

Quality Program Indicators for Children with Emotional and Behavior Disorders

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Special education professionals today find themselves challenged in new ways as they strive to provide effective programming for children with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD) in public schools. Factors contributing to this situation include changes in I.D.E.A., increased use of functional assessments, schoolwide positive support programs, and the ubiquitous concern for school and community safety. In response, school programs for EBD are undergoing substantial revisions across the nation.

Many states have contributed to this boiling cauldron of change by passing academic performance standards and putting statewide assessment systems in place. These legislative initiatives typically require schools to increase the content of their curricula and improve the effectiveness of their instruction for all children. This movement will only be amplified as No Child Left Behind moves into implementation. The revived focus on academic achievement has in many cases been accompanied with a decrease in tolerance for student behaviors that interrupt or threaten the general education process, creating a need for a more comprehensive approach to individual and collective support for appropriate student behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 1997).

Finally, many schools have been developing or refining their discipline procedures. General and special educators



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are questioning the differences in both rights and the procedures for specialized programs and common school discipline, leaving parents, teachers and administrators wanting for specialized instructional know-how that applies to a variety of complex school organizations.

Many school districts and professional organizations have responded to these changes by launching a series (some would say barrage) of initiatives that address the various elements of schooling viewed by some as needing improvement. Teacher and administrator roles are expanding. Many educators are working to revise curriculum, to ensure compliance with special education laws, develop schoolwide support systems, and to become effective instructional leaders and building managers. Many educators must wade waist deep into community and corporate fund raising, while struggling to address an increasingly diverse set of needs and behaviors in their schools. It is not surprising that widespread understanding of what it takes to adequately serve children with EBD rarely occurs.

Special education teachers, their principals and special education adminis-

trators are questioning what is necessary to provide a quality program for children with EBD. In an effort to shed some light on programming concerns, this article focuses on a set of indicators that Colorado has been using state-wide over the past several years. The indicators have been used to help schools assess their current programs, sort through the complexities of program implementation, and design professional development opportunities that are strategic and individualized to various program and staff needs. These indicators are based on and reflect integration of best practices into an assessment system that can help educators discover current strengths and identify problem areas in need of attention. We view this as a work in progress, and offer it here as one tool to use in program improvement.

In previous work, we have advocated the need for an expanded curriculum for children with EBD (Neel & Cessna, 1993). An expanded curriculum should include: (a) relevant academics with necessary accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of the student; (b) formal and informal instruction in what we have called life skills, those skills

necessary to negotiate home, school, and work environments; and (c) direct instruction in the areas of disability. In the case of children with EBD, the “area of disability” involves teaching social skills formally, followed by intentional processes that help the child personalize and internalize the lessons s/he has learned in the more formal settings (see Adams & Cessna, 1993, for a more detailed treatment of these curricular areas).

The expanded curriculum model served as the basis for the development of the Quality Program Indicators model described in this article. Three core areas were expanded to include the support and structures needed to provide effective programs and refine the descriptions of the content and curricular areas. For example, teaching social skills to students with EBD is an important element of the direct instruction component in an expanded curriculum. However, the complex nature of social competence and social skills instruction led us to develop the Quality Program Indicator, “Affective Education.”

Quality Program Indicators

The EBD Program Indicators include six elements of effective programming. Each area is treated separately, although in practice they form an interactive whole. Each area is briefly described, followed by a discussion of some issues that impact each area, and suggestions for how teachers and administrators might use them to develop new programs and/or improve existing ones.

- Environmental management
- Behavior management
- Affective education
- Individuation and personalization
- Academic
- Career/life skills/transitions

Environmental Management

Each type of setting is assessed in the Environmental Management section in terms of classroom organization, adequacy of resources, physical space and layout, emotional climate, scheduling, and communication systems. For example, the physical layout of a school and classroom can impact program success in both direct

and indirect ways. It is important to have set spaces that reflect positive student outcomes and signal expectations. Different spaces are needed to allow for different instructional environments. Some are designed to replicate or approximate the traditional working spaces of a classroom, while others are designed to facilitate the social and emotional instruction that helps children with EBD learn necessary management and social interaction skills. Still others are necessary to provide safety, support, and control.

