

# Addressing the Social and Academic Behavior of a Student with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in an Alternative Setting

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## ABSTRACT

Check-In/Check-Out is a secondary tier positive behavior support program in which an adult mentor is paired with a student to address problem behavior and support appropriate behavior. This case study extended the implementation of the Check-In/Check-Out strategy to a residential facility for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The present study examines the relationship between the Check-In/Check-Out intervention and frequency of office discipline referrals, percentage of school-wide positive behavior support points earned, and academic performance. Results indicate a decrease in office discipline referrals and an increase in academic performance. Future investigation is warranted to evaluate the implementation of Check-In/Check-Out with students with emotional and behavioral disorders and in alternative education environments.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), approximately 80,000 students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD) receive their education through alternative settings such as residential treatment facilities. Little is known about the practices or accountability of these facilities, and historically these facilities have not provided students with adequate education and supports (Gagnon & Leone, 2005). Therefore, it

is necessary to expose students in alternative education (AE) settings to interventions proven effective and socially valid to encourage social and academic growth (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010; Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, and Tobin, 2009).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been recommended as an effective and socially valid framework for responding to the needs of students with behavioral challenges (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2002, 2006). PBIS, a three tier proactive behavioral framework for addressing problem behavior in the school environment, is comprised of the (a) primary tier (school-wide), (b) secondary tier (small group), and (c) tertiary tier (individual). Primary tier interventions involve the development and teaching of school-wide rules and rewarding compliance for displays of the behavioral expectations, and it is expected that approximately 80% of students will respond to primary tier interventions (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002, 2006).

Approximately 10-15% of students will not show successful behavior change in response to primary tier interventions, and will require secondary tier interventions. Secondary tier interventions are designed to reach beyond the primary school-wide tier and target behavior in the classroom or small group environment. When students are not successful with primary tier interventions, they are targeted for secondary tier interventions before individual (tertiary tier) interventions are designed (Sugai & Horner, 2002, 2006). Secondary tier interventions are more

economical and more effective because they address larger groups of students as opposed to individuals (Hawken, Adolphson, MacLeod, & Schumann, 2009; Hawken, MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007).

### *Check-In/Check-Out Strategy*

The Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) strategy, also known as the Behavior Education Program (BEP; Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010), has been evaluated as a secondary tier intervention within the PBIS model. CICO involves pairing an adult mentor, known as the CICO facilitator, with a student to encourage positive, appropriate behavior. Students who have not responded to the school-wide interventions are typically identified for the CICO strategy by teachers or administrators based on the number of office discipline referrals (ODRs) accrued. The student checks in with the CICO facilitator at the beginning of the school day to establish behavioral goals and at the end of each day to review their behavior and to discuss if they met their behavioral goals. Reinforcement is given for meeting the goals and ideas to improve behavior also are discussed.

In addition, a home-school component is included in CICO to encourage parent participation in the intervention. Typically a home note or copy of the daily CICO point sheet goes home with the student, is signed by the parent, and is returned to school the following day (Crone et al., 2010). Thus, the CICO intervention has the potential to provide seamless communication across school and home focusing on the student's behavior.

The CICO strategy has been investigated at the elementary level in numerous traditional school environments (Campbell & Anderson, 2008; Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Filter et al., 2007; Hawken et al., 2007; Hawken, O'Neill, & MacLeod, 2011; McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Dickey, 2009; Mong, Johnson, & Mong, 2011; Todd, Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008). Despite recommendations regarding implications for use of CICO with students with E/BD as well as in alternative education settings (Swoszowski, Patterson, & Crosby, 2011), CICO has yet to be documented for use with students with E/BD in alternative education settings in the published literature.

### *Presented Case Study*

The current case study served as an extension to the literature by extending implementation of CICO to a residential school environment and to a student with E/BD who was unresponsive to primary tier supports. Additionally, this study sought to evaluate both social and academic outcomes of the CICO intervention as indicated by office discipline referrals, school-wide PBIS (SW-PBIS)

points, and grade reports. CICO was selected as opposed to other secondary tier interventions because (a) students in the residential facility often experienced poor adult/child relationships and could benefit from positive adult mentoring interactions, (b) CICO is resource efficient as it is cost effective and can be implemented using materials readily available in the school setting, (c) CICO can be implemented with minimal time and incorporated within the existing complex schedules of residential settings, and (d) the intervention could be sustained without external supports (Filter et al., 2007).

