

Strategies for Preventing Disproportionate Exclusions of African American Students

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The authors studied changes in disproportionate exclusion of African American students, compared with their White peers, in relation to implementation of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support using data from 46 schools. They measured (a) exclusion through suspension and expulsion data collected with the Schoolwide Information System; (b) Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support implementation through the Effective Behavior Support Survey completed by staff members; and (c) disproportionality with the relative rate index. Standard linear multiple regression analyses with the relative rate index as the outcome variable and Effective Behavior Support Survey items as predictors indicated specific Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support strategies, such as praise and positive reinforcement, were associated with reductions in disproportionate exclusions. Follow-up analyses with a subsample of eight schools that increased their Effective Behavior Support average score while decreasing their relative rate index identified additional strategies that hold promise for reducing disproportionate exclusion of African American students.

Keywords: African American, positive reinforcement, relative rate index, Schoolwide Information System, suspension

There is ample and persistent evidence that students from minority backgrounds, especially students from African American backgrounds, are referred to the school principal's office for discipline at a disproportionately higher rate than their White peers (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Many of these referrals result in disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsions for non-White students (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Vincent & Tobin, in press). High rates of exclusion, in turn, often lead to students' disengagement from school and academic failure (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Cartledge & Milburn, 1996).

Disciplinary events are complex interactions among student behavior, teacher behavior, and administrative decisions. Outcomes are affected by specific situational components ranging from institutional policies to individual teacher tolerance levels (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague,

Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). Although many individual teachers are aware of disproportionate discipline outcomes and would like to create greater disciplinary equity (McCreedy & Soloway, 2010), organizational components and systemwide changes appear to be critical to improving equity for all and reducing the "discipline gap" (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2002). Much research focuses on positive student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships as relevant to the prevention of behavioral problems jeopardizing student success (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005; Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Downey, 2008; Patterson, 2009; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008; Sutherland & Morgan, 2003). However, little information is available on empirically validated interventions to decrease racially and ethnically disproportionate student outcomes.

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Schoolwide positive behavior support

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is a set of systemic prevention processes focused on developing positive and contextually appropriate relationships intended to facilitate the social and academic success of all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity, in all school settings and all school types, including alternative schools (Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, & Tobin, 2009; Scott

et al., 2002). Key elements of SWPBS include (a) proactive teaching of schoolwide behavioral expectations, (b) consistent reinforcement of expected behaviors, (c) consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior, (d) monitoring of student behavior in all school settings, and (e) use of data for decision-making regarding students' support needs (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

SWPBS implementation has been associated with overall lowered office discipline referral rates (Bohanon et al., 2006; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Galloway, Panyan, Smith, & Wessendorf, 2008; Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Scott & Barrett, 2004). Lowered overall discipline referral rates have then been associated with improved student academic achievement (Ervin, Schaughency, Goodman, McGlinchey, & Matthews, 2006; Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Sadler & Sugai, 2009). However, overall reductions in discipline referrals at the whole school level may not be equitably distributed across students from all ethnicities (Vincent, Cartledge, May, & Tobin, 2009). Skiba et al. (2011) found that (a) African American students were substantially overrepresented in discipline referrals resulting from minor and more subjectively interpreted behavioral violations, such as disruption and defiance; (b) African American and Latino students were more likely to be more severely punished for those minor behavioral violations; and (c) African American and Latino students were excluded from school at a higher rate than were their White peers. Vincent and Tobin (2010) found that (a) the number of days lost to out-of-school suspension and expulsion as well as (b) the number of long-term (>10 days) exclusion events were disproportionately higher for African American students compared with White students. Being suspended from school is a risk factor for dropping out of school (Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010). Given the repeatedly documented associations between SWPBS implementation and overall decreases in discipline referral rates, and given the evidence that African American students appear not to benefit equitably from these decreases, we aimed to identify and recommend specific SWPBS strategies that may be associated with decreased disproportionate exclusion of students from African American backgrounds.

Method

Exclusion of students

As a measure of exclusion we used discipline referrals leading to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. These consequences result in complete removal of the student from any environment where instructional or social activities related to the school might occur. As such, suspensions

and expulsions are arguably the most damaging to students' academic and social success.

Data sources

Our data set merged suspension and expulsion data collected through the Schoolwide Information System (SWIS), demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistics, and data on school staff members' perceptions of implementation of key aspects of SWPBS collected with the online version of the Effective Behavior Support (EBS) Survey. We briefly describe each data source in the subsequent sections.

