Winning Behavior Management for the Hybrid Classroom: Increase Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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Table of Contents

The Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges and impacts for our nation's schools and the exact toll is yet to be understood. Schools look to an uncertain future, and new and different challenges will emerge.

Educational leaders are in general agreement that the mental health status of students, due to the fact that many students live in conditions of abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, will be adversely affected due to the extended school shutdowns. It is also likely to result in long-term social, emotional and behavioral impacts as students return to school in the fall of 2020.

Prior to the pandemic, over 70% of school principals reported that classroom behavior was a serious concern in their school. With the advent of COVID-19, educators are reporting high levels of additional concern about maintaining positive student behavior in a virtual learning environment which is essential to student engagement and learning. Adding more complexity to this situation is that many have hypothesized that schools will be a combination of traditional physical classrooms and virtual classrooms or what could be labeled a "Hybrid Learning Model". For example, the Governor of Colorado stated recently: "By and large, I think across our state and across our nation students are going to be able to return to school in the fall, it's just not going to look like any other school year...in anticipation of future outbreaks, there could be times when schools convert to online formats for weeks at a time during the year."

How do teachers manage student behavior, emotional status and engagement under these variable and continuously changing conditions?

Although it may seem very difficult to maintain the same level of classroom management when transitioning to virtual learning, it is critical to keep in mind that the practices that are used in a physical classroom in a brick and mortar school are equally effective in a virtual classroom. This article will provide educators practical strategies to support their students during these difficult times.

ONLINE

BLENDED
LEARNING

CLASSROOM
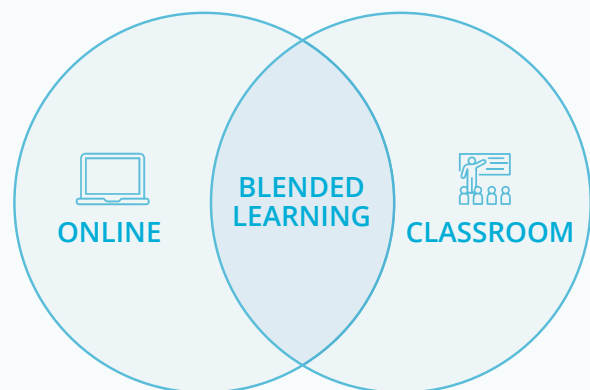
"There is a paramount need to create a safe and secure environment...the most important thing is teaching the skills to address the trauma." - Dr. Don Kincaid, USF

Positive Behavioral Supports

Hero will help schools improve climate through several mechanisms as supported in the research literature The continued implementation of positive behavior support systems, or also known as PBIS, will be an effective tool in bridging the gap between physical and distance learning classrooms. These methods and procedures will provide the "consistency factor" across both environments as students move between them. The existing school-wide behavior expectations should remain in place and the consistent application of the expectations and verbal language will have a positive impact across both physical and online settings. Applying these methods in a virtual learning environment will provide clarity for students and help them see that the same systems apply regardless of the mode of instruction. It is important in the online classroom that you keep your expectations and target behaviors clear and simple so students know precisely what to do. This will help achieve a high level of predictability which is so crucial during these uncertain times and even serves to ameliorate trauma-induced anxiety. However, be flexible because there will be times when interpersonal relationships and student well-being take precedence over assignment and work completion.

Positive Behavior Support Systems can provide a comprehensive approach to meet the needs of students struggling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:
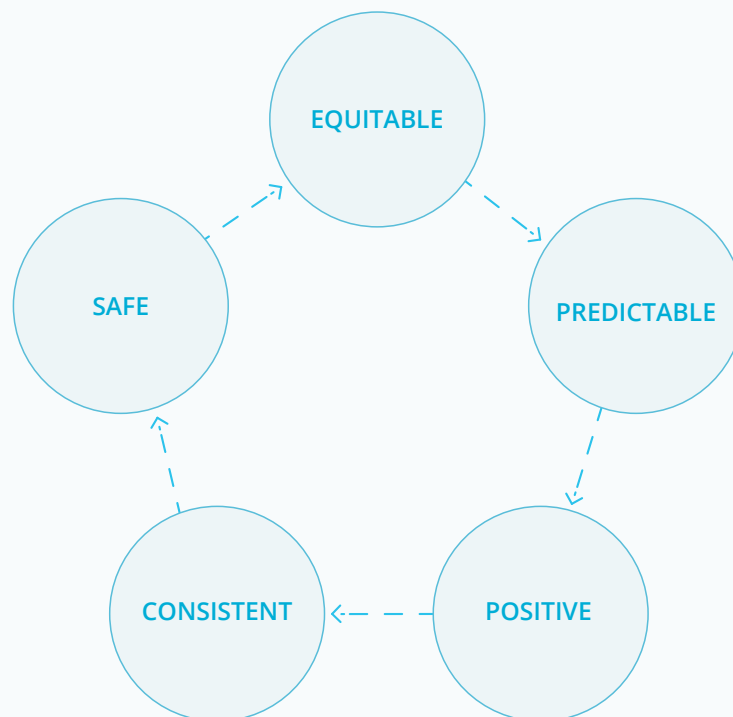
Adapted from CA PBIS Coalition