## **METHOD**

### *Participant*

Several students qualified for CICO due to lack of responding to primary tier supports, however, only one student (Laura) received the intervention for the duration of the study on a consistent basis. The other students received some aspects of CICO, but due to repeated absences were not exposed to CICO with fidelity to the degree necessary for inclusion in a scientific case study. Laura (pseudonym) was a ten year old female with E/BD in the third grade. She was admitted to the residential facility 10 months prior to the start of this study. Both the Department of Family and Children Services and Laura's home school referred her for services in the facility due to routine problem behavior displayed in both the school and foster home settings.

Teachers reported physical aggression towards peers and verbal outbursts toward teachers and peers as behaviors of concern that typically resulted in office discipline referrals (ODRs). According to teachers, these behaviors occurred frequently, as much as once per day. Of significant concern was that once Laura began to demonstrate inappropriate behavior with either a peer or teacher, her behavior would continue to escalate throughout the school day. Such behavior provided consistent interruption to the classroom environment.

Laura was chosen for the study according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) she was referred for 6-9 ODRs from August through November, and (b) teacher and administrator referral. The number of ODRs were determined by reviewing the School-Wide Information Systems database (SWIS; May et al., 2000) used by the facility, and six to nine ODRs were chosen as the range as it represented the secondary tier of referrals for this facility. A functional behavioral assessment (FBA) was conducted to determine the function of Laura's behavior using a two-step FBA process.

First, the Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff (FACTS; March et al., 2000) was completed

by Laura’s teacher. The teacher indicated adult attention seeking as the function of both Laura’s disruptive and aggressive behaviors. Second, a researcher conducted direct observations of Laura’s behavior. The researcher observed the student during four class periods (50 minutes per class period). Occurrences of target behaviors were recorded and antecedent-behavior-consequence (A-B-C) data sheets were used to further analyze the antecedents and consequences related to the target behaviors as a means to support the hypothesized function. Analysis of the checklists and A-B-C data also indicated attention seeking behavior as the function of Laura’s inappropriate behavior. A certified special education teacher and a housing unit supervisor who had daily contact with the student were trained as CICO facilitators to implement the CICO intervention.

**Setting**

The study took place in an urban residential school for students with E/BD in first through twelfth grades located in a southeastern city in the United States. Classes typically included 5 to 8 students, one teacher, and a

behavior specialist available to assist with behavioral issues on an as needed basis in the classroom. The school is structured as a typical public school but also provides housing for students on campus, and students eat all meals in their housing units. SW-PBIS interventions have been in place for several years at this facility with high fidelity and both school and housing staff have been trained to implement PBIS.

**Materials**

Please find in Table 2 an example of the CICO STAR chart and CICO fidelity checklist used for CICO implementation. SW-PBIS point sheets also were used daily to implement CICO.

**Training**

The CICO facilitator, a teacher in the facility, attended a two hour training session on the implementation of CICO. She was trained on both the dialogue to have with the student each morning and afternoon, and on the completion of the daily STAR chart (see intervention below for details). She was shown a fidelity checklist, trained

**TABLE 2**

*Check-In/Check-Out Materials*

CICO Point Chart						Fidelity CICO Checklist		
Student's Name: _____ Date: _____						Student's Name: _____ Date: _____		
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5			
Show Respect								
Take Responsibility								
Accept Adult Directions								
Respond Appropriately								
Points: 2= No warning[s] needed ; 1=Good but received warning[s] ; 0=Removed from Classroom Today's Goal: _____ Today's Total _____ Total Possible: _____ Goal Met? Yes No						<b>School Check In</b> Did the student check in with the designated facilitator in the morning? Was the check in implemented with the student on an individual basis? Did the facilitator discuss the student's daily point goal? Did the facilitator end the discussion with a positive statement?		
Unit Supervisor Signature: _____						<b>School Check Out</b> Did the student check out with the designated facilitator in the afternoon? Was the check out implemented with the student on an individual basis? Did the student take the CICO form to each teacher to obtain feedback throughout the day? Did the student meet their daily point goal? If yes, was the student given a STAR coupon? Did the facilitator end the discussion with a positive statement?		
						<b>Housing Unit</b> Did the student take the STAR card home? Was the form signed by a unit staff? Did the unit staff discuss the student's progress for the day? Did the unit staff end the discussion with a positive statement?		

on how to complete the checklist, and was instructed to complete the top portion of the checklist at the end of check in each morning, and the bottom of the checklist after check out each afternoon. At the conclusion of the training, the teacher was asked to role play the procedure for both check in and check out. She role played with the researcher until she was able to demonstrate mastery of the procedure with 100% fidelity of implementation.

