

**POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PROJECT**  
**ST. LUCIE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**EVALUATION**  
**2005**

Completed by:  
Beth Falls, Ph.D.  
Beth Falls, Inc.  
423 River Prado  
Fort Pierce, FL 34936

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The St. Lucie County School District selected the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Project as their primary behavior management program. The PBS Project is a collaborative assessment-based approach to developing effective interventions for problem behaviors. Safe and Drug Free Schools provided funding for the PBS Project in 2004-2005 as a promising program. The goals of the 2005 evaluation of St. Lucie County School's Positive Behavior Support Project were to:

1. Determine the level of implementation and fidelity of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County; and
2. Assess the overall effectiveness of the program in schools adapting the PBS Project.

This is the first evaluation of the PBS Project, which is a new program in St. Lucie County schools. Evaluation goals were selected with the recognition that the PBS Project is in its early stages. Limitations in its implementation, data collection and fidelity were expected. A primary objective of the evaluation was to identify those limitations.

At the completion of the 2004-2005 school year twenty-one schools (out of the 40 schools in the district) were participating in the PBS Project, and each of these schools had an assigned PBS Coach for the 2004-2005 school year. Of these twenty-one schools, five schools were at the level of Full Implementation and were deemed to be following the program with fidelity. Limitations to implementation of the PBS Project included: Staff turnover; Administrator turnover; and Environmental Influences – two major hurricanes hitting St. Lucie County in 2004, with subsequent school closures and disruption in the lives of students and staff.

All five of the PBS schools saw a significant reduction in total referrals as compared to the previous academic year. The decline in discipline referrals was seen in all grades, all ethnic groups and in both male and female students. Qualitative and anecdotal evidence supported the effectiveness of the PBS Project in those schools with full implementation.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the PBS Project when practiced with fidelity. Ample evidence supports the positive impact the PBS Project has had in the schools with full implementation. Excellent progress has been made to incorporate the PBS Project into the St. Lucie County School District. For a new program it is impressive that 12.5% of schools within the district have fully implemented the program. However, for a program with such important impact a greater level of implementation must be a priority.

## INTRODUCTION

The goals of the 2005 evaluation of St. Lucie County School's Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Project were to:

3. Determine the level of implementation and fidelity of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County; and
4. Assess the overall effectiveness of the program in schools adapting the PBS Project.

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St. Lucie County is a diverse and rapidly growing area located on the southeast coast of Florida. The district currently has 23 elementary, eight middle, and five high schools in addition to four specialty schools. St. Lucie County relies heavily on the citrus industry. Therefore, it is an area with a high migrant population. Although St. Lucie County is growing and improving in the areas of tourism, construction, higher education, science and technology, it does not currently enjoy the relatively high economic status of its neighboring counties. Gangs and the drugs and violence that accompany them are a problem and they have invaded the schools.

The 2004 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey for St. Lucie County supports the need for district wide implementation of the PBS Project. Of surveyed St. Lucie County students, 21.3% reported Getting Suspended, 15.2% reported Attacking Someone with Intent to Harm and 14.4% reported Being Drunk or High at School. Additionally, according to the St. Lucie County Goals and Objectives Progress Updates for 2003-2004, the number of fighting incidents increased from 1999.

The St. Lucie County School District selected the PBS Project as their primary behavior management program. Safe and Drug Free Schools (SDFS) provided funding for the PBS Project in 2004-2005 as a promising program. Money for SDFS was used primarily for materials and supplies. Additional funding came from University of South Florida (through the State PBS Project Team), and school fund raising.

## DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

Positive Behavior Support is an approach to helping people improve their behavior that is based on four things:

- A. An **Understanding** that people do not control others, but seek to support others in their own behavior change process;
- B. A **Belief** that there is a reason behind most difficult behaviors, that people with difficult behavior should be treated with compassion and respect, and that they are entitled to lives of quality as well as effective services;

- C. The **Application** of a large and growing body of knowledge about how to better understand people and make changes in their lives that can reduce the occurrence of difficult behavior; and
- D. A **Conviction** to continually move away from coercion – the use of unpleasant events to manage behavior.

The PBS Project is run through the Florida Department of Education. A State PBS Project Director oversees all aspect of the Project within the State. Within the District there is a District Coordinator, School Coaches, and School Team Members. All team members must attend PBS training. School PBS Team members receive on-going training support from the PBS Project Director and the District Coordinator.

The overall goals of the PBS Project are:

- There will be fewer problem behaviors;
- Academic achievement will improve; and
- Overall climate of the school will improve.

Additionally, St. Lucie County identified the following specific goals for the PBS Project in their School District.

