

Assessing positive effective behaviour support (PEBS) programs in rural Nova Scotia schools: An initial examination

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Abstract

Positive Effective Behaviour Support (PEBS) is a behaviour-based, systems approach to designing behaviour modification programs that lead to improved learning environments in primary, middle and secondary schools. In Nova Scotia, the use of positive effective behaviour support systems in schools is a province-wide initiative which began in May of 2005. This paper is based on the results of a study which explored the success levels of PEBS programs in nine schools representing three rural Nova Scotia school boards from the perspective of school administration as well as teaching staff.

Introduction

Positive Effective Behaviour Support (PEBS) is a behaviour-based, systems approach to designing behaviour modification programs that lead to improved learning environments in primary, middle and secondary schools. PEBS programs are founded on the notions of prevention, proactive instruction of teaching staff and individual student behaviour modification (Sugai & Horner, 2002) and are implemented to alter learning and teaching environments by creating more complete and manageable school cultures. Educators have instituted PEBS to deal with problems such as bullying, cyber-bullying, theft, cheating, and assault, to name but a few.

This paper is based on the results of a study which explored the success levels of PEBS programs in nine schools representing three rural Nova Scotia school boards from the perspective of school administration as well as teaching staff. Our original intent was to gather data from both urban and rural school boards. Unfortunately, the only urban school board in the province declined to participate, without providing any rationale. Consequently, this study can only provide insight into PEBS experiences within the rural context of Nova Scotia.

A Brief Overview of PEBS

In Nova Scotia, the use of positive effective behaviour support systems in schools is a province-wide initiative which began in May of 2005. However, it is important to note that PEBS is essentially an amalgam of several sound behavioural practices and numerous instructional strategies and designs aimed at improving or modifying undesirable behaviour. Thus, PEBS is the current moniker applied to an approach which has been several years in the making. The main focus of PEBS is the development of a school-wide, positive approach to teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviour in all settings of the school. As both a systemic and individual approach, PEBS is a proactive approach to problem behaviours, and stands in stark contrast to many of the reactive strategies teachers sometimes use to manage their classroom. According to the PEBS model, 80-90% of a school's population can be found in what is described as the *green zone*. These children are referred to as having no behavioural challenges. A further 5-15% of students are pegged as being in the *yellow zone*, and this refers to children who are at risk of behaviour challenges. Finally, the *red zone* represents that 1-7% of students who exhibit chronic and extreme behaviour challenges (Muscott, 2012). "Primary prevention is used school-wide. Secondary interventions are utilized with yellow and red zone students and tertiary interventions are reserved for the small population of red zone students who have not responded to both the school-wide supports and secondary interventions" (Adams, 2007, p. 29).

In Nova Scotia, "the School Code of Conduct Guidelines support the development and implementation of a comprehensive school-wide positive effective behaviour supports (PEBS) approach as outlined in the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) Resource for Schools, *Meeting Behavioural Challenges*" (2008, p. 9). According to this document, much of its content and intent is based on the research of Sugai and Horner (2002). However, Sugai and Horner refer to their program as positive behaviour supports (PBS), or school-wide positive behaviour interventions and supports (SWPBIS). Both are based on the belief that active teacher, parent and school community interventions can improve student behaviour. It is also worth noting that the response to intervention (RTI) method is also used in conjunction with PBS/SWPBIS systems to support behavioural programs. RTI is based on universal screening of all students, as well as specialized interventions for students who are exhibiting behavioural difficulties (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Regardless of the name, as Sugai and Horner (2002, p. 45) point out, most PEBS systems contain four elements:

- Defined and socially important outcomes as pertains to teachers as well as students and their families;
- Practices that are research-validated;
- Data-based decision making processes; and
- Systems that support high fidelity (accurate) implementation.

Again, the four elements mentioned above were based on the research of Sugai and Horner, and subsequently adapted slightly to fit the Nova Scotia context.

With this in mind, educators have sought to improve behaviour identification systems like PEBS for several years and this has led to the implementation of many types of programs, including

those designed for individuals as well as grade-wide and school-wide modification programs (Scott, 2003). In Nova Scotia, every school board has required member schools to create appropriate PEBS programs to facilitate and create higher functioning school environments. The Halifax Regional School Board, for example, has created a task force to create such protocols (HRSB, 2008). A number of PEBS models have been used with varying results; some employ data gathering and analysis, some are teacher-directed, others are administrator-directed while others encourage community involvement (Safran & Oswald, 2003). PEBS programs have also contributed to the almost continent-wide pursuit of the establishment of safe schools—a movement dedicated to the belief that schools must be secure for both successful learning and teaching to occur (Duke, 2002; Roher, 1997).

