

Supporting Wraparound Implementation: Chapter 5e.3

Wraparound: A Key Component of School-Wide Systems of Positive Behavior Supports

Lucille Eber, State Director
IL Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Network



Most of the articles and resources in the *Resource Guide to Wraparound* present examples of wraparound implemented in the context of community mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems. Though school systems play an important role in wraparound initiatives led by these systems, schools also are increasingly leading wraparound efforts. A prime example is when school systems incorporate the principles and practices of wraparound into their continuum of supports and services for all students, including those with or at risk of emotional/behavioral disabilities (EBD). This allows the benefits of wraparound to be experienced by a greater number of youth and can prevent schools from resorting to restrictive educational settings and out-of-home placements.

More recently the wraparound process is being integrated into systems of school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) to ensure that all students, including those with EBD or other serious disabilities and challenges, experience success at school (which is also a significant contributor to a youth achieving success at home and in the community). This paper describes: (1) how the wraparound process can be integrated into schools through SWPBS, (2) differences between wraparound and typical school-based practices, including special education, and (3) how SWPBS systems can support and strengthen the wraparound process and its ability to improve quality of life for youth with unique emotional/behavioral needs, and for their families and teachers.

Wraparound and PBS: What's the Connection?

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is based on the core belief



that all children can learn and succeed and that schools, in partnership with families and communities, are responsible for identifying and arranging the physical, social, and educational conditions that ensure learning (see www.apbs.org; Eber et al., in press). In the past 10-15 years, school-wide applications of PBS have emerged with the intent to build capacity for schools to provide effective behavior supports to all students, including those with complex behavioral needs, through a comprehensive prevention-based approach. SW-PBS applies the science of behavioral techniques school wide, using systems change structures that include a representative leadership team, ongoing self-assessment of the fidelity of the process, and rigorous application of data-based decision-making. Consistent with the public health model, SWPBS is a systemic approach that focuses on large units of analysis (e.g., school buildings and classrooms) and incorporates a three-tiered framework (Horner & Walker, 1996):

1. **Universal prevention** addresses the entire school population via evidence-based instructional practices, pre-correction, and adjustment of the environment to foster pro-social behavior;
2. **Secondary or selected prevention** delivers higher level, more specialized interventions to 10-15% of students whose lack of response to universal prevention places them at risk for problem behaviors; and
3. **Tertiary or indicated prevention** delivers specific interventions to the 1-5% of students with the highest needs due to a disproportionately high level of risk relative to protective factors.

The wraparound process is an essential component of school-wide positive behavior support if schools are to ensure success for students with complex needs across home, school and community settings (Eber et al., in press). Experience implementing wraparound through interagency system-of-care initiatives has shown that families (including the youth) need to be positioned as key informants and decision makers in prioritizing desired outcomes and strength-based strategies. The wraparound process provides a structure for schools to establish proactive partnerships

between families and community supports, a necessary component for arranging successful environments around students with complex emotional/behavioral needs.

In addition to incorporating natural supports and interagency services, wraparound plans organize and blend positive behavior support and academic interventions as needed to ensure success at school. Differentiating itself from traditional service delivery in schools, wraparound focuses on connecting families, schools and community partners in effective problem-solving relationships. There are several features of wraparound that distinguish it from typical school-based practices. First, family and youth voice guide the design and actions of the team. Second, team composition



and strategies reflect unique youth and family strengths and needs. Third, the team establishes the commitment and capacity to design and implement a comprehensive plan over time. Finally, the plan addresses outcomes across home, school and community through one comprehensive plan.

Connecting Families and Teachers through Wraparound

A hallmark component of the wraparound process is that it includes specific steps to establish ownership by, and therefore investment of, the family. These same engagement techniques need to be applied to teachers who also may become frustrated and discouraged with “expert-focused” intervention plans that often don’t work in the context of their classrooms. Engagement and collaborative problem solving creates an environ-

ment in which a range of interventions, including behavioral supports, are more likely to be executed with integrity.

Just as wraparound teams support families, they can also tailor supports for teachers who may be challenged with meeting the unique needs of a student. For example, a plan to change problem behavior at school may be more likely to succeed if the teacher has a trusted colleague of her choice who models the instruction of the replacement behavior or how to naturally deliver the reinforcement in the classroom context. This may feel more helpful than simply being told to “provide more reinforcement” by the behavior experts at an IEP meeting. Participating in the design of successful interventions for the most challenging youth can provide a sense of both competency and relief for teachers, as the wraparound team frequently acts as a support to the teacher. The emphasis on the cooperative planning and data-based decision making—consistent with wraparound and implemented within SWPBS—reduces the feelings of isolation and sense of failure that teachers may experience in the traditional child study model. This model, typically used in special education, tends to focus more on eligibility and placement than brainstorming, monitoring, and refinement of specific and individualized interventions.

The School-Based Wraparound Facilitator

Differing from IEPs and other typical school-based team processes, the wraparound process delineates specific roles for team members, including natural support persons, and detailed conditions for interventions, including specifying roles each person will play in different circumstances. The role of a designated team facilitator is critical to adhering to the steps of the process and to upholding the principles of the strength-based, person/family-centered approach. The school-based wraparound facilitator, often a school social worker, counselor, or school psychologist, guides the team through the phases of wraparound, ensuring a commitment to “remain at the table,” despite challenges and setbacks, until the needs of the youth and family are met and can be sustained without the wraparound team.