Behavior Management

Effective behavior management systems focus on supervision rather than total control and involves specialized instruction around students’ social needs. This section assesses individual, classroom, and schoolwide systems that teach and encourage appropriate behavior. Effective behavior management includes clear rules and routines, an integrated system of discipline that is coordinated with the whole school system, specific modifications that address individual needs, and crisis plans to minimize the negative effect of problem events. Attention is given to content as well as structure. Focus is placed on assessing how well the management system helps children take responsibility for their behavior and involves significant others (parents, principals, teachers) in supporting the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom.

Affective Education

This area includes programs designed to provide information and experiences that will help children with EBD learn appropriate social skills, individual and collective expectations, and strategies used to “read” situations, develop action plans, and evaluate interactions. We chose the term “affective education” to signal a more comprehensive approach than formal social skills training, although such instruction is a critical part of affective education. Affective education provides information about personal and relationship successes and pitfalls. Curricula are taught both formally and informally and content is based upon the needs of the students. Generalization and maintenance of skills

learned is intentionally taught.

Individuation and Personalization

This component reflects the activities that are used to individualize and internalize the lessons learned in affective education. Some programs call this processing or “working through” a situation. In some cases this might involve an intervention in response to a crisis, in other situations it might involve planned cognitive restructuring or similar approaches, applied at the teachable moment, that help an individual child take responsibility for his or her actions and generate acceptable solutions to the problems involved.

Academics

Engaging, quality academic instruction is another critical element of an effective program. This element assesses the breadth of the curricular offerings, the degree to which they reflect essential understandings and skills needed to operate successfully in post-school environments, as well as the quality of instruction provided. The extent to which the academic instruction reflects the general education curriculum and aids students’ access to it is also examined. The number and types of accommodations and modifications provided is another major area in this section. A final area examined in the academic section is the systems and structures available to help maintain students in least restrictive environments.

Career/Life Skills Transitions

The final section of the Quality Indicators focuses on the connection between what is taught in classes and what is needed for life outside of school. That is, careful attention to the link between the skills a student gains in his/her school experience and application of those skills in the nonacademic settings is reviewed for every grade. At the elementary level, applications of learning to current and future real-life situations are stressed. By middle school, exploration of future goals and possible differentiation to meet varying abilities and interests is included. In high school, more formal vocational instruction and individual transition plans are assessed with special emphasis placed

on providing instruction in the settings where the skills will be needed.

Using the Indicators

The Quality Program Indicators outlined in this article can act as a roadmap for applying current best practices to a variety of delivery options. Careful attention to each element, along with thoughtful integration of these elements into an effective whole, will enable EBD programs to continue to improve. Each component embodies a critical element of good programming. The expression of each element will differ from program to program, but no element can be absent or ignored if children with EBD are to be adequately served.

Students' needs should dictate the design and location of the instruction provided. The indicators do not depend upon a particular delivery model. They can be used in all types of settings and with a variety of instructional practices. Their most important use is to serve as a means for educators to determine if all potential needs of a student have been addressed and the necessary degree of specialized instruction has been provided.

Order of Implementation

It is rare that a program has the luxury to plan, develop, and implement all the elements at once. Most programs already exist or are being created as works in progress. Given that in most programs several areas are either undeveloped or underdeveloped, a decision must be made as to the order in which the elements should be addressed. There is no one answer. However, our experiences have led us to suspect that in a majority of cases, it is wise to begin with a functional and safe environment and a clearly articulated behavior management program. Academics, affective education, and individualization and personalization seem to be parallel concerns that could be addressed in tandem. A word of caution, if these three areas are underdeveloped they often contribute to problems that render behavior management ineffective. Far too frequently, a child is removed from a less restrictive environment due to difficult

behavior that is not being adequately addressed through affective education and individualization of replacement behaviors and alternate strategies. Additionally, relevant academics, presented in innovative and engaging ways, is critical to a good program. Without them frustration and boredom often lead to behavior difficulties that sidetrack a well-conceived program. Career planning and the development of critical life skills in authentic environments, although often added last, are essential to adequate adult adjustment (See Neel, Meadows, Levine, & Edgar, 1988).