Most of the PEBS programs in Nova Scotia schools share common elements. First, a matrix which outlines desired pro-social behaviours is created and posted in areas of high visibility. Most matrices consist of two elements: (1) the vertical element which lists geographical areas of the school building such as cafeteria, hallways, classrooms, etc.; and (2) a horizontal element which describes the responsibilities and expectations of the various school constituents in terms of respect for self, others, the environment and learning. These two elements in concert are presented in a grid-like manner in the matrix. As well, the behaviours targeted in the matrix are taught and reinforced throughout the year. Second, a type of token economy in which students receive a ticket or “gotcha” coupon for recognized appropriate behaviour which they can then use for a reward is commonplace in schools. Assemblies during which students are recognized for their efforts are also a common part of PEBS programs in Nova Scotia. Third, Board Administrators define PEBS programs as a reporting system which can lead to overall positive behaviour modification. This is done by the on-going analysis of the number of interventions that in-school administrators enact as infractions of each school’s matrix occur. It is hoped that as the list of such infractions becomes more defined and eventually categorized, the ensuing interventions can then be tracked to compare and contrast the rates of either the decline of misbehaviour or in the worst case the increase of such negative behaviours. In sum, PEBS purports to prevent “misbehaviour by specifically teaching and reinforcing expected behaviours” (Netzel & Eber, 2003, p. 73). It is not clear at this point except from generalized perceptions of our participants and through some of the statistical data that PEBS is accomplishing this goal. The data from the Halifax Regional School (2008) indicates that there has been a 20-60% reduction in office discipline referrals; thus, it appears, at least on the surface, that PEBS is contributing to a tangible decrease in behaviour issues in schools in that particular Board.

The PEBS framework in Nova Scotia was implemented in 2005 in conjunction with the development of the *Provincial Code of Conduct and Code of Conduct Guidelines*. The impetus for the adoption of PEBS can be attributed in large measure to the shift within the Department of Education from a crisis oriented approach to supporting students toward a more positive, preventative and pro-active model based in data and evidence which measured the effectiveness of interventions. From 2005-2008, Tom Schimmer conducted training for two educators (one administrator and another staff member) from each school in the province. After 2008, lead teams were established in each school board to support schools in the province. Two additional training

sessions were provided to each lead team under the direction of Dr. Howard Muscott starting in 2010. These sessions provided information and strategies regarding various academic learning systems, behavior systems, statistics, PBIS action planning tools, issues of classroom management, the identification of expected and non-expected student behaviours, school-wide rules, and examples of positive and negative teacher interactions, to name but a few (Muscott, 2012). Lead teams then returned to their respective boards and assisted each individual school in implementing the PEBS program. Since then, the Nova Scotia Department of Education has provided grants to the eight school boards in the province. The lead teams in each board has used this grant money to train school personnel who are implementing the new student information system, Power School, which has a behaviour incident tracking component. This facilitates in the collection of school data necessary to make informed decisions with respect to school-wide initiatives and student interventions (R. AbiHanna, Nova Scotia Department of Education, personal communication, June 29, 2012).

This measure is done by collecting data on major behaviour office referrals, i.e. severely disruptive behaviours. PEBS also represents an approach that is philosophically aligned with the belief that all students need to be included, supported and recognized in a positive and individual way in order to encourage healthy, safe and inclusive school environments, social/emotional development, academic success and student engagement. In other words, PEBS is not a one size fits all framework and allows for inclusivity, cultural consideration and individual student support.

This project sought to discover whether or not current PEBS practices are successful in the opinion of in-school personnel in three rural Nova Scotia school boards. This study is also useful in that it addresses this question through the thoughts of administrators and teachers—those ultimately responsible for implementing PEBS programs on the front lines of the province's schools.