"PBIS will be the consistent and predictable components to bridge virtual and physical classrooms in this blended learning model." - Dr. Howie Knoff

Setting Expectations

Most experienced and effective teachers know that the first step in setting up a high performing classroom, from a PBIS perspective, is to define the expectations for behavior and social competencies. The same can be said for the virtual learning environment. The first step in defining your expectations is to create a "behavior matrix" or sometimes known as a "teaching" matrix. Instead of defining expectations by locations around the school, use the most common virtual activities or routines. Essentially, you create two matrices; one for the physical classroom and one for the virtual classroom. The behavior matrix should consider the range of possible activities that will take place online such as teacher-led instruction, independent work, one-on one work and small group activities. There will be times when the expectations for behavior will vary based on the software application or the way content areas are covered so consider using these variables to organize your matrix.

Define, teach, and practice the virtual behaviors you want to students to exhibit. Do not simply post the matrix and assume it will be effectively understood by your students. It is essential that these expectations be systematically taught just as you would in the regular classroom, give students ample opportunities to practice and receive acknowledgment for meeting expectations. Below is an example of a matrix for virtual classrooms:

We are...	Entering Class	Teacher-led Whole Group Instruction	One-on-One Inscruction	Small-Group Acticities (Breakout ROoms)
SAFE	• Choose a distraction free-space • Use equipment as intended • Use kind words and faces	• Ask in chat if you need help • Use kind words and faces	• Use kind words and faces	• Use "stop-leave-talk" when you hear disrespect • Encourage others to participate • Use kind words and faces
RESPECTFUL	• Video on at all times • Audio off • Use chat with classmates for first 5 minutes	• Video on at all times • Audio off • Answer questions in chatbox on cue • Answer polls promptly	• Video on at all times • Audio off • Listen attentively • Answer questions out loud on cue	• Video on at all times • Audio off • One speaker at a time: wait or use chat to respond when others are talking • Respect others' cultures, opinions and viewpoints
RESPONSIBLE	• Be on time and ready to learn • Start class charged or plugged in • Have materials ready	• Ask questions (voice or chat) when you have them • Be present - avoid multitasking	• Ask questions (voice or chat) when you have them • Try your best • Be present - avoid multitasking	• Encourage each other to stay on topic • Complete the work together • Be present - avoid multitasking

From PBIS.org

5

Strategies for successful design and implementation of expectations:

- ⊘ Describe specific, observable behaviors for each expectation

- ⊘ Plan for modeling the desired behaviors

- ⊘ Provide students with written and visual cues in the setting where the behaviors are expected

Examples of expectations that will require clear guidelines are:

- ⊘ Arriving on time for virtual class

- ⊘ Engagement during instruction

- ⊘ Logging study times

- ⊘ Check-in time

- ⊘ Office hours

- ⊘ Establishment of an appropriate home work space

- ⊘ Virtual responding etiquette

- ⊘ How students should work with parents to support their learning

Acknowledgement Systems

Once the expectations are defined and taught you must monitor and acknowledge the prosocial behaviors observed in both learning environments. The acknowledgement of the expected behaviors is accomplished through "behavior specific praise" which is verbal or written feedback statements that are descriptive, specific, and delivered upon student demonstration of the expected behavior. To deliver behavior specific praise, inform the student of the specific positive behavior they were doing, and the rule to which it is linked.

There are many benefits of behavior specific praise as it helps adults and students focus on positive social behaviors and actions. It is one of the most powerful behavior change tool teachers have in their repertoire in the virtual environment as well, and it increases the likelihood students will use the recognized behaviors and skills in distance learning. Additionally, behavior specific praise will decrease inappropriate behavior and therefore reduce the need for corrective responses. This type of praise teaches new skills and the predictability of behavior specific praise allows for a sense of control and promotes brain development in children as it triggers much meta-cognition.

"
"Schools need to use the PBIS framework to teach the behaviors, the approaches to mental concerns and [the] strategies for students [on] how to be engaged…" - Dr. Don Kincaid, USF

Creating High Structure with a Token Economy

Research over several decades with teachers in classroom settings using token economies has firmly established the efficacy of token reinforcement systems in improving a wide range of student behaviors and academic engagement. Token economy systems are able to have a profound impact on schools, classrooms, and community-based settings and this holds true for virtual settings as well.

