Behavior Recommendations and Strategies
Aligned with South Carolina Standards

Behavior Recommendations and Strategies
Grades K–5th

Recommendation 2
Modify the classroom learning environment to
decrease problem behavior (WWC Recommendation 2)

Recommendation 2

Teach skills by providing examples, practice, and feedback.

Positive student behavior is associated with consistent, preventative classroom management and engaging instruction. Teachers can reduce inappropriate behavior by implementing clearly defined classroom rules and differentiated instructional strategies. In doing so, teachers may alter the factors that trigger the problematic behavior. As needs arise, it is recommended that teachers reinforce or reteach classroom expectations, adapt the classroom environment, and/or adjust instruction to encourage engagement.

Classroom management practices that have been found to reduce problematic behavior include:

- Establishing a positive and organized environment by teaching procedures and reinforcing rules.
- Reinforcing appropriate behavior.
- Presenting new materials through modeling and practice.
- Matching instructional materials, activities, and pace to the range of student abilities.
- Encouraging peer collaboration as an instructional strategy.

Strategy 1

Revisit, re-practice, and reinforce classroom behavioral expectations.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: ENVI.ESMB.1, ENVI.ESMB.2, ENVI.ESMB.3, ENVI.ESMB.4
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.LE.4, S.SPE.12, T.WC.11, T.WC.12

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Explicitly teach behaviors, expectations, procedures, and routines and revisit these regularly.
- Include visual reminders of the expectations, especially for younger students.
- Implement a contingency system (rewards, tokens, etc.), individual or team-based, for motivation.
- If initially using artificial rewards, gradually shift to more natural consequences such as increased time for a preferred activity.

Behavioral expectations and procedures need to be explicitly taught and practiced, not only at the beginning of the school year, but also revisited throughout. Students benefit from seeing visual examples of what to do in specific settings and situations in the classroom.

Subject
Math
ELA
Cross Content
Behavior

Level of Evidence
Minimal
Moderate
Strong

Grades
Pre-K
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
12th

Teachers should plan to revisit the expectations at key times (following breaks or disruptions) and on an as-needed basis. In addition to explicit teaching and revisiting, expectations should be reinforced daily through modeling and building/maintaining positive relationships.

Example

Since returning from winter break, Mr. Boyle's 5th grade students have become increasingly distracted and off-task during independent work time. Mr. Boyle decides to revisit and reteach the expectations when working independently, including posting a visual reminder on a poster in the classroom. Following the reteaching, Mr. Boyle intentionally increases his recognition and praise for students adhering to the expectations. Additionally, table points (which earn a group of students the opportunity for lunch in the classroom and to choose their next desk location) are awarded more frequently in the days immediately following the reteaching.

Strategy 2

Modify the classroom environment to encourage instructional momentum.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: INST.LSP.3, INST.LSP.4, INST.LSP.5, PLAN.IP.2, ENVI.E.2, ENVI.E.3
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.LE.1, S.SPE.10, T.IF.1, T.SPE.15

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Review lesson plans and the daily agenda to consider pacing, rigor, student choice, and transitions.
- Reconsider the arrangement of the classroom, specifically the ease of movement and access to instructional materials.

To ensure the classroom environment is not contributing to unwanted behavior, the teacher should examine the structure of lessons as well as the physical layout of the classroom. It is recommended that teachers ask themselves a series of questions to reflect on how their pacing, level of rigor, learning activities, and transition times may be impacting student behaviors.

Questions to Reflect on the Structure of Lessons:

- Do I schedule the most academically demanding activities during the times of day when most students' engagement is high?
- Is my teaching strategy appropriate for the lesson?
- Is the length and pacing of my lesson suited to my students' developmental abilities?
- Do I offer my students choices in how they participate in learning activities?
- Do I manage transitions quickly and efficiently?

In addition to these reflective questions, teachers should also review the seating arrangements in the classroom and how students access the materials they need during instruction. The physical layout of a classroom may create congestion or blind spots in the room. These high-traffic or

unsupervised areas can contribute to off-task behavior. Teachers should define specific places in the room for collecting instructional materials (shelves, bins, baskets, etc.). In some classrooms, it may also be helpful to define the use of the seating areas (i.e. carpet area for whole-class time, small table for group time). Assigned seating may also be needed to allow the teacher to control the proximity of students who need the greatest amount of support.