SWIS. The SWIS¹ (May et al., 2006) is a Web-based application that allows schools to collect information on which students engage in what problem behaviors when, where, and why, and what administrative decisions follow the behavioral incidents. Schools using SWIS have been found to be representative of public schools in the United States (Spaulding et al., 2010). To encourage consistency, operational definitions of behavioral offenses and administrative decisions are used (Todd, Horner, & Tobin, 2010). Schools could record ethnicity or race, using the following categories: (a) Native American/Alaska Indian, (b) Asian, (c) Hispanic/Latino, (d) African American, (e) White, (f) Pacific Islander/Hawaiian, or they could select "not listed" or "unknown." About 40% of schools entered specific student ethnicity or racial information (Vincent, 2008).

National Center for Education Statistics. The National Center for Education Statistics is supported by the U.S. Congress and is responsible for collecting data related to education.² State educational agencies provide public school data annually to the National Center for Education Statistics. At the time of our study, the most recent National Center for Education Statistics data available were for the 2005–2006 academic year.

EBS survey. Originally published as the "EBS Survey" (Lewis & Sugai, 1999), this questionnaire also is known as the Self-Assessment Survey. Ratings of implementation status for 46 specific SWPBS strategies are made on a three-point scale ranging from 0 (not in place) to 2 (in place).³ We used data from Version 2 (Sugai, Horner, & Todd, 2000) collected online. More than 20 SWPBS tools are available for various assessment purposes, typically focused on one or two elements or tiers.⁴ The EBS survey addresses four domains at once: (a) schoolwide discipline systems, (b) non-classroom-management systems (e.g., cafeteria, hallway, playground), (c) classroom management systems, and (d) systems for individual students engaging in chronic problem behaviors. Although used primarily at the school level for local needs assessment and action planning, schools using the online survey agree to share their data (anonymously) for research. The EBS Survey

has been found to be internally consistent (Hagan-Burke, Burke, Martin, Boone, & Kirkendoll, 2005; Safran, 2006). The online version of the survey is sensitive to the value of using SWIS data when implementing SWPBS (Tobin, 2006).

Sample

Inclusion criteria for our study were as follows: (a) use of SWIS in 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 and at least one suspension or expulsion in the first year reported, (b) agreement that SWIS data may be used in research studies, (c) representation in the National Center for Education Statistics database, and (d) online completion of the EBS Survey in 2005–2006 and 2006–2007. To make our sample meaningful for analyses of reductions in disproportionate exclusion of students from African American backgrounds compared with their White peers, we formulated three additional inclusion criteria: Schools needed to (a) improve their overall rates of out-of-school suspension from Time 1 to Time 2, (b) have a sufficiently diverse student body, and (c) exclude African American and White students. We based the improvement criterion solely on suspension rates, because expulsion rates were so minute as to be barely interpretable. To meet the diversity criterion, a school's total enrollment of African American students needed to be greater than 5% and less than 95% on the basis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics. To identify schools that excluded African American and White students, we examined student ethnicity data recorded in the SWIS.

A total of 46 schools met the inclusion criteria previously identified. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of our sample, which included 19 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, 6 high schools (general education), and 4 alternative secondary schools.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Schools Meeting Inclusion Criteria

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Location		
Colorado	3	6.5
Illinois	1	2.2
Maryland	12	26.1
Michigan	30	65.2
Total	46	100.0
2005–2006 enrollment, by race		
African American	9,248	
White	19,688	
Other	3,758	
Total	32,694	

Analytical procedure

To assess disproportionality of exclusions of African American students, we relied on the relative rate index (RRI), which is an unbiased measure of disproportionality and is recommended by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Feyerherm & Butts, 2003; National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). The RRI is an alternative to the more traditional disproportionate representation index, which compares the percentage of a specific racial/ethnic group being identified (e.g., arrested, suspended) to the percentage that group makes up of the total population. Although this index is useful for visual comparisons, it is a statistically biased estimator that is affected by the relative size of the minority group populations, making comparisons from state to state or school to school problematic. The RRI is not affected by relative proportion of minorities to the total population (Feyerherm & Butts, 2003).