Having offered a potential sequence, it is important to emphasize that other sequences could be equally effective. The Quality Program Indicators are flexible and should be considered a "working tool" for program evaluation. If one or more areas are of immediate concern, prioritize based on the intensity of student, teacher, and/or environmental needs. Remember, however, the interactivity of the various elements and the impact that changes in one area may have on the others. You can use them to scale up from an immediate problem to a more systematic examination of all the elements, how they interact, and which might contribute to the current concern and its probable solutions.

Schoolwide Application

Quality programs for children with EBD do not exist in a vacuum. Promising efforts in all-school positive behavior support programs have emerged in the past several years (Sugai & Horner, 1997). The attention to accountability through statewide initiatives and comprehensive assessments has also helped scale up the problem of providing an effective education for children with EBD from the individual child and her/his classroom to the whole school, and in some cases the community at large. As the focus expands to larger units of school organization, the complexity of the problems and their potential solutions also expands.

The indicators should help practitioners integrate programs for children with EBD into the larger school environments. They complement, rather than replace, other programs designed to promote positive social and academic climates.

Each element should be considered as a connection to the content of other programs. The outcomes of most programs will be remarkably similar to those embedded within the indicators. The intent of the indicators is to help reconcile the outcomes for all children and integrate instructional efforts to produce the maximum gain for everyone.

Common Language

A sad, but frequently true dynamic of organizations is that as pressure for increased performance mounts, the key stakeholders often have heightened difficulty communicating clearly and well. Schools are not different from other organizations in this regard. The very group of people who must work together if students with EBD are to be successful often have difficulty agreeing on areas of concern and identifying best strategies to address them. In Colorado, principals, special education teachers, special education administrators and parents have found the indicators to be helpful in establishing a common language when discussing specific areas of programming to be expanded or improved without being prescriptive or blaming. The Quality Program Indicators may be an effective means for ensuring that our combined efforts are cohesive and on target.

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Table 1
Quality Program Indicators

I. Environmental Management: The systematic use of resources, physical factors and organizational and communication schema to structure students' total environment for the purpose of providing necessary support and control

- A. Classroom organization and management support of functional behaviors.**
- There are predictable class routines.
 - Transitions are accomplished smoothly and efficiently.
 - Exemplars of good student work are displayed in the room.
 - Visual cues for good practice of procedures are displayed in the room. An organizational system is evident for making assignments.
- B. Resources are adequate, appropriate personnel with expertise in instruction, behavior and emotional needs are adequate and appropriate for program**
- Personnel are available to maintain group instruction, provide emotional support and behavioral management to individuals as needed without undue interference of group or classroom instruction.
 - A variety of materials representing a range of ability levels have been selected for content subjects, basic skills and affective purposes.
- C. Physical space/layout is used intentionally to support students' emotional/behavioral needs.**
- Physical space that is free from distracting stimuli is readily available.
 - Students can remove themselves to a private space for personal regrouping.
 - There is physical space where students can be contained for their own or others' safety.
 - Seating is arranged preferentially for proximity control.
 - The teacher has easy visual access to students in the classroom at all times.
 - The teacher is physically accessible to the students
- D. The emotional climate is safe as demonstrated by students' willingness to initiate interactions or ask questions.**
- Interactions between student and teacher are genuine.
 - Students feel free to seek the teacher for support and problem solving at nonscheduled time.
 - Humor is used effectively to maintain perspective and create a safe, emotional climate.
- E. Scheduling is done intentionally to support students' emotional/behavioral needs.**
- A person who has expertise in the child's area of need has planning responsibilities and ongoing contact with the student
 - Schedules are arranged to structure students for success, such as scheduling for content, teachers who work best with student, and students' optimum functioning patterns.
 - Schedules are arranged to avoid problematic times and places.
- F. Communication systems facilitate support for the student in the total environment.**
- There is a designated case manager to facilitate support for the student in the total environment.
 - Effective communication systems exist between special and regular education staff to facilitate support for the student.
 - Effective communication systems exist between special education staff and parents to facilitate support for the student.
 - Effective communication systems exist with other agencies to facilitate support for the student.
 - Case managers advocate for students in all environments.