Example

After noticing that her 7th grade Civics students consistently argued and became agitated when getting started with independent work, Mrs. Roy examined her classroom environment. She found that the problematic behavior always began at the time when students were collecting textbooks from the shelf to use as they worked independently. Mrs. Roy realized that the 7th grade textbooks were stored on a bottom shelf in an area of the classroom that also had several desks. When students needed textbooks, a mass of students gathered in the small space, which inevitably led to bickering and irritation. Mrs. Roy developed a new system for the textbooks. On days when students would need the books, she would ask the first three students in the room to place a textbook on each desk as the others entered the room. At the end of the class, she would ask a few students to do the same in returning the books. This kept the area clear of congestion and allowed for more efficient transitions.

Strategy 3

Adapt or vary instructional strategies to increase opportunities for academic success and engagement.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: INST.LSP.3, INST.QUES.3, INST.GS.1, INST.GS.4, INST.TKS.3
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.LE.11, T.IF.10

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Provide instruction at a brisk pace, supported by modeling and guided practice with new material.
- Increase the opportunities for students to respond to questions successfully.
- Differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students by varying the materials, processes, and assessment strategies.
- Incorporate peer tutoring into instructional practices and routines in the classroom.

If challenging behaviors consistently arise during academic activities, teachers should vary their instructional pace and questioning techniques, and differentiate their practices to increase engagement and accommodate learner needs. Begin by identifying the specific frustration or challenge for the student(s) and what conditions may prompt or reinforce that behavior. If students have too much time between tasks or are rushed to complete a task, they may respond with behaviors to fill the idle time or with frustration. Teachers should adjust the pace of their instruction and questioning to provide frequent opportunities for students to respond correctly to build confidence and engagement.

Materials and processes used during instruction should be differentiated for students to access the content in a variety of ways. This can include the use of novels, magazines, newspapers, videos, and images to share content. Teachers can also vary the grouping structures within a lesson as well as offer several ways for students to demonstrate their understanding. Peer tutoring is also an effective strategy to improve engagement in the classroom. If implemented with clear expectations and structures, peer tutoring can deepen academic understanding and foster cooperative work habits.

Example

During the writing block in her 4th grade classroom, Ms. Smith noticed several students consistently off-task and easily frustrated with peers. The expectation was that all students would work independently on their writing assignments as Ms. Smith provided individual support. However, she soon realized that this task was challenging to many students, and without having direct support from her, they were unsure of what to do on their own. Ms. Smith decided to implement a new structure during the writing block. Students were assigned writing partners (peer tutors) and explicitly taught how to help one another with revising and editing. Once students had access to and learned how to use revising and editing tools, Ms. Smith allowed the writing partners to meet daily during writing time as needed. The students thrived on choice, so the option to meet and receive feedback from a peer was motivating and provided enough support to keep students progressing on their assignments until Ms. Smith could meet with them.

Strategy 4

Learn about your students and establish positive connections among students, families, and educators.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: ENVI.RC.1, ENVI.RC.3
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.SPE.9, S.HSR.3, S.HSR.8, T.HSR.11

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Introduce yourself to families.
- Learn more about students through surveys.
- Help students learn about themselves and each other.
- Maintain open communication with families.

Collaboration between teachers and families, particularly culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse families, can have positive outcomes. Through positive relationships, open communication, and shared decision making, equity is promoted, and any challenges to engaging families in their child's learning experiences can be addressed. It is important to engage students and families in authentic ways and to validate and affirm their histories and cultural identities on a regular basis.

At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Hernandez introduces herself to her students and shares a glimpse of herself and her life inside and outside the classroom. She also has students share about themselves by engaging them in a get-to-know-me activity in which they draw themselves and people, hobbies, and cultural attributes that are important to them. After class, Ms. Hernandez sends students home with a link and QR code parents can access in which she introduces herself and welcomes parents. She sets the stage for a year of open communication, collaboration, and unified decision making. Throughout the year, Ms. Hernandez continues to engage students in activities that validate and affirm their histories and cultures and that help students get to know themselves and their peers as whole individuals. Students, parents, and members of the community receive frequent surveys from the teacher focused on learning preferences, meeting their needs, and getting to know each other. Ms. Hernandez provides an open line of communication between her, her students, and the community throughout the year by establishing regular opportunities for connection, including flexible conference hours, regular meeting opportunities, cultural celebrations, varied communication platforms, etc.

Strategy 5

Consider your students' learning history when selecting relevant curriculum, planning effective instruction, and considering differentiation.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: INST.MS.1, INST.TKS.2, ENVI.RC.1, PLAN.IP.2
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.LE.11, S.SPE.8, T.SPE.13

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Consider students' interests and backgrounds while planning for instruction.
- Teach and celebrate diversity.
- Differentiate instruction based on your students' needs and preferences.