A separate one hour training was conducted with the housing unit supervisor. This session was scheduled separately from the teacher training to accommodate the schedules of the unit supervisor. The unit supervisor was trained on the dialogue to have with Laura each afternoon when Laura brought her daily STAR chart to the unit (see intervention below for details). The unit supervisor was shown the fidelity checklist, instructed on how to complete the checklist, and was asked to complete the checklist after signing the daily STAR chart. At the conclusion of the training, the unit supervisor was asked to role play the procedure for providing feedback and signing the STAR chart. The unit supervisor role played with the researcher until he demonstrated mastery of the procedure with 100% fidelity of implementation.

### *Design*

This case study used a nonexperimental A-B design to assess the applicability of the CICO procedure with a student with E/BD in an alternative education setting as indicated by ODRs, primary tier data, and student grades. The A-B design, commonly referred to as a teaching design, allowed for the initial assessment of this intervention in the piloted residential treatment environment (Alberto & Troutman, 2008). While the basic A-B design does not allow for the determination of a functional relationship between the CICO intervention and the dependent variables, it is a design commonly used by educators in traditional and non-traditional settings to evaluate student response to intervention (Alberto & Troutman, 2008; Kazdin, 1982).

### *Data Collection*

Three dependent variables were collected: ODRs, SW-PBIS points, and student grades. The frequency of ODRs Laura received was obtained through the school's SWIS database. The total number of ODRs were summed at identification, during the baseline data collection period, and during intervention. ODRs awarded during any portion of the school day, including all six class periods, and on the housing unit were included in the sum. Students could receive ODRs from any location and teacher

in the school for inappropriate behaviors such as fighting, defiance/disrespect, disruption, harassment/bullying, and property damage (May et al., 2000).

SW-PBIS points were the school-wide points used with all students in the school building as part of the school-wide program. The implementation of the school-wide system was evaluated by the PBIS leadership team in the school on a monthly basis; data of primary tier points awarded reviewed, and adjustments made as necessary. Students could earn a maximum of 50 points per class period for compliance with school-wide rules (i.e., show respect, take responsibility, accept adult directions, respond appropriately) at the discretion of the classroom teacher as outlined in the school-wide procedures. Students were awarded points for six periods per day for a maximum of 300 points earned for compliance. The percentage of daily school points was calculated by dividing the total number of points awarded by the total number of possible points to be earned, and multiplying by 100. Student grades are reported as they appeared on Laura's report card in her cumulative file at identification, during baseline, and during intervention.

### *Intervention*

The CICO intervention was implemented daily for a six week period. First, Laura met individually with the school CICO facilitator within the first fifteen minutes of homeroom to set STAR point behavioral goals for the day and to receive her daily CICO STAR chart. The chart provided a visual representation of Laura's daily schedule and provided a place for the teachers to rate Laura's daily behavior by class period. The CICO facilitator informed Laura of her daily point goal (e.g., 32 points), and ended the discussion with a positive statement (e.g., "I know you are going to meet your point goal today!").

Second, Laura took the chart from class to class. Laura gave the chart to the teacher at the beginning of each class period and collected the chart at the end of the period with verbal and written feedback from the teacher indicating whether she scored a 0, 1, or 2 for the period. A score of 0 indicated that Laura was dismissed from the classroom and required intervention by the behavior specialist. A score of 1 indicated Laura was good overall but did receive warnings for behavior, and a score of 2 indicated that Laura demonstrated behavior consistent with the school rules and did not require warnings from the teacher.

Third, at the end of the school day, fifteen minutes prior to dismissal, Laura met individually with the school CICO facilitator again to discuss her behavior for

the entire school day and then both discussed all points received. Laura was given verbal praise for scores of 2 (e.g., “Look at you earning all these 2s today”), and the facilitator and the student brainstormed behavioral strategies to address scores of 0 or 1 to improve behavior for the next school day. For example, if Laura scored a 0 during period 2 (reading), the CICO facilitator would ask Laura what happened during reading time. If, for example, Laura stated that she called the teacher a “bad name” (i.e., used profanity) and ran out of the classroom (i.e., eloped) when she was asked to read aloud, the facilitator would ask Laura to consider a better choice. Appropriate responses included (a) communicating with the teacher that she would prefer not to read aloud, (b) asking for a “cool down,” (c) asking for permission to use peer assistance, and (d) speaking with the teacher outside of reading time to ask that she have an alternative means of participating, other than reading aloud.