To find the RRI for disciplinary exclusions of African American and White students, we first found the total number of each group enrolled in the school and the number excluded for disciplinary reasons (suspension and/or expulsion). On the basis of these totals, we calculated the rate of disciplinary exclusion per 100 students by dividing the number excluded by the number enrolled. We then used the exclusion rate for African American and for White students to calculate the RRI by dividing the rate for African American students by the rate for White students.

To identify specific SWPBS strategies that might lead to reduced racial disproportionality in disciplinary exclusions, we conducted separate standard linear multiple regression analyses for each of the four EBS subscales (schoolwide, classroom, nonclassroom, individual student systems). For each analysis, we used the RRI as the outcome variable, and the individual scale item scores for implementation from each EBS subscale as predictors. For each analysis, we entered all predictors into the regression equation at the same time because we did not have an a priori theory about which item would likely be associated with decreases in disproportionate suspension of African American students. We examined the statistical significance of standardized beta coefficients to identify EBS items representing specific SWPBS strategies that were associated with decreases in RRI. Because a decrease in RRI was the desirable direction of our outcome measure, we needed to identify and interpret negative beta coefficients.

To get a better sense of how changes in RRI were associated with changes in EBS survey scores, we did follow-up analyses with a small subsample of schools that improved their overall scores from Time 1 to Time 2, calculated as the average in-place rating across all individual items. Of the 46 schools studied, 18 schools improved their average EBS score in 2006–2007, operationally defined as any score at least 0.05 points higher at Time 2 than at Time 1. Of those 18 schools, 13 had an RRI at Time 1 of greater than

Table 2. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Classroom Variables Predicting Relative Rate Index ($N = 46$)

Classroom variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	-0.58	3.91	—
1. Expected student behavior and routines in classrooms are stated positively and defined clearly.	4.56	3.61	.40
2. Problem behaviors are defined clearly.	-5.24	2.66	-.49
3. Expected student behavior and routines in classrooms are taught directly.	3.39	3.26	.33
4. Expected student behaviors are acknowledged regularly (positively reinforced) (>4 positives to 1 negative).	-7.69	2.39	-.81**
5. Problem behaviors receive consistent consequences.	-1.31	2.81	-.19
6. Procedures for expected and problem behaviors are consistent with schoolwide procedures.	1.74	2.95	.23
7. Classroom-based options exist to allow classroom instruction to continue when problem behavior occurs.	5.23	2.13	.53
8. Instruction and curriculum materials are matched to student ability (math, reading, language).	1.95	2.05	.20
9. Students experience high rates of academic success ($\geq 75\%$ correct).	2.43	1.81	.34
10. Teachers have regular opportunities for access to assistance and recommendations (observation, instruction, and coaching).	2.37	1.38	.31
11. Transitions between instructional and noninstructional activities are efficient and orderly.	-5.51	2.12	-.61*

Note. $R^2 = .52$, adjusted $R^2 = .36^{**}$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

1.5 (range = 1.60 to 10.89, $M = 3.95$, $SD = 3.17$), meaning that African American students were more than 1.5 times more likely to be excluded than were their White peers. Because these schools (a) improved their average EBS scores at Time 2 and (b) were disproportionately excluding African American students at Time 1, we calculated their RRI at Time 2 to determine whether improvements in the average EBS score were accompanied by reductions in RRI. Of the 13 schools, 8 reduced their RRI at Time 2. For those schools, we examined the EBS survey items at Time 2 to see what specific SWPBS strategies had improved implementation scores occurring at the same time as the RRI reductions.

Results

RRI

The average RRI for African American to White students excluded from schools for our sample of 46 schools was 3.11 ($SD = 2.21$). This means that overall, African American students were 3.11 times more likely to be excluded from school than their White peers.

Regression analyses

The standard linear multiple regression analyses identified specific strategies associated with decreases in RRI, indicated by a statistically significant ($p < .05$) negative beta coefficient, within the classroom subscale but not within the other subscales. The overall model for the classroom scale was significant and explained approximately 36% of the total variance ($R^2 = .52$, adjusted $R^2 = .36$, $F(11, 34) = 3.312$, $p = .004$). Within the model, two items were statistically significantly ($p < .05$) associated with decrease in the RRI. Item 4, "Expected student behaviors are acknowl-

edged regularly (positively reinforced) (>4 positives to 1 negative)" had the greatest association, with a standardized beta coefficient of $-.812$ ($p = .003$). Item 11, "Transitions between instructional and non-instructional activities are efficient and orderly" also was associated with a decrease in RRI, as indicated by a standardized beta coefficient of $-.606$ ($p = .014$). Table 2 summarizes the results of the standard linear multiple regression analysis for classroom variables.