II. Behavior Management: Systems, including classroom management, individual management, school rules and crisis management systems to assist the student in obtaining and maintaining prerequisite behaviors for learning and to assume increasing responsibility for his/her own behavior

- A. Systems for classroom management facilitate appropriate behaviors.**
- Rules and expectations are explicit.

- Rules are stated positively.
- Some variances of behaviors are allowed based on individual level of internal control to meet rules and behavior expectations.

B. Procedures and modifications are utilized to assist students in following the school and/or bus rules.

- There is a system of rewards for desired behavior.
- There are options for reinforcement.
- Rewards are realistically attainable.
- The consequences for students' behavior choices are clearly stated. Consequences are consistently applied.
- Consequences are logical and based on the severity of behavior.
- The system is written.

C. Management systems are in place for atypical and crisis situations.

- Management procedures are designed for atypical situations.
- Personnel involved in atypical management procedures are identified and their roles described.

D. There is a system for individual behavior management to facilitate appropriate behavior.

- Systematic means are available to address problem behaviors that are individual to the student.
- Students help set own behavior goals.
- Students are involved in monitoring own behavior.
- The teacher modifies ineffective individual behavior plans to structure for success.

E. Behavioral intervention or interactions are utilized to encourage students to be more responsible for their behavior.

- The teacher is aware of and uses nonverbal cues.
- The teacher uses nonverbal strategies to redirect problem behavior.
- Problem-solving strategies are used to encourage responsibility.
- The teacher offers behavioral choices to encourage responsibility.

F. Behavior management systems involve key persons in the student's environment.

- Parents are included in behavior management systems.
- The principal's involvement in total behavior management system is planned for.
- Principal involvement is not limited to negative interactions.
- Involvement of significant others in behavior management systems is clearly articulated.

III. Affective Education: Systematic instruction, the primary purpose of which is to help students acquire information, attitudes and skills that will encourage appropriate behavior and mental health

A. Students are systematically provided with information and skills regarding behavior.

- Direct instructions scheduled with regard to:
- Specific content (classes, units, a specific time)
- Strategic grouping
- Integrated with academic instruction
- As situations arise, they are pointed out as exemplars of content that was formally taught.

B. Affective education covers personal, relationship and life skills.

- Content is comprehensive.
- There is content about the individual, which includes the individual:
- Feelings (identification and appropriate expression)
- Personal awareness (knowledge of self, monitoring self)
- Communication (active listening, assertiveness, expressing empathy)
- Problem solving (negotiation, conflict)

- Decision-making
- Groups and systems
- Significant relationships
- Lifestyle choices (drugs, risk-taking, street law, suicide)
- Coping strategies
- Life planning

C. Curriculum is selected on the basis of individual students' needs.

- Student emotional/behavioral needs are/is used to determine content.
- Student input is sought.
- A well-articulated system is in place for utilizing individual students' needs and input to determine general group needs and prioritize topics for the affective curriculum.

D. Good instructional practices are employed to teach affective education.

- Elements of good instruction are evident.
- Skills are taught interactively with high student involvement.