A positive school culture affirms and validates students' identities, cultures, and histories. It is essential to engage in technical changes (practices or instruction) and adaptive changes (values, beliefs, and mindsets) as necessary to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. Classroom curriculum, instructional materials, and activities should be relevant and celebrate the diversity of students and their families through awareness of their race/ethnicity, family composition, languages, cultural traditions, genders, physical strengths and needs, SES, and local history. Differentiating instruction based on students' varied needs is also an essential element of an effective learning environment where all students' interests and backgrounds are acknowledged.

Example

As Mr. Tovar transitions from science to math, he plays part of a song to signal to his students that it is time to clean up and begin preparing for the next lesson. Every week, Mr. Tovar alternates the song he uses during transitions from a collection of student-selected, age-appropriate songs. Mr. Tovar begins the math lesson as part of a unit on fractions by asking students to take out the recipe he asked them to bring to class today.

Each student takes out a recipe they were asked to write over the weekend with the help of their families or caregivers that includes at least three fractions and a step-by-step guide for preparing a traditional cultural dish. Students are asked to share the recipe with their shoulder partner and, together, identify the three fractions and discuss whether the dish is familiar to them or not. As a whole group, Mr. Tovar asks students to share the name of their dish as he writes it on the whiteboard, affirming and validating the diverse cultural backgrounds that make up the class. He continues with the lesson by asking students to write down their fractions on a white sheet of paper, as they will be creating equivalent fractions. Mr. Tovar pre-planned differentiated tasks based on the academic and cultural backgrounds of students and grouped them accordingly. He asks students to create a poster in which they write down their fractions, draw a visual that represents their fraction, and select whether they want to record a video, create a song, or write a poem on creating equivalent fractions and where they see them in their daily lives.

Strategy 6

Greet and connect with each student and create opportunities to foster positive relationships among students, educators, and families.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: ENVI.ESMB.3, ENVI.ENVI.1, ENVI.RC.1, ENVI.RC.3
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.SPE.10, T.SPE.15

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Greet and welcome each student as they enter the classroom.
- Include opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions and connections.
- Create a classroom environment that incorporates students' ideas and preferences or allows students to co-design the space.

Teachers can foster positive relationships with students and families through simple, yet intentional actions. Welcoming each student by name and casually socializing as they enter the classroom helps establish a positive tone for the day or class period and makes students feel valued and recognized. This interaction can improve student engagement and create a sense of belonging. Teachers can support positive interactions between students by intentionally planning time for students to work in partners or groups and strategically using whole class discussions to build connections and share perspectives. Another opportunity for teachers to connect with students and families is through the classroom design. The classroom space should represent the students who spend time in it. Teachers should allow students to share their ideas about the learning environment (i.e., the layout of the furniture, the posters on the walls, and the placement of tools). Incorporating students in the design of the classroom promotes student engagement and ownership.

Example

Elementary— - Each morning, Ms. Shek greets her 1st grade students at the classroom door as they enter school for the day. She is sure to individually acknowledge and welcome each student, often asking a question about their family or an activity they are in outside of school. Students know the routine of entering the classroom and stopping by the carpet area before heading to their seats. Ms. Shek has a daily question posted on the easel.

The question is usually an opinion, not an academic question, but may be connected to the content the students are studying. Each student writes their name and response on the chart paper and then heads to their seat. When Ms. Shek is ready to begin the morning meeting, she gathers the students together on the carpet near the easel and provides time for students to share their ideas about the prompt. This routine allows students to share something about themselves, hear from one another, and practice social skills as they interact. The students make connections with peers and their teacher.

Secondary— - Mr. Stevens stands in the hallway at his classroom door to greet each of his students as they enter his 9th grade science course. Although he is short on time between classes, he does this consistently, so it has become routine for his students. As students filter in, Mr. Stevens has the opportunity to briefly check in with each one through a greeting and frequently a handshake the class created in the first week of school (the choice is the student's). This brief interaction provides Mr. Stevens with a pulse on the current attitudes and needs of his students. As short as this practice is, it is enough to help Mr. Stevens provide the energy and choices his students may need that day to engage with the content of the course.

Strategy 7

Provide reminders or prompts to encourage skill use and actively monitor and supervise (move, scan, and interact) students' use of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic skills.