A token economy is simple to understand and is comprised of 3 steps:

1. Student engages in a target behavior in an effort to earn a token or point(s).

2. Student receives a token (or points) for engaging in the behavior.

3. Student exchanges tokens (or points) for a preferred backup reinforcer.

A consistent and predictable token economy will be very important in establishing continuity between the physical classroom and virtual classroom. In the situation where schools are shifting frequently from physical to virtual classrooms, the token reinforcement system can be designed to work across environments and improve student engagement and behavior. For example, students can earn long-term rewards via virtual class and redeem upon return to school. The use of token economy will also increase the "positivity ratio", which is important in class climate, by having teachers focus on reinforcing positive behaviors when they occur.

Philosophical critiques in opposition of the token economy have come from educators amid concerns that students may become dependent on these systems and they will learn to respond appropriately only when working for tangible tokens or backup rewards. It is also articulated that token systems may attenuate intrinsic motivation for students. Employing methods of shaping, fading, intermittent reinforcement, the pairing of social reinforcement and meta-cognitive strategies will engender the transfer of student behavior management from external sources to "self-management" which is the ultimate goal.

"When a teacher observes student behavior and compliments the students...[they] will continue to engage in appropriate behavior." - Robin Ennis, University of AL

When designing the token system for blended learning consider:

- ⊘ What reinforcer(s) are most desired by individuals?

- ⊘ What reinforcer(s) are most desired by the group?

- ⊘ What specific reinforcer can I deliver immediately during the virtual lesson?

- ⊘ Will delayed reinforcement work for my students?

- ⊘ What specific reinforcer can I deliver at a later time after the virtual lesson?

- ⊘ How will I pair social reinforcement with tokens or points?

- ⊘ How will I pair verbal language in my process to help students build internal dialogue and "self-reinforcement?"

Increasing Student Engagement

Student engagement is viewed as multidimensional: involving aspects of students' emotions, behaviors and cognitions and can be viewed as the "glue" that links students, teachers, families and outcomes. Deci and Ryan (2012), based on social determination theory, describe three psychological conditions that underlie student engagement: Relatedness, Autonomy and Competence. These conditions foster the most volitional and high-quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity.

Teachers can support these three psychological conditions by showing students personal and cultural respect in the hybrid learning model environment by:

- ⊘ Listening and paraphrasing back to the student

- ⊘ Asking questions to learn about the student

- ⊘ Being consistent with all students

- ⊘ Being judicious in the use "evaluative" statements

- ⊘ Setting high expectations

- ⊘ Showing consistent attitudes and moods

- ⊘ Admitting your failures and being humble

Helping students cultivate a sense of personal efficacy and control over their environment will advance student engagement and increase a sense of competence.

- ⊘ Convey to students that they are making progress and becoming a competent learner
- ⊘ Have specific goals that are attainable (e.g., zone of proximal development)
- ⊘ Provide concrete feedback indicating level of competence
- ⊘ Provide reinforcement for effort and performance improvements
- ⊘ Set high expectations
- ⊘ Give reasonable controls to students to guide their own learning
- ⊘ Help students self-monitor their learning

A study by Cornell, Shukla, and Konold (2016) found strong relationships between the use of positive behavior support methods or PBIS (i.e., clearly defined expectations, consistent discipline, positive reinforcement, and supportive student relationships) and high levels of student engagement. The study also provides additional confirmatory evidence that student engagement is one of the main drivers of student academic achievement.

Authoritative Climate Model (ACM)
Multilevel multitrait-multimethod model

Konold, T., Cornell, D., Jia, Y., Malone, M., 2018
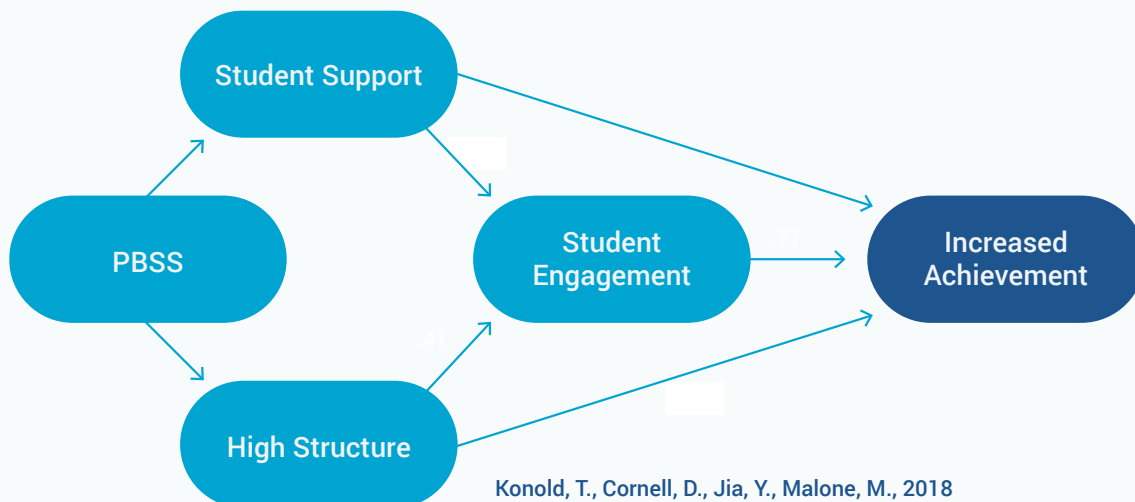
"20% of parents may prefer to have their children continue taking classes online until they feel more comfortable that it is safe to go back" - Colorado Governor Jared Polis