Follow-up analyses

We examined a subsample of 13 schools that (a) improved their average EBS score from Time 1 to Time 2 by at least .05 point on a 2-point scale and (b) were excluding African American students at a disproportionate rate at Time 1 to see how changes in EBS scores might be related to changes in RRI. A total of 3,699 African American students and 5,839 White students were enrolled in those schools. Changes in exclusion rates of African American students, White students, RRI, and EBS average scores for those 13 schools are summarized in Table 3. In 8 of the 13 schools, improved EBS scores were accompanied by reduced RRI; those reductions were substantial, ranging from .52 to 10.01.

Next, we examined changes in individual EBS item scores for the schools who lowered their RRI in conjunction with increases in their EBS average score. We subtracted Time 1 scores from Time 2 scores for each EBS item in order to measure improvements. For each of these schools, we then rank-ordered items from those that were rated as most improved to those that were rated as least improved. We then counted the number of times each item was among the 10 most improved items. Thus, we were able to identify which EBS items were most improved across our sample of schools that reduced their RRI. The schools varied in their

Table 3. Enrollments, Number of Exclusions, Exclusion Rates, Changes in Relative Rate Index (RRI), and Changes in Average Effective Behavior Supports Survey (EBS) Scores for Follow-Up Sample

Variable	Did RRI (or African American exclusion rate) go down?											EBS average in 2005–2006		EBS average in 2006–2007		Change
	African American enrollment	White enrollment	African American OSS or EXP	White OSS or EXP	African American exclusion rate	White exclusion rate	RRI in 2006–2007	RRI in 2005–2006								
School code																
104150	82	41	7	4	8.54	9.76	0.88	10.89	Yes	1.43	1.57	0.15				
188036	40	337	3	9	7.50	2.67	2.81	10.26	Yes	1.51	1.58	0.07				
102839	240	122	91	16	37.92	13.11	2.89	5.52	Yes	1.09	1.43	0.34				
123922	172	135	15	7	8.72	5.19	1.68	4.75	Yes	1.36	1.56	0.19				
158371	213	40	11	13	5.16	32.50	0.16	3.28	Yes	1.33	1.64	0.31				
111572	133	362	28	38	21.05	10.50	2.01	3.03	Yes	0.92	1.32	0.40				
104573	105	75	5	0	4.76	0.00	*	2.40	Yes	1.44	1.66	0.22				
118621	216	430	66	80	30.56	18.60	1.64	2.16	Yes	1.46	1.60	0.14				
M for schools reducing racially disproportionate exclusions																
SD for schools reducing racially disproportionate exclusions																
School code																
150979	214	584	63	78	29.44	13.36	2.20	2.11	No	1.24	1.39	0.15				
165726	159	532	32	49	20.13	9.21	2.19	1.91	No	1.45	1.60	0.15				
103719	695	1217	158	140	22.73	11.50	1.98	1.83	No	1.43	1.49	0.06				
162950	446	1442	118	194	26.46	13.45	1.97	1.65	No	1.04	1.39	0.35				
156467	984	522	224	60	22.76	11.49	1.98	1.60	No	1.42	1.58	0.16				
M for schools NOT reducing racially disproportionate exclusions																
SD for schools NOT reducing racially disproportionate exclusions																
										1.32	1.49	0.17				
										0.17	0.10	0.11				

Note. EXP = expelled; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

*School 104573 did not have any disciplinary exclusions for White students in 2006–2007, which meant that the African American:White RRI could not be calculated (National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). However, the rate of disciplinary exclusions for African American students in 2006–2007 was 4.76 per 100, which was lower than the rate of 7.41 in 2005–2006.

ratings of most improved items. Despite this variability, the following three items were listed most often as the most improved items:

- Patterns of student problem behaviors are reported to teams and faculty for active decision making on a regular (e.g., monthly) basis (schoolwide systems scale).
- The school team has access to ongoing training and support from district personnel (schoolwide systems scale).
- Local resources are used to conduct functional assessment-based behavior support planning for ~10 hours/week/student (individual student systems scale).