South Carolina standards alignment

SC Teaching Standards: ENVI.RC.1, ENVI.RC.2, ENVI.RC.3, INST. AF.3
SCDE School Climate Survey: S.LE.4

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Remind students, through both verbal and non-verbal interactions, about expected social-emotional-behavioral skills needed during the lesson/work time.
- Teach, model, and practice techniques and skills to self-manage daily activities.
- Review assignment guidelines and criteria before students begin working and monitor students' work to adjust instruction as needed.
- Actively monitor (move, scan, listen, prompt) during student work time and provide feedback on contextually appropriate social-emotional-behavioral skills.

Appropriate social-emotional-behavioral skills need to be taught, practiced, and monitored just as academic skills. Teachers should begin by clearly communicating expectations for behavior and social interactions, using both verbal cues and nonverbal signals to reinforce these guidelines.

Before independent work begins, teachers review assignment criteria to ensure clarity, and they continue to monitor progress, adapting their instruction as needed. Throughout work periods, teachers actively monitor by moving around the classroom, observing student behavior, listening to discussions, and offering prompts. This active monitoring allows them to provide timely feedback on both academic progress and the appropriate use of social-emotional skills in context. These strategies create a structured, supportive learning environment that promotes both academic success and social skill development.

Example

Ms. Johnson introduces a group project on short story writing to her 8th grade ELA class. She displays the project guidelines on the board and reviews them aloud. She emphasizes respectful communication within groups and time management and shows examples of well-organized work to set clear expectations. As students begin working in their groups, Ms. Johnson moves around the room listening to group interactions and pausing to prompt or remind groups of specific skills such as listening to all ideas, engaging all group members, and keeping one another on task. When she notices that several groups are struggling to come to a consensus with ideas and arguing more than writing, she pauses the whole class and gathers them together for a reminder about collaborative problem-solving techniques they have previously practiced. After this reminder, Ms. Johnson sends the students back into their groups to continue working.

Potential Roadblock 1

"I just don't have time to rethink my classroom practices."

Suggested Approach. It is recommended that teachers try one strategic change at a time. This helps the teacher feel less overwhelmed by the time it may take and it also ensures that teachers can identify specifically what is working and what is not. After implementing one change in one setting, teachers can initiate an additional adaptation to their practice or expand the implemented change to an additional setting. By trying one change at a time, students are also more likely to adapt efficiently to the new routines.

Potential Roadblock 2

"Making changes now to my schedule or classroom routines will just make things worse."

Suggested Approach. Although changes in routines can sometimes be disruptive, if done with purpose and intentionality, such changes can offer improved engagement and instruction. Teachers can prepare students for changes in routines by discussing the challenges and the reason for the new routine. Teachers can set clear expectations for the new routines and then provide time for students to repeatedly practice meeting those expectations.

Potential Roadblock 3

Teachers may be hesitant to contact and connect with families.

Suggested Approach. Teachers can proactively interact with families by prioritizing authentic connections over delivering a message. This means rather than waiting for a challenge or concern that the teacher feels is necessary to communicate, the teacher can instead reach out to families to learn more about them or share positive updates. Families will have different preferences in how they communicate with teachers, so it is important to share information in multiple formats and ask families about their delivery preferences for information regarding their individual student.

Potential Roadblock 4

Teachers may inadvertently create an exclusive learning environment.

Suggested Approach. To avoid creating a classroom environment that feels exclusive to some students, teachers can use classroom materials, activities, and content that represents the experiences of multiple groups. Such resources will create opportunities for teachers and students to celebrate diversity and embrace multiple perspectives.

Potential Roadblock 5

Teachers may unintentionally diminish student engagement.

Suggested Approach. Teachers often think about how to make their instruction engaging, yet sometimes it is the learning environment that may impact engagement. To ensure the classroom encourages participation and collaboration, teachers can leverage opportunities to foster joy and student interactions. Teachers can be attentive to students as they enter the classroom rather than focusing on administrative tasks, such as checking email or grading papers. Teachers should also consider how the design of the classroom reflects the preferences of the students, not just those of the teacher.

Potential Roadblock 6

Teachers provide behavior reminders after correcting a student(s).

Suggested Approach. In the hurried pace of the classroom, teachers often feel pressed for time and, therefore, want to move students from one activity to the next quickly. Teachers can build and increase student efficiency within activities by spending a few moments before the lesson providing behavior reminders. Teachers can plan these reminders into their lesson plans to ensure the topic does not get skipped in an effort to move the class quickly.

References

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