- Full implementation and fidelity of PBS in all schools District wide
- Increased parental involvement
- Show connection between behavior and academic achievement
- Develop a District wide data system to track data and generate reports
- Increase attendance and decrease expulsion/suspension rate
- Develop more programs under the PBS Project targeting groups
- Develop PBS collaboration with the Student Support Team
- Decrease school violence
- Attain adequate funding for full implementation of PBS District wide

One school in St. Lucie County used the PBS Project for the 2002-2003 school year. Through the principal's encouragement and that of psychologists who went to PBS training the county decided to offer it to all schools for the 2003-2004 school year. Seven schools decided to initiate the project for the 2003-2004 school year, and fourteen more school initiated PBS for 2004-2005. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year a total of twenty-one schools were using the PBS Project at some level.

## **EVALUATION DESIGN & METHODOLOGY**

The formal evaluation of the PBS Project for St. Lucie County Schools for the 2004-2005 academic year was completed by Beth Falls, Ph.D. However, the information used for the evaluation came from a number of persons. Mr. Robert O'Neil, the PBS Project District Coordinator, provided Dr. Falls with abundant data as well as general information about the history of the program and how it has been accepted and incorporated into the various schools within the district. Mr. O'Neil completed the School-Wide Evaluation Tool and he collected and summarizes findings from the Representative

School Staff Survey (described below.) Additional information and support for the preparation of the evaluation was provided by Mr. Mary Gregory, Curriculum Specialist for Safe and Drug Free Schools, and Mr. Bob Gibson, Director of Management Information Systems for St. Lucie County School District.

The overall plan was to evaluate the level of implementation of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County, including identifying limitations and road blocks to implementation. Once those schools with full implementation and fidelity to the PBS Project were identified, data from those schools were evaluated to assess the overall effectiveness of the program in schools adapting the PBS Project. Information used to complete the evaluation came from the following sources:

1. Reports from the St. Lucie County Positive Behavior Support Project District Committee Meetings;
2. Personal communication between the evaluator and district and school personnel;
3. The Savanna Ridge Elementary School Staff Survey (a survey of a representative school with full implementation and fidelity);
4. The School-Wide Evaluation Tool (compiled from interviews between the PBS Project District Coordinator and a school principal and randomly selected staff and students);
5. An email survey of faculty and staff (district wide); and
6. Discipline referral data.

Effort was made to collect information for the evaluation from a variety of sources to provide the most accurate picture of implementation and effectiveness of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County. The best, most objective method to evaluate the effectiveness of the PBS project was to look at student behavior. However, a number of limitations with respect to collection and analysis of referral data occurred.

1. Technology Problems. A decision was made to switch the software used for tracking referrals and generating reports from the SWIS program to the more powerful GENESIS program. However between the two hurricanes that hit St. Lucie County in fall 2004, and a number of technical road blocks the District-wide availability of the GENESIS program took longer than expected.
2. Consistency in referrals. There is naturally great individuality among teachers and staff with respect to which behaviors warrant discipline referrals – there may even be inconsistency by an individual teacher over time.
3. Coding inconsistency. The original evaluation plan included an examination of the rate of discipline referrals for specific behaviors to identify changes within schools over time. However after speaking with district and school staff it became apparent that there were significant limitations with the method for coding of behaviors on referral forms.

## FINDINGS

### **Goal 1: Determine the level of implementation and fidelity of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County.**

At the completion of the 2004-2005 school year twenty-one schools (out of the 40 schools in the district) were participating in the PBS Project, and each of these schools had an assigned PBS Coach for the 2004-2005 school year. Of these twenty-one schools, five schools were at the level of Full Implementation and were deemed to be following the program with fidelity. In fact, four of these schools (Forest Grove Middle School, Port St. Lucie Elementary, Savanna Ridge Elementary and Windmill Point Elementary) were designated model schools by the State PBS Team at the University of South Florida. Because of the success of the PBS Project in these schools, the St. Lucie County School District was invited to present information regarding the development and implementation of their PBS Project at the International PBS Conference which was attended by over 2000 people.

Of the remaining fifteen schools, twelve schools were at the level of Plan Development, and six were retraining staff. Based on interviews with the PBS District Coordinator and PBS Coaches it is clear that Lack of Interest, or Lack of Support for the PBS Project, are not to blame for these schools not reaching full implementation. Lack of progress in implementation of the PBS Project in St. Lucie County Schools appears to be due to:

1. Staff turnover;
2. Administrator turnover; and
3. Environmental Influences – two major hurricanes hitting St. Lucie County in 2004, with subsequent school closures and disruption in the lives of students and staff.