Limitations

Our data posed a number of limitations that need to be considered when interpreting outcomes of our analyses. Although our sample yielded rich descriptive outcomes that can be useful in shaping future research, interpretation of our regression analyses outcomes is limited by the relatively small sample size for statistical procedures in terms of the number of schools. Replication of our analyses with larger samples is recommended when schools are used as the unit of analysis. At the time our data were collected, many disciplinary events recorded in SWIS were linked to students whose ethnicity was recorded as “not listed” or “unknown.” Future research will benefit from new federal ethnicity and racial categories which do not include “not listed” or “unknown” (National Forum on Educational Statistics, Race/Ethnicity Data Implementation Task Force, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Ethnic and racial categories in SWIS have been updated to match those now required for federal records (Rossetto Dickey, 2009). Although the SWIS database is a valid and reliable record of discipline referrals to the school office (Irvin et al., 2006; Irvin et al., 2004), the administrative action of expulsion—typically a decision that is not made at the time of the referral but rather later, after a hearing—tends to be underreported in the SWIS database. In addition, all of the data sources reflect information reported by school staff. The National Center for Education Statistics obtains data from state departments of education, which obtain data from schools. The EBS Survey is a school staff self-assessment measure. SWIS discipline data are entered by local school staff members. Future research that includes other types of data (e.g., direct observations, interviews), even if from a small sample, would provide valuable additional information, especially if the real benefits of SWPBS (Sailor et al., 2009) in relation to the harm done by exclusion from school (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health, 2003) were clearly addressed.

Discussion

Although disproportionate exclusion of African American students from school has been widely documented, it re-

mains a problem in U.S. schools. To address this problem, existing research recommends positive behavioral supports implemented systemically at the school and classroom level, and specifically establishing positive and consistent classroom procedures (Cartledge, Sentelle, Loe, Lambert, & Reed, 2001; Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Hershfeldt et al., 2009). The main finding from our analyses is consistent with, and extends, the existing literature. We found that the most important strategy, the one that made the greatest contribution to explaining the change in a school's RRI, involved improving implementation of the following SWPBS classroom strategy: “Expected student behaviors are acknowledged regularly (positively reinforced) (>4 positives to 1 negative).” In other words, schools where teachers reported improving their use of praise and reinforcement for students who behave appropriately and improving on trying to have a 4:1 ratio of positive remarks (e.g., praise) to negative remarks (e.g., reprimands) were schools that also had reductions in disproportionate disciplinary exclusions of African American students. Although more research is needed on culturally responsive use of praise and positive reinforcement, it seems logical that a classroom atmosphere where teachers express appreciation to students would help build trust.

Trusting teacher–student relationships have been identified as particularly important for African American students. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) looked at data on the specific situations related to discipline referrals of African American students, particularly referrals for defiance, using multiple data sources, and concluded that a key to solving the problem was enabling students to trust teachers by increasing teachers' demonstrations of caring and high expectations. Gregory and Ripski (2008) also addressed the issue of trust in relationship to discipline referrals, studying interviews with teachers and surveys from students. They concluded that in this situation, relationship building was essential to increasing trust and reducing discipline referrals.

Our fine-grained follow-up analysis of the specific strategies that improved the most in the eight schools that were most successful in reducing their disproportionate exclusion of African American students indicated the importance of improvement in the implementation of several schoolwide and individual student-level items. Regular reporting of discipline referral data to schoolwide teams and faculty emerged as an important schoolwide SWPBS strategy. This type of use of data for decision making to improve equity in schools also is recommended by Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009). Regular reports of discipline data to school teams and faculty might be more likely to occur, and be used successfully to assess needs, make data-based decisions about action plans to improve school climate, and monitor and evaluate progress if “the school team has access to ongoing training and support from district personnel.” This was the second school-level SWPBS strategy that emerged from our analyses as potentially associated with reductions in disproportionate

exclusion of African American students. Some school districts have Positive Behavior Intervention and Support leadership teams that provide training, coaching, evaluation, or coordination to schools (Lewis-Palmer, Bounds, & Sugai, 2004; Netzel & Eber, 2003).⁵

At the individual student level, having “local resources available to conduct functional assessment–based behavior support planning (~10 hrs/week/student)” was identified as a SWPBS strategy that might facilitate keeping African American students in school. A full discussion of the functional behavioral assessment and related positive behavior support process is beyond the scope of this article, but its essence has been well described by Sugai et al. (2000). They emphasized that a functional behavioral assessment is intended to identify what triggers and maintains problem behavior and has three main results:

The first is hypothesis statements that include three key features: (a) operational definitions of the problem behavior(s), (b) descriptions of the antecedent events that reliably predict occurrence and nonoccurrence of the problem behavior, and (c) descriptions of the consequence events that maintain the problem behavior(s). The second is direct observation data supporting these hypotheses. The third functional behavioral assessment result is a behavior support plan [on the basis of the assessment]. . . . Behavior support plans provide a summary of intervention manipulations in four areas: (a) setting event strategies, (b) antecedent strategies, (c) behavior-teaching strategies, and (d) consequence strategies. In addition, a comprehensive behavior support plan provides implementation scripts that detail (a) who does what strategies when, where, how often, and why; (b) how emergency or crisis situations will be handled; and (c) how implementation and effectiveness will be monitored. (Sugai et al., 2000, p. 12)

Materials are available on the use of function-based support for individual students (e.g., Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & Sugai, 2007; Crone, Hawken, & Bergstrom, 2007; Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010; Fairbanks, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008; O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Storey, & Sprague, 1997; Preciado, Horner, & Baker, 2009; Smith & Sugai, 2004; Steege & Watson, 2009; Tobin, 2005, 2008; Tobin, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2002; Tobin & Martin, 2001; Todd, 2004; Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Colvin, 1999). Training, consultation, and support from school district personnel can help school staff conduct functional assessment–based behavior support planning (Couvillon, Bullock, & Gable, 2009; Horner, Crone, & Stiller, 2001; Lewis-Palmer et al., 2004).

The present study highlights the importance of fully implementing SWPBS strategies, which will involve identifying barriers and facilitators (Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, & Wallace, 2007). Although making sure that educators are correctly implementing SWPBS strategies can be expected to benefit all students, in some schools, staff may need additional guidance on how these strategies can be implemented in a culturally responsive manner. Efforts to

improve cultural responsiveness include (a) professional development led by experts who provide information on different cultures and (b) educators' own adaptive efforts to increase their knowledge of and reciprocal relationships with the cultures of their students and the students' families (Irvine, 2003; Jones, 2005; Sheely & Bratton, 2010). Schools could learn from the health care profession how to benefit from *cultural brokers*, individuals who are familiar with two cultural groups who can function as a liaison and help build cultural competence and respect (National Center for Cultural Competence, n.d.). Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) recommended increasing teachers' understanding of their own cultural backgrounds and their awareness of sociopolitical issues. Singleton and Linton (2006) developed a comprehensive program for this purpose. As explained by Garcia (2009), the Southern Poverty Law Center provides a range of resources to enhance educators' cultural responsiveness, including a variety of materials from the Teaching Diverse Students Initiative.⁶ These may be useful in combination with SWPBS.

To summarize, we recommend that educators strive to implement the following five specific strategies, monitor their implementation efforts, and evaluate the results using the RRI:

1. Expected student behaviors should be acknowledged regularly (positively reinforced) (> 4 positives to 1 negative) in the classroom.
2. Transitions between instructional and noninstructional activities in the classroom should be efficient and orderly.
3. Patterns of student problem behaviors (e.g., office discipline referrals and suspensions) should be reported to teams and faculty for active decision making on a regular (e.g., monthly) basis, disaggregated by ethnicity and race.
4. School teams that are responsible for developing action plans for improving student behavior (at whole school and individual levels) should have access to ongoing training and support from district personnel related to function-based positive behavior interventions and supports, SWPBS, and cultural responsiveness.
5. For individual students with serious behavior problems, local resources should be used to conduct functional assessment–based behavior support planning (~10 hrs/week/student).

In conclusion, this study suggests that these strategies would help prevent racially disproportionate disciplinary exclusions. It contributes to the field by going beyond describing the problem to taking initial steps to identifying solutions.

Notes

1. For more information, visit <http://www.swis.org>.
2. For more information, visit <http://nces.ed.gov>.

3. For current versions, visit <http://www.pbssurveys.org/pages/SelfAssessmentSurvey.aspx> and <http://pbis.org>.
4. For details, visit http://www.pbis.org/evaluation/evaluation_tools.aspx.
5. For more information, visit http://www.pbis.org/school/district_level.aspx.
6. For more information, visit http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/about_tdsi.

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