Design of the Study

After receiving approval from the University Research Ethics Board, five school boards (four rural and one urban) in Nova Scotia were approached regarding this project; ultimately, three boards agreed to be part of this study. The boards, which operate some 125 schools throughout Nova Scotia, with a total enrolment of approximately 38,000 students, are primarily rural-based. On receiving approval from the respective school boards, participation of administrators and teachers in three schools from each participant board was solicited upon the recommendation of each school board's student services director. Of the nine schools, the breakdown was as follows:

- 2 Schools (Grades P-12)
- 1 School (Grades P-9)
- 1 School (Grades P-8)
- 2 Schools (Grades 10-12)
- 2 Schools (Grades 7-9)
- 1 School (Grades 6-8)

We invited the participation of one school administrator in each school, as well as three teachers who work on PEBS programs. Essentially, the teachers were chosen by the school principal for their experience with PEBS implementation in their schools and were considered for this study only

if they had been implementing PEBS for at least three years prior to the start of this study. Of the nine administrators interviewed, three were female while six were male; of the twenty-seven teachers interviewed, the composition was 9 males and eighteen females.

Interviews of approximately 45 minutes in duration were conducted with each participant at their workplace. Although the interviews did allow for flexibility, each participant was asked the same series of questions, listed below.

1. Describe the current PEBS program in service in your school?
2. Why was this program selected over other programs?
3. Describe how this program is analyzed for its success?
4. Do you feel that this program or any other PEBS program is a useful tool for securing student behavioural success in this school?
5. Please describe the positive attributes of any PEBS program? Of the one here in this school?
6. Please describe the negative attributes of any PEBS program? Of the one here in this school?
7. What other types of behaviour modification programs or protocols do you think would be more or less successful than the one currently employed in your school?
8. How do you think the Principal and administrative staff view the success rate of this program or any PEBS-like program in this school?
9. How do you think your colleagues view the success rate of this program or any PEBS-like program in this school?
10. How do you think the parents view the success rate of this program or any PEBS-like program in this school?
11. How do you think the students view the success rate of this program or any PEBS-like program in this school?
12. How do you think the school board view the success rate of this program or any PEBS-like program in this school?
13. How would a student manipulate the program to his or her advantage?
14. Does geographical locale, socio-economic status, or the multi-cultural backgrounds of students affect PEBS' outcomes?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the PEBS program?

The qualitative interview data collected was supplemented with quantitative and qualitative data collected from each school in the form of student behaviour reports detailing the actions which administrators and/or teachers took to address specific student behaviours.

Research Methods and Data Analysis

Proponents of constructivist inquiry have established the theoretical foundation for use of the mixed research methods proposed for use in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Reichardt & Cook, 1979; Brinberg and McGrath, 1982). Interviews focusing on PEBS were conducted with study participants and participant biographical and experiential data was collected for coding purposes. Interviews were transcribed and then coded for analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1987). Each participant school administrator was also asked to provide quantitative data on student behaviour along with details of the actions administrators or teachers may have taken

regarding student behaviours. Content validity was checked by triangulating qualitative and quantitative data and by monitoring the contextual narrative (Maxwell, 1996; Lincoln, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). Where possible, the quantitative data collected was correlated with the qualitative interview data collected to assess trends and patterns.

The quantitative data we collected from the selected school boards (not all boards provided data citing privacy concerns) merely consisted of lists of student infractions with no analysis. At the time of collection most boards were in the process of deciphering the types and number of infractions, and not necessarily the consequences of the infractions. Hence, we decided that the statistical information was of marginal use. Upon further reflection, we opted for a quasi-grounded theory approach in the analysis of the interview data. In this application, we employ the term “quasi-grounded theory” to focus on several emerged themes as opposed to all themes. Unlike typical grounded theory application which systematically analyses line-by-line transcriptions, we listened to emerging themes as opposed to individual lines. As well, we did not use the constant comparison method (Strauss, 1987).

Research Findings

Initially, we embraced the idea of doing a question-by-question analysis; however, after studying the transcripts, we were surprised to discover immense support and congruency among respondents, especially those from elementary schools, with the PEBS initiative. As a result, saturation was achieved in that we had reached the “...point of diminishing returns, when nothing new [was] being added” (Bowen, 2008, p. 140). We then decided to decipher the transcript data into four emergent themes, which emerged with a consistently high degree of regularity.