Fourth, Laura received a STAR coupon for meeting her point goal. A STAR coupon is part of the SW-PBIS system, and is awarded to students when they are noticed for engaging in positive, appropriate behavior. When students are given a coupon, they write their name on it, and place it in one of the STAR coupon boxes around the school. Once per week, all STAR coupons are combined and a drawing takes place. The student whose coupon is drawn is allowed to choose an additional reward.

Fifth, Laura took her CICO STAR chart to her housing CICO facilitator for review at the end of the school day. The housing facilitator reviewed the point sheet with Laura, praised her for areas of strengths (i.e., scores of 2), discussed areas of improvement (i.e., scores of 0 or 1), ended the discussion on a positive note (e.g., “I am so proud of you for earning your point goal today” or “I know you are going to meet your point goal tomorrow”), signed the form, and placed the form back in the Laura’s folder.

Sixth, Laura returned the CICO STAR chart to the school CICO facilitator during check-in the following school day. A bonus STAR coupon was given for returning the chart to school each day with all appropriate signatures.

**Fidelity**

To ensure accurate implementation of the CICO intervention, fidelity was assessed for 100% of the CICO steps by completing a fidelity checklist (Filter et al., 2007) at the end of each check-in and end of each check-out session across both school and housing environments. Filter and colleagues (2007) recommended the immediate

completion of the checklists in contrast to having participants complete the checklists from memory as was done in their study. The fidelity checklist consisted of four to six items, and asked questions such as, “Did the student check in with a designated teacher/staff in the morning,” “Did the student check out with a designated teacher/staff at the end of the day,” “Was the CICO procedure implemented with the student on an individual basis,” and “Did the unit supervisor initial that they reviewed the CICO form every day?”

The CICO facilitators rated their implementation of the CICO procedure by circling “yes” or “no” for each of the items on the form. Fidelity checklists were completed by Laura’s teacher each morning immediately after check in and each afternoon immediately after check out for 100% of CICO trials. These checklists indicated that the teacher completed all four steps of check in and all six steps of check out with 93% fidelity. The housing component, however, was completed with much lower fidelity. Only 34% of the CICO STAR charts were signed and checklists completed by the unit supervisor serving in the parental role in the home. Of those checklists completed (i.e., home checklists), fidelity was reported as 40% correct implementation. This is consistent with the 41% fidelity of the home component reported in traditional settings (Filter et al., 2007).

**Interobserver Agreement**

The School administrator observed 22% of all the CICO sessions to provide for interobserver agreement of the completed fidelity checklists. Interobserver agreement was calculated using the point-by-point formula by

**FIGURE 1**

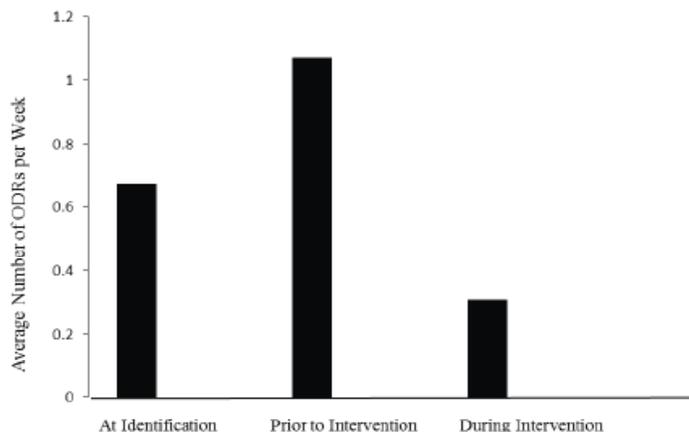


Figure 1. Average ODRs. This figure illustrates the weekly average of ODRs at identification, prior to intervention, and during intervention.