Savanna Ridge Elementary School was selected from among the schools with full implementation for further evaluation. For this evaluation Mr. Robert O'Neill interviewed the principal, twelve staff members and fifteen students. The results are summarized below:

#### **STAFF (n=12):**

11 knew all four of the PBS Expectations  
1 did not know any of the four PBS Expectations  
All 12 stated that they taught the expectations this year  
All 12 stated that they gave out a reward in the past two months  
All 12 knew that there is a team on campus to address school wide behavior support systems

**STUDENTS (n=15):**

- 11 knew all four of the PBS Expectations
- 4 knew three out of four of the PBS Expectations
- All 15 had received a reward in the past two months

Expectations (Show Respect, Obey Safety Rules, Act Responsibly, and Ready to Learn) were found posted in the front hall, office, two-thirds of the classrooms, cafeteria, media center, lab and hallways.

These findings demonstrate the fidelity and commitment that Savanna Ridge Elementary School had to the PBS Project. Additional information was collected from this model school through the PBS Staff Survey (Appendix A.) Significant findings from this survey that address the level of implementation and fidelity of the PBS Project include:

- 48% agree that at least 80% of faculty use PBS strategies on a regular basis. Only 19% disagree with that statement (remaining 33% were neutral.)
- Only 19% agree that the PBS “Observed Student Behavior Form” and the St. Lucie County “Student Discipline Referral” forms are used effectively. 44% disagree with that statement (33% were neutral.)
- 89% agree that the PBS Core Team effectively communicates PBS activities and current PBS news to the staff at large.

The results of the Staff Survey once again demonstrate the commitment of this school to the PBS Project. The concerns with the referral forms (as discussed above) were confirmed through this evaluation tool.

**Goal 2: Assess the overall effectiveness of the program in schools adapting the PBS project.**

Discipline referral data from the five schools with full implementation and fidelity of the PBS project are shown below. Total referrals for the 2004-2005 school year are compared to the previous year.

School:	Total Referrals: 2003-2004	Total Referrals: 2004-2005	Reduction in Total Referrals	Reduction in Referral Rate*
Floresta Elementary	699	456	35%	56%
Forest Grove Elementary	4302	2798	35%	37%
Port St. Lucie Elementary	513	507	1%	11%
Savanna Ridge Elementary	415	221	47%	43%
Windmill Point Elementary	384	297	23%	36%

\*Rate is calculated as number of referrals divided by number of students. This is a better indicator of change than are total referral rates because it allows for changes in enrollment from year to year.

All five of the PBS schools saw a significant reduction in total referrals as compared to the previous academic year. The decline in discipline referrals was seen in all grades, all ethnic groups and in both male and female students (Appendix B.)

Significant findings from Staff Survey that address the effectiveness of the PBS Project include:

- 63% feel the initiatives of the PBS Team have had a positive impact on student behavior.
- 63% agree that the PBS Project offers sufficient short and long-term incentives for staff to recognize appropriate student behavior.

These results provide qualitative support of the effectiveness of the PBS Project at Savanna Ridge Elementary.

Additional information was collected through a brief survey completed by PBS Team Members throughout the school district that confirms the effectiveness of the PBS Project when implemented. Twenty-two surveys were sent via email. Five surveys (22%) were returned. The consistency of the responses warrant inclusion in this report – with the recognition that the low response rate and the lack of effort to identify reasons for participation or lack of participation in the survey makes this information purely anecdotal.

All survey respondents strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I am aware of the PBS philosophy in my school
- PBS has positively affected my school's climate
- I have received adequate training for the PBS Project
- I receive adequate support for the PBS Project

Of the five respondents, two agreed and three strongly agreed that:

- PBS changed my attitudes about giving referrals
- PBS changed the way I handle negative behaviors

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the PBS Project when practiced with fidelity. Ample evidence supports the positive impact the PBS Project has had in the schools with full implementation. Excellent progress has been made to incorporate the PBS Project into the St. Lucie County School District. For a new program it is impressive that 12.5% of schools within the district have fully implemented the program. However, for a program with such important impact a greater level of implementation must be a priority.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for continued success and growth of the PBS Project within the St. Lucie County School District are described below.

1. Review the specific goals for PBS in St. Lucie County. For each goal develop an action plan for achieving the goal, and identify methods for tracking progress and evaluating impact.
2. Review the forms used for discipline referrals. Make every effort to simplify the forms and minimize the ambiguity in selecting codes. [NOTE: The discipline forms were streamlined last year to provide clearer teacher understanding. There will be additional changes to these forms coming into effect in the fall of 2005.] Develop a plan to train all teachers and staff on how and when to use discipline referrals, and how to select conduct codes.
3. Take a closer look at the road blocks to implementation within individual schools. Work with administrators at the district level to address problems with school administrator and teacher turnover. Develop a plan to identify and support schools that are facing issues that are impacting their implementation efforts.
4. Continue to address problems with referral data tracking software.