Finding 1: PEBS as an Amalgam

It is clear that PEBS, as an approach to prosocial behaviour, is regarded by those administrators and teachers interviewed as a compendium of various techniques that educators have employed in schools to track and document student behaviour transgressions, their succeeding interventions, and to some degree the overall downward rates of negative behaviour. Board-wise this is accomplished through continual reporting by the in-school administrator to the School Board PEBS Coordinator using an on-line program. This program looks as follows:

Incident Date	Gender	Grade	Primary	Secondary	Target	Location	Intervention
9/2/2009	Female	11	Throwing objects	Profanity, Refuse to follow instructions, Gestures	School Property	Other	
9/2/2009	Female	12	Electronic /Internet	Electronic/Internet	Other	Classroom	Verbal redirect/ teaching /reminder, Explicit teaching of appropriate behaviours

As one vice-principal put it:

I think that a lot of the things that we do on the proactive [side] with the PEBS model are things that teachers have done in schools quite often for a long time. The PEBS approach is to formalize some of these procedures, to provide a little bit of structure and to make sure that the teachers are on the same page with regards to what the expectative behaviours are. That is something that perhaps in the past wasn't as formalized as it is now, school-wide, that there is a common set of expectations that everybody, students, staff, visitors to the school, community members can all refer to.

The views expressed by the interviewees in this regard indicate a level of understanding and appreciation for the nature of behaviour modification approaches. It is oft times assumed that PEBS represents a radical and novel means of managing and tracking students in schools, while in fact, it is simply a continuation and expansion of tried and practiced techniques. It will likely require several years of tracking to provide sufficient data to assess the long-term actual increase or decrease of behaviour infractions and whether or not the selected interventions succeeded in diminishing negative behaviours within each school and subsequently the school board as a whole. The following male teacher summarized it as,

...not really a new idea, just a new branding of an idea.... For me, if you look at the whole, I think it's a paradigm shift, but that's the change [we see] looking at things...but PEBS isn't new.

Similarly, another male teacher concurs,

Again I say it's common sense, it's what good teachers have done for many, many years, it's just that someone called it something different.

Although PEBS purports to be a new approach, one female teacher who was interviewed, believes that any realistic shift in actual change towards PEBS was simply a re-branding of existing approaches. As she stated, “some of the parts of it were new, but the organization of it was not new—[but viewed] as if it were new.”

Finding 2: PEBS' Effectiveness

There was near unanimous agreement among those involved in this study that PEBS is an effective approach to behaviour management, and is yielding positive results in the overall sense. According to one teacher, the implementation of PEBS brought with it a change in school culture. Problem behaviours were now a rarity, to the point where office referrals in some schools had declined by approximately 70%. Certainly, data analysis, which is a large component of how schools measure the success of PEBS programs, points to results that can be interpreted as impressive. Many of the respondents believe institutions, which were once viewed as disruptive, have undergone a metamorphosis and are now model schools. Although there was a general acknowledgement among the interviewees that it was impossible to state with absolute certainty if

this change was due solely to PEBS, it was posited by all those interviewed that PEBS was a large part of the equation.

The following female vice principal sees the success of PEBS in the elementary grades, but less in the junior high school grades,

At this school, I guess we know it's being successful from the amount of office referrals and incidents that were happening; if we look at our younger grades, we look to primary [kindergarten]- grades six. It's a rarity that we have to deal with behavior issues in those grades; for grade seven and eight, to be honest, we've had major issues and hence, changing our approach towards the goal of using the rewards; that seems to be making a little bit of a difference but we'll be able to tell with a little bit more time. But we were struggling in that area.

One male vice-principal claims that PEBS has been successful over time as seen through the diminishing number of referrals. However, he indicates that increasing teacher involvement in school activities has ameliorated both positive student behavior and trust relationships within the school community.

We're not getting the number of referrals that we may have gotten four years ago. We have a number of teachers who are involved in a number of extra-curricular activities, via sports or student council... it may be so they [teachers] do get involved with the students and I think that goes a long way in tempering and handling the poor behavior that might have occurred in the classroom. They're always going to get somebody who is having a bad day, but if you develop that relationship [teacher-student] then you're more likely to talk them through it as opposed to having them [students] referred to the office for various reasons.

This male vice-principal also corroborates that PEBS has been successful in his school by stating the number of referrals that led to suspensions was reduced considerably.

[PEBS has] been very successful at the school; when I look back to five years ago, my first year [here] and I look at the number of suspension rates we had that year and the following year as compared to what we had to deal with the last two years—to be perfectly honest—we are down approximately 70% percent.

Finding 3: Elementary vs. Secondary Visions of Success

Despite this uniformity of thought in terms of the success of PEBS, it is possible to qualify the responses given in terms of elementary vs. secondary school levels. Elementary level administrators and teachers were extremely supportive and appreciative of the positive impact that PEBS had made in their respective schools. For them, the behaviour matrices, “gotchas” and assemblies where students were recognized for their positive behaviour were all part of an effective school-wide effort to improve climate. There were also some respondent comments indicating parental approval of these reward systems in terms of student recognition, overall improvement of school climate and individual student self-esteem.