Ideas for Fostering Student Engagement in Virtual Learning

- **Send daily or weekly newsletters to families and/or students.** Consider recording and uploading a video to include in the email. Many teachers have recorded themselves reading a children's book, conducting a science experiment in the kitchen, or even delivering a short lesson.

- **Take your class on a virtual field trip.** Many museums and cultural sites are offering digital tours for free. You and your students can go together to any of these places around the world

- **Host a virtual morning meeting.** Routines are critical for students so find ways to create ways for students' routines at home. A daily virtual morning meeting via a web conferencing service is one way to consistently bring students together.

- **Record and share videos or audio clips.** To simulate daily announcements in the regular school, consider recording short video or audio clips and sending them out via email or text. These announcements can include student birthday shout-outs, important resource information, or updates on school policies.

- **Moderate a classroom chat or discussion board.** Host small or large online chats with students using platforms such as Zoom or Google Hangouts. Provide prompts to students ahead of time, especially if you'll be discussing academic content. You can also position the online chats as quick check-ins or informal time for students to connect. Students can also submit ideas about what they'd like to chat about with their peers.

- **Host informal virtual office hours.** Dedicate one to two hours per week to holding office hours in a video conference or chat room. This can allow for students, caregivers, or fellow teachers to connect with you to ask questions, share how they are feeling, or just say hello.

- **Collect and share virtual notes of gratitude and appreciation.** Over the course of a week, ask students to submit notes of appreciation about their peers. Compile these notes in a slide deck or on your classroom website to share with students, caregivers, and staff.

- **Build a virtual classroom hub, website, or blog.** Using Google Classroom or other free services, you can create a class website or blog for your students to access. Once built, you can add various activities—from virtual journaling to resources for additional learning and movement.

- **Use feedback and token economies to build relationships.** Providing personalized feedback to let students know how their behavior and academic efforts are progressing can be helpful in building relationships. Catch students doing something good and make sure you have at least a 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative feedbacks.

Technology Support

With students expected to working in a hybrid learning model environment for the foreseeable future, it will be critical for school districts to implement a variety of online tools to support student learning as well as managing student behavior and engagement. The proper software tools will provide the consistency and coherence across virtual and physical classrooms to hopefully create seamless transitions between the two environments.

Hero by SchoolMint is aligned to the best practices of positive behavior support systems, PBIS and the best practices to provide improved student engagement and student behavior in virtual and physical classrooms.

"PBIS combined with SEL work significantly improved overall mental health and reductions in externalizing behaviors" - Dr. Clayton Cook, U. of MN

Specifically, Hero will help you:

⊘ Set up your expectations (virtual and physical classrooms)

⊘ Provide consistent responses to student behavior

⊘ Positively reinforce good behavior

⊘ Deliver corrective responses based on your discipline model

⊘ Implement a token economy that will carry over from virtual to physical

⊘ Engage parents by sharing details of student performance

⊘ Track attendance in virtual and physical classes

Studies show that achieving a 5 to 1 positive to negative interaction ratio is critical in establishing a positive classroom environment, improving student behavior and student engagement. Hero will provide a systematic method for achieving the 5 to 1 positive interaction ratio which supports improved student-teacher relationships and student engagement. Progress monitoring data is critical in any educational endeavor and Hero will provide educators a stream of real-time data on students' behavioral status and degree of engagement.

Finally, Hero will help by creating equitable learning environments with high levels of predictability, safety, consistency and positivity which research has shown will reduce student levels of stress and support students who have experienced trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Maintaining a positive relationship requires ongoing positive interactions with students... [strive to] maintain the 5-to-1 ratio of positive to negative interactions."   - Dr. Clayton Cook, U. of MN

Citations

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Dr. Christopher Balow from SchoolMint will provide your school a free 1-hour video conference to help you get started.

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