

Instinctive decision making has its place in school leadership. But so does data-driven decision making, particularly with addressing and preventing behaviour issues in a school. We look at Papatoetoe Intermediate School's experience of data-based decision-making through the School-Wide behaviour initiative.

ABOUT PB4L SCHOOL-WIDE

Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide is a long-term approach that supports schools to create a culture where positive behaviour and learning thrive. Students are taught in very specific ways the behaviours that are expected of them so that there is a consistent response to these behaviours across the school. School-Wide is a customised approach that can fit the specific cultural needs of a school. The process involves:

- setting up a school leadership team;
- consulting and engaging with teaching and support staff and the wider school community;
- a behavioural information system to record and report on the type of incidents, when and where they occur, who was involved, what might have motivated them and how the school responded;
- positively stating expectations for all students and staff in the school (clear, positive definitions that all staff, students and parents can understand and remember);
- procedures for teaching these expectations (explaining, modelling, practising, consistently acknowledging);
- a reinforcement system for encouraging students to demonstrate and maintain these expectations;
- a continuum of logical consequences for students to discourage problem behaviour.

Contact your local Ministry of Education office if you're interested in the School-Wide approach.

Behaviour data challenges assumptions

WHILE YOU MAY THINK you know what the behaviour issues are in your school, you might be surprised that your assumptions aren't always quite right.

Papatoetoe Intermediate School was surprised at what it found when it signed up for the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) School-Wide framework at the end of 2009. Part of this framework requires schools to use a school-wide data information system to gather behaviour data from across the school. (See sidebar for a description of the other elements that make up PB4L School-Wide.)

"When we gathered the data, there were a few surprises," learning leader, Donna Young said. "For example, we had assumed it was probably the year eights who were showing less respect, but the data told us it was often the year sevens."

Another assumption was that the number of serious behaviour issues would increase during the year, when it turned out to be an increase in minor incidences that took up the most teacher time.

As part of PB4L, the school continually gathers data on behaviour issues around the school and adjusts its programme accordingly. A school leadership team, which includes two students, meets monthly to analyse the statistics and develop responses.

Data-driven decision making

Some of the main preventative initiatives put in place in response to behaviour issues identified through the data are summarised below.

Teaching values and appropriate behaviour.

"We did have a values initiative in the school before PB4L – the virtues programme – that was built into the curriculum so that every teacher was required to teach these virtues. I then modelled those virtues at assembly on Monday morning," principal Brian Hinchco said.

"What PB4L has done is taken that to the next level. We now teach aspects of what we call relationships rather than behaviour. We're changing the language – one of the readings we did said that you can never change someone else's behaviour, you can only show them what's expected. So we talk about relationships and changing people's relationships."

Consistency. "We've spent a good portion of this year developing the lesson plans around getting a consistency of approach," Brian said. "Consistency of teacher understanding and language being used and therefore the students have a feeling that, no matter which teacher speaks with them, their language, the approach and the issue will be treated exactly the same."

Clearer focus on positive incentives. "Not only are incentives more obvious and more transparent, there are more of them and they're all aligned to the same purposes," Brian said. "Where, in the past, we would have had a number of positive incentives but little alignment of those – they would have all been

trying to achieve different purposes – now they achieve the one purpose."

Moving away from the Dean system. "Before 2011, if a student was misbehaving, they'd be sent to the dean," Brian said. "But now, if there are some difficulties with their behaviour, the teacher calls a learning leader, and they release the teacher and the teacher is given time to work with that student because they're the ones with the closest relationship with the student."

More student voice. "We make assumptions about what students are wanting but without their involvement, students wouldn't have bought into the whole idea," Brian said.

"We seek student voice through the student council with a head class leader and deputy class leader and they meet every fortnight," Donna said. "The student council has also appointed two students to the PB4L team. Their role is to inform us of what the issues are for the students. They interpret the data alongside us. They watch the videos alongside us and then report back to the student council about what's happening for PB4L. But increasingly they're also taking ownership of a lot of the PB4L initiatives and delivering some of the initiatives themselves."

Dark days of acting on assumptions

The 'dark days' of implementing the PB4L School-Wide process were the days when too many assumptions were being acted on, according to Brian.

"Staff would make assumptions that students don't feel safe or they don't like this or that. During the dark days, little seemed to be working and little happening. The team decided to pick one thing that the data tells us is the most urgent or would make the most difference. And suddenly we'd have all this change and everybody came back the next month all energised because that little thing, identified by the data, had made such a big difference."

What the data says has changed

Because the school already had a strong behaviour programme before introducing PB4L School-Wide, stand-downs and suspensions were already low – around 10 to 12 stand-downs and three suspensions per year.

As a result of undertaking the PB4L School-Wide framework, they have had only one suspension from school during 2011. But the true impact of PB4L School-Wide is seen in the playground.

"At the end of the school year you'd expect to see a whole lot of end of year behaviours in the year eights, such as developing boy-girl relationship," Brian said. "This year [end of 2011] our year eights are still playing games during break times. I don't think we've ever had that. All the usual end of year, year eight behaviours that you'd expect, we're not seeing many of them at all."

BEYOND THE DATA – A STUDENT’S EXPERIENCE OF PB4L SCHOOL-WIDE

“Last year I was like one of the shy people,”

Isha Patel (pictured left) said.

“This year I just wanted to step it up. My teacher believed in me, so I just started doing more things and helping around the school and they noticed and I got nominated [as a deputy school leader]. A good leader is being a good role model. Heaps of students look up to you and you need to always try your best. PB4L has given me confidence. I have grown in confidence. When I speak now I don’t even need notes,” Isha said.

“Through PB4L, the students are now showing respect, trust, safety and good attitudes. Students are nice and I always have friends who are there for me. When teachers have to leave the class for a minute they can trust that the class will get on with their work. Those students who ride bikes to school wear their helmets. Students have a good attitude – they are keen to learn new things.”

Isha is one of two PB4L student representatives on the PB4L leadership team at Papatoetoe Intermediate School. She provides the student voice on the team and also helps analyse the school data to identify issues that need to be addressed.

Recently the data showed that a number of students were arriving to class late. Isha got on the school intercom every day for two weeks and round everyone up five minutes before bell time. Even the teachers could be seen scurrying from the staffroom ahead of time.

Isha has gradually taken on a more active role in advocating for PB4L initiatives. She now visits feeder schools and gives them talks and a video and hands out PB4L nominations so they get a feel for how things will be when they start at Papatoetoe Intermediate.

Isha is a student who responds well to the PB4L approach. The lapels of her uniform are stiff with badges – recognition of her contribution to music, speech, the library, and homework and attendance. At graduation last year Isha received another badge – for her contribution to PB4L. ❖

Right: Year 8 student Isha Patel with learning leader Donna Young.

