initiative Designed to Increase Capacity of School Teams to Reduce Challenging Behavior in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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One of the most challenging issues that school personnel and parents encounter in their efforts to provide appropriate educational programs for students with autism spectrum disorders is the occurrence of problem behaviors. Needless to say, behavior problems—such as noncompliance, verbal and physical aggression, and self-injury—are major barriers to effective educational and social development (Horner, Albin, Sprague, & Todd, 2000), and they place children at risk for isolation and exclusion from multiple settings (i.e., home, school, community; Sprague & Rian, 1993). Evidence suggests that for many children with developmental disabilities, problem behaviors that begin in early childhood do not naturally diminish with age (i.e., they do not go away). Developmental and learning deficits play a role in the maintenance and further development of problem behaviors into later childhood and adolescence (Hunt, Johnson, Owen, Ormerod, & Babbit, 1990; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Furthermore, children with deficits in communication and/or social skills are at particular risk for the development of behavior problems (Borthwick-Duffy, 1996; Koegel, Koegel, & Surratt, 1992).

Research suggests that educational interventions that fail to address the development of positive and prosocial behaviors will not be successful in the long-term elim-

ination of behavior problems. Essential elements—such as communication, social interaction, and adaptive behaviors—are necessary for educational programs for students with autism spectrum disorders to be effective in addressing core behavior problems. Understanding what causes problem behaviors to emerge, what maintains them, and what evokes their expression is important for prevention and treatment (Berkson & Tupa, 2000).

More children than ever are being classified as having autism spectrum disorders. In fact, autism spectrum disorders are the second most common serious developmental disability after mental retardation/intellectual impairment. Recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network indicated that about 1 in 150 children 8 years of age in multiple areas of the United States had autism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a rate of 10% to 17% per year (Autism Society of America, 2008). In New York State, a 452% increase in the number of students with autism occurred from 1996 to 2006. The current estimate of school-age students in New York State with this disability is 17,599 (New York State Department of Education, 2008).

While the number of children identified with autism spectrum disorders is rising, the number of trained professionals to teach them is not keeping up (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). As a result, school districts are faced with costly options, such as hiring consultants or sending children to out-of-district providers. In an effort to address the limited availability and rising costs associated with effective educational programs for students with autism spectrum disorders, the University at Albany Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD Albany) has partnered with the New York State Department of Education to provide training to school personnel on reducing challenging behavior in students with autism spectrum disorders. A significant part of this initiative involves working with school districts to assist them in building capacity to intervene using positive behavior interventions and supports. This program combines traditional training methodologies with targeted technical assistance to help teams in better understanding and addressing the challenging behaviors of their students with autism spectrum disorders.

### **Danny: A Case Study**

One boy, Danny (age 9), was a typical example of a student diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental

Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Danny participated in a general education third-grade classroom with (a) daily pull-out support for math and language arts and (b) weekly pull-out services of occupational and speech therapies. He participated in special classes (gym, music, art, etc.) and lunch with his typically developing peers. Danny was a bright, funny, and charming young man who greatly enjoyed time on the computer and reading out loud to his classmates. However, he also exhibited a number of challenging behaviors that put him at significant risk for a more restrictive educational placement. The behaviors of most concern were running out of the classroom periodically for 10- to 15-minute intervals during the day and refusing to complete classwork. Often, his verbal refusals would escalate to yelling, biting, kicking, punching, pinching, and eventually running out of the classroom. His classroom teachers and other support staff struggled to determine the function of Danny's behaviors and to create a plan that would support prosocial behaviors while diminishing the challenging behaviors.

With the assistance of CARD Albany staff, the school team acquired the knowledge and skills needed to develop an effective behavior intervention plan for Danny. To begin, CARD Albany staff provided fundamental training on functional behavior assessments and taught the team how to utilize simple data collection forms (*Behavior Rating Scale*; Dunlap, Iovannone, Wilson, Strain, & Kincaid, in press) to consistently monitor behavior. After several weeks of tracking behavior, it became clear that Danny's behaviors were primarily escape motivated. CARD Albany staff then provided training on creating a behavior intervention plan, using positive interventions and supports, to address the function(s) of the challenging behaviors. School staff members were able to identify several effective strategies, including setting up a meaningful reward system for Danny. Prevention strategies, such as a "working for" chart, and consequence strategies that included consistent, natural consequences for leaving the room (e.g., he needed to complete the work he missed, which meant he lost computer time) were also included. New behaviors, such as asking for a break, were also taught and immediately reinforced when appropriate attempts were made. CARD Albany staff also taught school personnel more appropriate prompting techniques, including utilizing a prompt hierarchy that began with natural cueing and progressed to verbal prompting. All identified strategies were assessed for contextual fit, and only those strategies that corresponded to the environment were ultimately chosen for implementation.

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*(Statewide Initiative, continued from page 3)*

A month into plan implementation, CARD Albany staff returned to the school to assist in monitoring outcomes and problem solving, if needed. Ongoing data collection showed a marked decrease in the number and duration of “running out of the room” episodes. Prior to intervention, Danny was leaving the room for an average of 16 minutes per day. Following consistent implementation of the plan, episodes of leaving the room were completely eliminated. Regarding Danny’s “refusal to complete work,” which occurred an average of 24 times a day at baseline and escalated to crisis (hitting, kicking, biting, etc.) at least two times a week, the episodes of refusal decreased to 2.5 per day with consistent implementation of the plan.

While the reduction in Danny’s challenging behaviors was a desirable outcome, an equally important result was the ability of his school team members to share the knowledge they acquired through this training initiative with other staff in their district. To that end, CARD Albany staff assisted the team in creating a system of support that provided release time for Danny’s current teachers to meet with his future teachers to provide them training on monitoring behavior and implementing the established behavior intervention plan. Time was also included for the current and future teams to continue to meet regularly to monitor the plan and/or problem solve.

## Summary

Now in its third year of implementation, this statewide training/technical assistance initiative has been successful in assisting school teams to reduce challenging behavior in students with autism spectrum disorders. Data indicate that school personnel are acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to effectively intervene using positive interventions and supports. In addition, action planning has allowed teams to begin to build the capacity of other professionals in the district to more effectively support students with autism spectrum disorders in the school environment.

CARD Albany is a university-affiliated resource center that brings research and practice together in community settings. CARD Albany provides evidence-based training and support to families and professionals and, through ongoing research, contributes knowledge to the field of autism spectrum disorders. For more information on CARD Albany programs, visit the website ([www.albany.edu/psy/autism](http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism)).

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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:



- Innovative Applications
- Member Perspectives
- Training Events & Workshops
- Resources and Materials
- Success Stories

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

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