FIGURE 2

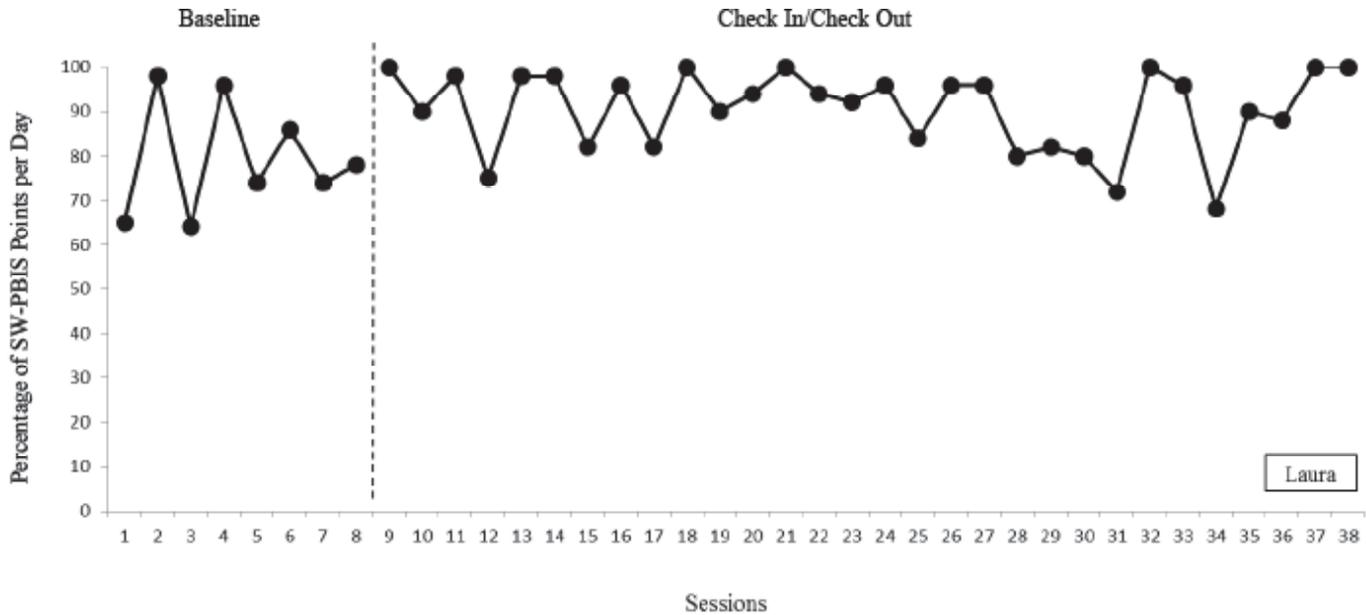


Figure 2. SW-PBIS points. This figure illustrates the daily average of SW-PBIS points earned during baseline and intervention.

dividing the total number of agreements by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and multiplying by 100. Interobserver agreement was 90.9% (range, 75% to 100%).

**Social Validity**

The Treatment Acceptability Rating Form Revised (TARF-R; Reimers & Wacker, 1988) was used to assess the effectiveness of the CICO intervention and the willingness of implementers to implement the CICO procedure. The TARF-R is a 20 item, Likert scale inventory in which CICO facilitators rated the CICO procedure for ease of implementation, likelihood of future implementation, and perceived effectiveness of the intervention on a scale of 1 (not at all acceptable) to 7 (highly acceptable).

**RESULTS**

**Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)**

To evaluate the effects of the CICO intervention on Laura’s social behavior, the average number of ODRs per week were compared prior to identification and during baseline and CICO intervention phases (see Figure 1). Prior to being identified for the CICO intervention, Laura received 9 ODRs (.67 per week). After being identified for this study, Laura received 8 ODRs (1.07 per week). During the intervention period, Laura received 2 ODRs (.31 per week).

**SW-PBIS Points**

During the baseline period, Laura received an average of 79.38% of SW-PBIS points with a range of 64% to 98% (refer to Figure 2). During intervention, Laura earned an average of 90.57% of SW-PBIS points, ranging from 68% to 100%.

**Student Grades**

Refer to Table 1 for a detailed description of grade by subject. Sessions 1-8 took place during the second grade reporting period of the school year and these grades serve as baseline data for academic performance, with an average grade point average (GPA) of 3.25. The intervention phase, sessions 9-38, took place during the third and fourth reporting periods of the year, with a GPA of 3.13 and 4.0 during the third and fourth reporting periods, respectively.

TABLE 1

Student Grade Report

Subject	Identification	Baseline	Intervention	
Language Arts	C	A	B	A
Math	A	A	A	A
Reading	B	B	B	A
Social Studies	A	A	B	A
Science	C	B	A	A

### *Social Validity*

Both CICO facilitators, teacher and unit supervisor, who implemented the CICO intervention with Laura completed the TARF-R at the conclusion of the intervention period. Both CICO facilitators rated the intervention as effective with all scores on items related to effectiveness being scored as 6 or higher (with 7 indicating highly effective). The teacher did rate the intervention as somewhat difficult to implement with scores of 4 on these items. The unit supervisor, however, did not rate the intervention as difficult to implement. Both personnel indicated they would be willing to carry out the procedure in the future, with all scores related to this measure rated as 4 or higher.