E. Transference and maintenance of skills is systematically planned and taught.

IV. Individuation and Personalization: Systematic assistance and support for which the primary purpose is to help the student with personalization and internalization of information about alternative ways to behaving and viewing ones beliefs, oneself and the world.

A. Students are systematically assisted in internalizing and personalizing new affective information and behavior skills.

- A system is in place for responding to emotional crisis.
- Formal (planned) systems are present to help students internalize and personalize, and are based on their experience.
- Informal systems are also available. As situations arise, they are used to assist students in internalizing and personalizing information and skills that were formally taught and may be applicable to a given situation.

B. Good teaching/counseling strategies are employed to assist student in personalizing and internalizing information.

- Good processing strategies are evident.
- Student is involved interactively in the process.
- Questions and comments acknowledge the student as a valued individual.
- Interaction is nonjudgmental.
- Students' feelings are validated.

V. Academic: Systems that promote academic growth utilizing various techniques or curricula that is appropriate to the student's individual learning needs.

A. A comprehensive academic curriculum is available for the student.

- Essential/critical skills in reading, math, language arts, and communication (writing).
- Content subjects: social studies, science, history, etc.
- Fine and practical arts: music, art, PE, vocational education, etc.
- Core concepts are taught that aid access to the general education curriculum.
- Application of information and skills to post-school environments is intentionally taught.

B. Modifications/alternatives to the regular curriculum are provided when needed.

- Alternate curricula are used to reteach information in different ways in order to ensure mastery of previously taught critical concepts and ideas.
- Independent studies are used to allow the student to work on regular curriculum and related topics of personal interest at own pace.

- Alternative curriculum is used to provide the student with a different, parallel curriculum that better meets his/her cognitive and affective needs (i.e., script writing for role-plays instead of essay writing).
- C. Systems/structures accommodations are used to help maintain students in the least restrictive environment.**
- Modified schedules are used to better match student needs with appropriate teachers, time, or content.
 - Co-teaching is used to increase the number of instructional approaches available to students.
 - Modified requirements are used to structure the system for student success.
 - Alternatives to regular evaluation procedures are used to measure student progress and performance, such as modified grading, narrative records of performance, or use of IEP objectives as measurable outcomes.
- D. Effective instruction is provided.**
- Instruction is delivered in a manner that increases the potential for student success.
 - Instructional strategies are used to decrease students' frustration level and help students achieve maximum success.
 - Instructional strategies are used to increase students' motivation level and help students achieve maximum success.
 - Different learning approaches are accommodated.
 - Instruction incorporates real-life experiences.

VI. Career/Life Skills/Transitions: Systems that develop skills necessary for productive, meaningful life outside of school. These systems provide the link between the skills a student gains in his/her school experience and application of those skills in the nonacademic settings.

- A. Students are systematically provided with information/skills necessary for life outside of school.**
- There is direct instruction with specific content regarding life outside of school.
 - Instruction of life skills is integrated with academics.
 - Informal instruction in life skills occurs by referencing content that was formally taught when situations arise.
- B. Curriculum is appropriate in content, level, scope and developmental sequence.**
- Career-vocational subjects are addressed.
 - Awareness: Elementary - Content includes discovery of why people work and the variety of occupations available.
 - Exploration: Middle School - Content includes exploring the variety of careers that will best meet individual abilities and interests.
 - Preparation: High School - Content includes preparation for an occupation in the areas of socialization, communication skills, job procurement and retention skills and financial management skills.
 - Living skills are implemented to prepare students to function appropriately in domestic, recreational and community life.
 - Domestic skills
 - Health
 - Transportation
 - Citizenship
 - Community resources
 - Leisure, money skills
 - Time management
 - Housing, phone skills
 - Other
- C. Effective instruction is demonstrated.**
- The link is intentional between knowledge and skills taught inside school and application to outside life.
 - An experimental approach is utilized by providing concrete experiences.
 - Students are taught skills in the settings in which they will be needed.