Nevertheless, there were a number of participants in each school who stated that several upper elementary students did manipulate the system to accumulate as many tokens for rewards as they possibly could. These actions in some cases had a negative impact on other students who chose not to participate in the PEBS program simply because they felt the program was subject to pupil manipulation. This sub-finding points to the possibility that the students targeted for behavioural modification saw the program as a failure.

Respondents from the secondary level were not as enthusiastic in the responses they provided as compared to colleagues from elementary grades. In fact, it seems that there is a disjuncture between PEBS in the elementary grades, and PEBS in the secondary stream. According to one secondary teacher:

PEBS is a little different from the elementary end of things [compared] to the high school end of things. I know more of the elementary—how they're incorporating PEBS by having assemblies to reward the positive behaviours—and where I'm restricted to the high school side, I don't see a lot of that. On the high school end of things the way I see PEBS working right now, it's a little different where we're not really rewarding kids for positive behavior; it's like I think they are at the age level where if you give them [a reward for] good behaviour [the students feel] it is a little below them.

Thus, the interview data suggests that PEBS as implemented in elementary and secondary settings is markedly different. Furthermore, and perhaps more concerning, it appears that despite the agreement that PEBS is effective in elementary schools, this cannot be said in totality, especially in some middle and secondary schools. The interviews reveal that a tangible gulf exists between elementary and secondary settings. That is, those secondary teachers and administrators involved in this study suggest that PEBS has not been an overwhelming success. The following excerpt from a secondary teacher in a P-12 school explains an intellectual and maturational divide that secondary students have when compared to elementary students:

Through the high school we don't have any major reward systems as such. In the elementary section they have [an] assembly each month where student's success is celebrated, the public is asked to come in; there's no major rewards [in the secondary setting] on a daily basis or on a weekly basis or on even on a monthly basis....In the high school, I've had to explain to them [students]...that the language [of the PEBS program] is inclusive for the whole school so they find it a bit silly sometimes. It's below them.

Further, some secondary respondents lamented the fact that PEBS has failed as a model to target both yellow and red zone students. As PEBS is designed to target all students in school, this seeming lack of success in terms of yellow and red zone students—arguably those most in need of intervention—is troubling. This apparent lack of success in the secondary setting could be attributed to a variety of factors, including but not limited to the following: the nature of the students themselves, including ethnicity and socio-economic background; or a lack of consistency among staff in terms of PEBS implementation. However, it is worth noting that several respondents

indicated that the success of a PEBS program requires time. In fact, one high school teacher indicated that the students he was now teaching, who had experienced PEBS while they were enrolled in elementary school, were generally more respectful and well-behaved than students he had taught previously, and who had no familiarity with PEBS. Thus, in an anecdotal sense, the data suggests that the success of PEBS in secondary schools may hinge upon student exposure to PEBS in elementary contexts.

Finding 4: PEBS and Change

When PEBS was implemented in 2005, it represented a formalized, proactive attempt to achieve desirable pro-social behaviours among the school-age population. Of course, it also represented a transition in terms of how educators would be expected to manage and track student behaviour. As Fullan (2001, p. 40) points out, “real change involves changes in conceptions and role behaviour, which is why it is so difficult to achieve.” In this same regard, as one vice-principal put it when describing the views of teachers during the infancy of PEBS, “this is another thing I [as a teacher] have to report, that I have to do.” Another teacher interviewed voiced her opinion that there is still a general reluctance on the part of some veteran teachers towards embracing the PEBS model, because in their view PEBS represents a false departure from a model that is perceived to be already effective. In other words from an old adage, *if it's not broken, don't fix it*. This stands in stark contrast to the opinion of one vice-principal in describing the position of younger teachers. As he put it, “They [younger teachers] would be coming in with the philosophy [of PEBS] in some of the pre-service work and so on.” Therefore, we deduce from the interview data that ultimately, for PEBS to be successful, the entire school community must embrace and consistently practice the tenets of PEBS. Furthermore, the administrative team of the school must demonstrate a commitment to PEBS, for without this it would appear likely that PEBS will not be met with success. As Sammons notes, “almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a key factor” (as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 141).

The following teacher indicates that the faculty of her school fully supported the PEBS movement. However, over time, it became more difficult to sustain due to the fact its usefulness was in question.