## DISCUSSION

This case study sought to determine the applicability of the CICO intervention with students with E/BD in alternative education settings when social and academic measures were assessed. The data presented for the student and the A-B design indicated a reduction in frequency of ODRs, and a slight increase of SW-PBIS points earned. A review of the student report card indicated that the CICO intervention also was associated with improvements in academic performance across all subject areas. Furthermore, both school and housing facilitators perceived the intervention as effective.

CICO is a research validated intervention for addressing problem behavior in the elementary school environment at the secondary tier (e.g., Filter et al., 2007; Hawken et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2009; Mong et al., 2011). Extension of the CICO intervention to the alternative education environment was necessary and relatively seamless as the components of the CICO intervention implemented in previous studies could be extended to the residential school setting with relative ease.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations must be considered when fully evaluating the results of this case study. First, while implementation of the intervention with only one student is appropriate for this pilot, case study format, generalizability of results are certainly limited due to the small sample size (n=1). Future replication of this research across students as well as across various schools/settings is warranted.

Second, limited fidelity of the home component of the 5-step CICO cycle may indicate a need for increased training and support for this step. While administration did conduct fidelity checks on the unit, administration

was limited in their access to the unit supervisors due to scheduling conflicts between the administrator and unit supervisor schedules. It would be helpful to train someone that can arrange their schedule to complete the checks more frequently to conduct fidelity checks. Additionally, providing booster sessions or increasing training time of the home component of CICO in response to low fidelity could be beneficial as well. In the future, researchers should evaluate the impact of increased training time with the housing CICO facilitator on accuracy of implementation of the home component.

Third, the time of year also served as a possible limitation to the study. During the intervention phase, statewide testing and spring break occurred. The mentorship relationship may have had to be reestablished after each break and the routine confirmed. Future research is warranted to determine if such breaks are disruptive to the mentoring relationship established with CICO and therefore impact student social and academic data.

Fourth, there was noted variability in SW-PBIS points earned and modest changes to the points during baseline versus intervention. The subjectivity involved with awarding these points is of concern as is the consistency with which the points were awarded. Since the SW-PBIS points were an existing SW-PBIS procedure monitored by the administration, additional monitoring of such points on the part of the researchers did not occur. Future research is warranted to monitor all variables as well as the overall fidelity of any existing SW-PBIS procedures when used as a continuous measure.

### *Implications for Practice*

The implementation experience from this study can be linked to numerous implications for practice when exposing students with E/BD in alternative education settings to CICO. First, it is common for numerous staff members to have daily contact with students in alternative education settings. In the residential facility Laura was in, it was common for teachers, therapist and housing unit staff to interact with Laura on a regular basis. Therefore, it may be necessary to train all staff within a facility/setting on CICO for consistent and seamless communication about and implementation of intervention. Next, staff turnover as well as staffing concerns due to scheduling differences between the school, housing, and therapeutic staffing schedules are common obstacles in residential facilities that may serve as barriers to accurate and consistent implementation of CICO. Therefore, it may be necessary to assign CICO teams (more than one facilitator) to each student for check-in and check-out as well as for the

housing component, as there may be times when the designated CICO facilitators experience schedule changes and are not available for the intervention.

Furthermore, to respond to the unique behavioral needs of the students in alternative education settings, it may be necessary to increase the rates of contact and reinforcement available through CICO. Meeting with students only twice daily as well as reinforcing students once daily may not be frequent enough to respond to the frequency, intensity, and duration of behaviors commonly demonstrated by students in residential settings. Last, the GPA measure used to assess academic responsiveness to CICO in this study may certainly be used easily by teachers to evaluate responsiveness. However, teachers may find other academic measures that are available more readily and frequently than 9-week grade reporting such as quiz grades, exam grades, or curriculum based measures a more sensitive method for monitoring student responsiveness to CICO (Mong et al., 2011).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, little is known about the practices and accountability in residential facilities. Research validated interventions to address residential school populations are needed (Jolivet & Nelson, 2010; Nelson et al., 2009). This pilot study sought to evaluate the application of a secondary level PBIS intervention, CICO, on the social and academic behavior of a student with E/BD in a residential treatment facility who was not responsive to primary level PBIS interventions. The data indicated that the CICO intervention was related to a decrease in ODRs the student received, a modest increase in the SW-PBIS points earned, and improvements in the academic performance of the student (as indicated by student grade report). Additionally, teacher/staff ratings on the social validity measure (TARF-R) indicated the CICO strategy was perceived as effective.

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