Individuals who perform the function of team

facilitation should ideally possess certain skill sets and dispositions, including the ability to translate the experiences and stories of the family, youth and teacher(s) into strengths and needs data that can be used to guide the team. Another crucial facilitator skill is the ability to respectfully articulate the family’s vision without judgment. This includes helping teams clarify the “big needs” that, if met, will improve the quality of life for the youth and family. Examples of “big need” statements to guide wraparound teams include: “José needs to feel respected by teachers;” or “Tracy needs to feel accepted by other students and teachers.” The identified facilitator also must have the ability to facilitate problem solving and decision making in a consensual manner. Potential wraparound facilitators, readily available in school systems, include personnel who already lead intervention planning and meetings for students with or at-risk of EBD. Typical persons who are trained and coached to facilitate strength and needs-based wraparound meetings include school social workers, school psychologists, counselors, special education specialists, administrators, and others (Eber, 2003).

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How is Wraparound Different than Typical School-Based Approaches?

On the surface, wraparound can be seen as similar to the typical special education or mental health treatment planning process. It actually goes much further, however, as it dedicates considerable effort to building constructive relation-

ships and support networks among the youth and their family (Burchard, Bruns & Burchard, 2002; Eber, 2005). This is accomplished by establishing a unique team with each student and his family that is invested in achieving agreed-upon quality of life indicators. Key questions asked of youth and their families and teachers during team development (Phase I) of wraparound often include: “What would a good school day for your child look like to you?” Or, “How would you define success for your child five years from now?”

The identified team facilitator initiates wraparound using individualized engagement strategies with the family and youth, teacher and other potential team members. Assuming lower level interventions (e.g., universal and secondary PBS, parent conferences, function-based behavioral intervention plans) have not resulted in enough positive change, families may be understandably cautious about engaging in yet another meeting about their child. School-based wraparound team facilitators are trained to approach a family carefully to ensure that the family doesn’t feel judged and/or blamed. Families who have had a lot of contact with school but little success may need to be reassured that *they* are not expected to change the problem behavior of their child at school. For example, facilitators may use a statement such as “At school, we feel we are not being successful enough or positive enough with your child so we are going to change our approach to make sure he is going to have success.” This may be a different message than what the parent is used to hearing from the school and can set the stage for a different type of process that is intensive, yet positive.

How Does SWPBS Support Wraparound?

Program evaluation data in Illinois suggests that schools that implement SWPBS with measured fidelity at the universal level are more likely (than schools not yet reaching fidelity at the universal level of SWPBS) to implement individualized interventions, including wraparound. This suggests that SWPBS practices create school environments in which successful wraparound plans are more easily developed and implemented. The benefits that SWPBS offer to the highest level of support

on the continuum (achieved via the wraparound process) include experience with a problem-solving approach and using data to guide decisions. Also, full implementation of SWPBS at the universal level provides a solid base of lower level interventions (e.g. primary and secondary) to build upon, as well as more effective and supportive environments in which to implement wraparound plans.

Within a three-tiered system of behavioral support, students who need tertiary level supports also have access to and can benefit from universal and secondary supports. Each level of support in SWPBS is thus “in addition to” the previous level. In other words, no student only needs wraparound—the wraparound plan, with its multiple-life-domain and multiple-perspective focus, makes the universal and secondary supports available in the school effective for the student. (For more information on SWPBS, see www.pbisillinois.org and www.pbis.org.)

Youth who need wraparound usually respond best in environments that are predictable (setting behavioral expectations), clear (direct teaching of behavioral expectations), strength-based (acknowledgment systems) safe (school-wide discipline policies and practices), and that have high levels of prompts (re-teaching). SWPBS supports these youth by providing these components across all school settings and creates climates where all youth in the building are supported, and are therefore calmer and better behaved. Peers can help support or prompt one another because the expectations are positively stated and well understood. Teacher and administrative time isn’t taken up by responding to multiple low-level problems throughout the building, giving the time necessary to provide the extra support to those students who need more comprehensive planning time.

Proactive use of data to drive instructional decisions within a problem-solving model is a hallmark principle and practice of SWPBS (Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, & Larson, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Nakasoto, 2000). Participating schools not only gather, report and use data related to students’ social and academic behavior, but are also encouraged to self-assess SWPBS implementation fidelity (e.g, using the School-wide Evaluation Tool or SET) and effectiveness of school-wide practices (Horner et al, 2004). Tertiary level SWPBS prac-

tices, including wraparound, also require the use of data to facilitate positive change for students. Most critical for this purpose is the use of data by individual family and youth teams for purposes of making decisions about effective interventions. In turn, the systems surrounding the child and family teams can make changes that support and sustain effective practices as evidenced by positive student outcomes (Eber et al., in press).

Future Directions

Schools need to expedite efforts to build competency and capacity for supporting students with complex emotional and behavioral needs. The wraparound process, with its focus on linking families, schools, and community partners on behalf of individual students should be an integral part of a multi-tiered, prevention-based system to support the emotional/behavioral needs of all students. To ensure optimal outcomes, the critical features of SWPBS, including data-based decision-making, ongoing self-assessment of fidelity, and rigorous progress monitoring, need to become routine within the wraparound process.

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Author

Lucille Eber, Ed.D is Statewide Director of the Illinois Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Network, which supports implementation of PBIS in over 800 schools in Illinois and includes training, technical assistance and evaluation for the wraparound process for students with complex emotional/behavioral needs and their families. Dr. Eber is a partner in the National PBIS Center which provides technical assistance and training in PBIS across the country. She has multiple publications on integrating wraparound into school-wide applications of PBIS.

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