....our school was ready for something, we didn't know what it was so early on. In the early years I would say that we had probably 95% of teachers on board, working hard, and it was easy to buy into because we made huge changes in the organization of our school and the way we approached things. I think as the years went on it became more and more difficult to keep that ball rolling. The others who had been doubters, that converted, started to slip back into that yellow zone. So I think as for an administrator, it's probably been a challenge to keep that yellow zone as small as possible.

She goes on to say that the school administration along with the faculty really pushed themselves to get on board with the PEBS program for another reason—the faculty's individual and

collective health. PEBS provided a vehicle for their school to change or improve school behaviour issues for the better.

[There was] a hell [of a time] with discipline and we came together [with the principal] and said: what are we going to do? And that's where it started and once we got the ball rolling, we were on fire...we couldn't get enough information, and we couldn't make enough changes...if we didn't make changes, we were all going to be burnt out; we were all going to be on stress leave because we had a difficult group of kids. So we knew we had to make big changes and PEBS just fell into our laps and we took it on without any training.

If the PEBS system is viable—meaning that that both teachers and students can change for the better—this vice-principal seems to infer (ostensibly optimistically) that people's values can also change. For both faculty and students, she considers that if change (in the positive sense in her school) can serve as a transition of understanding, then negative behaviors can be foreseeable (due to the collected PEBS data and its analysis) and such behaviors can also be avertable or at least mitigated. As she stated:

....once you understand the philosophy and reality, it's the changing behavior that changes your values. So we're really getting at people's core belief systems— that things don't have to be equal to everybody. You can have some equitable treatment in there and I think that it's understanding the reasons behind the behavior and if it's predictable, it's preventable.

From the secondary teacher quoted below we surmise that her school's culture and climate could also be enriched with the deployment of PEBS. At the same time, she also warns that some ensconced senior teachers, especially with introducing PEBS programs into her school, can use their experience (rightly or wrongly) to impact school culture.

Well it's not just a program, it's been promoted as a culture and a cultural change in the school's [daily life]...instead of maintaining the status quo, you have to [embrace something new]. I think that was one reason why they chose it [PEBS] because it was geared towards changing the culture of the school. It's people that haven't realized that they have to move with the culture and the way society and youth are brought up today...but they're [ensconced teachers] still thinking that they're standing up in front of the class and lecturing and making sure that they [students] stay in their seats is still the way to do it. It takes a while to change everyone's beliefs and you know they [older teachers opposed to change] think that way...A lot of the young teachers that are coming into our staff rooms, they've been listening to these [older] guys or girls that think they have all the answers and [PEBS] is just foolishness and it should be left up to the elementary teachers. This really gives these young innovative teachers the wrong idea. These teachers are looking to them for guidance and leadership, "how should I behave as a teacher;" or "what's the staff room culture" and that sometimes gets some of them a little more jaded than they should [be]....

Conclusion

In a 2007 study involving the use of PEBS in Nova Scotia, Adams points out that it is important to recognize that each school experiences PEBS in a unique way (p. 114). This is a point that cannot and should not be under-estimated, as the success or failure of behaviour programs rests to a degree on the school community itself. Without question, any program which purports to improve pro-social behaviour among school age children is laudable, and while there is data to suggest that office referrals for behaviour have declined, this is arguably an incomplete picture. This research, which is based on conversations with those most intimately connected with PEBS implementation—administrators and teachers working each day in schools with children—suggests that there are differences between success rates of PEBS programs in elementary and secondary schools. While the elementary schools can be characterized as pro-PEBS, secondary schools may be described as hesitant towards embracing the PEBS model because the findings show that secondary school students view PEBS as an elementary program and further, secondary teachers view PEBS programs as easily manipulated by students for rewards. Hence, where PEBS programs are designed to improve behavior of both red and yellow zone students, mostly green zone students use the system to their advantage.

With school improvement and accreditation being both an integral and mandated aspect of the educational landscape in Nova Scotia, success rates of programs such as PEBS will continue to receive attention from all educational stakeholders. Admittedly, this study was based on results obtained from rurally situated schools, and this is a limitation in terms of the ability to generalize these findings. To obtain a more complete picture, the second stage of this research will focus on how PEBS programs have impacted school citizenship in light of changing trends of school and community mores, its imprint on social science pedagogy and curricula. In sum, this research is a starting point into an issue of importance for all educational constituencies, and it is our hope that this study will lead to improved practice, and the creation of a school community where pro-social behaviour is the norm.

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