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Calvin Won't Sit Down! The Daily Behavior Report Card: A Practical Technique to Change Student Behavior and Increase School-Home Communication

Carolyn B. Mires, PhD[1] and David L. Lee, PhD, BCBA-D[2]

Abstract

Calvin is a student who will not stay in his seat. He calls out constantly. Calvin does not complete his class work, and his homework is rarely returned. Do you have a student like Calvin? Does he fail to turn in homework, or act disrespectfully toward teachers and peers? Easy to implement, the Daily Behavior Report Card is an empirically based behavioral intervention that can help busy teachers better manage their classroom.

Keywords

academic, behavior(s), management/modification, emotional disturbance, disorders/disabilities, teaching strategies, efficacy/effectiveness, practices

The academic difficulties of students with learning and behavioral challenges are well documented. In recent years, researchers have identified the academic characteristics of these students, which include low levels of academic engagement and below-average performance in reading, writing, and math (Lane, Little, Redding-Rhodes, Phillips, & Welsh, 2007; Owens et al., 2012). In the absence of effective interventions, researchers suggest that this population of students, which includes those with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBDs), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and/or or learning disabilities, are more likely to experience academic failure, be retained in grade, and leave school before graduation than students without disabilities (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005).

Not only is the number of students with and at risk for behavioral and learning difficulties increasing, but more of these students are being served in general education classrooms (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). Dealing with challenging behavior, then, is a challenge for all educators. The behavior of this population of students introduces change in how each teacher manages his or her classroom. Their behavior also impacts the learning experiences of peers and the school-based interactions of parents, caregivers, and other family members. School-home communication and how it can be positively impacted through a daily behavior report card (DBRC) is the focus of this article.

School–Family Partnerships

Henderson (1987) examined the relationship between parent involvement and children's school achievement. She reviewed 49 studies and concluded that "the evidence is now beyond dispute: Parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools" (Henderson, 1987, p. 1). Regular and consistent communication is required for parents and teachers to share information about their child's needs, progress, and interests (Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015). Expectations concerning student behavior, achievement, and discipline can be communicated regularly. This sets the stage for establishing shared goals and mutual decision making.

Schools traditionally provide learning inputs consisting of opportunities for learning in both academic and social contexts, as well as rewards for that knowledge (Snyder et al., 2009). Families often provide support concerning attitudes toward learning, socialization, and effort (Power

[1]Bridgewater State University, MA, USA
[2]The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, USA

Corresponding Author:
Carolyn B. Mires, Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, Bridgewater State University, Hart Hall, Room 225, 90 Burrill Avenue, Bridgewater, MA 02325, USA.
Email: cmires@bridgew.edu

et al., 2012). The contributions from the family are viewed as providing the "social capital" or building blocks needed by schools to optimize outcomes of learners. Partnerships between schools and families of students with EBDs may increase positive school outcomes, such as reduced dropout rates and further self-advocacy (Fabiano et al., 2010; Owens et al., 2012). The importance of these partnerships can further be seen in the form of legislation (e.g., Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) that has identified priorities for maximizing parental roles with increased consultation and collaboration.

Active family participation can include parental engagement in educational tasks at home, such as helping students with homework, as well as effective collaboration between school and family, such as family conferences to resolve problems at school. In establishing lines of communication, families are often dependent on teacher feedback, as children are often not forthcoming regarding what happens in school. In addition, some teachers only contact a student's family when problems arise at school and as a result, homeschool contact can be aversive for all parties involved.

Teachers often struggle with increasing family engagement in education (Cary, 2006). According to Weiss and Edwards (1992), an underlying goal of school–home communication is "to provide consistent messages to families that the school will work with them in a collaborative way to promote the educational success of the student" (p. 235). Although 98% of teachers believe that working well with parents is a trait of an effective teacher, and 90% see communication as one of their school's priorities, the greatest challenge beginning teachers report and the areas in which they feel least prepared is parent communication (Cary, 2006; MetLife, 2010). Barriers from a teacher's perspective include negative experiences with parents, uncertainty about working with linguistically and culturally diverse families, and inadequate school support for involvement efforts (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002).

Three decades of research has examined the impact of typical family involvement in the elementary through high school (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). In one early study, Duncan (1969) compared the attendance, academic achievement, and dropout rate among two junior high classes. In the experimental class, students' parents met with counselors before their child entered junior high school. In the other class, students' parents did not meet with counselors. Results suggested that after 3 years, students whose parents had met individually with guidance counselors had significantly higher attendance rates, better grade point averages, and lower dropout rates. These trends are continuing to be observed today (Murray et al., 2015).

DBRC

The DBRC is a daily progress note that includes student target behaviors, both appropriate and inappropriate (e.g., raising hand, being respectful of authority figures, noncompliance, task completion), and lists specific criteria for meeting behavioral and/or academic goals (Owens et al., 2012). This intervention can be implemented for a variety of learner populations (any student with academic or behavioral difficulties), for a variety of outcomes (academic and/or behavioral), and in a variety of settings (private or public elementary, middle, or high schools; special education or general education classrooms). The student receives a paper copy of her or his daily goals and receives feedback each day on progress toward those goals. Teachers provide immediate prompting and feedback to students on the target behaviors in the DBRC, as well as praise for working toward or meeting their behavioral goals. A critical aspect of the DBRC is that this feedback is also presented to parents or caregivers at the end of the school day rather than weekly or not at all, effectively and efficiently bridging the communication gap between parents and schools (Power et al., 2012).

There are three types of DBRCs: DBRCs with incentives, DBRCs with response cost, and combined DBRCs. In DBRCs with added incentives, when a "good note" is returned home, parents provide tangibles (e.g., video game, stuffed animal) and/or privileges (e.g., later bedtime, computer time, time with friends) for positive teacher feedback on the report card. DBRCs with response cost involve the loss of a previously earned reward or the removal of something positive in the student's environment if a "poor note" comes home (e.g., loss of extra dessert, loss of extra computer time). These two types can also be combined to provide both rewards and response cost options (Vannest, Davis, Davis, Mason, & Burke, 2010).

Studies involving DBRCs with incentives demonstrated decreased rule violations and increased task completion. Burkwist, Mabee, and McLaughlin (1987) found that the inappropriate behavior of a middle school student with learning disabilities could be decreased with the use of an incentive-only DBRC. Researchers have also found positive effects for the response cost version of DBRCs. For example, Jurbergs, Palcic, and Kelley (2007) reported that student behavior improved when each student received school–home notes with a component in which they could lose points based on inappropriate classroom behavior. Combined DBRCs have been implemented with positive effects on calling out behavior, homework completion, and classroom disruptions, and with students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorder (Fabiano et al., 2010; Owens et al., 2012).

Using meta-analytic techniques, Vannest and colleagues (2010) reported findings for 17 single-case research design studies involving the use of DBRCs. First, the DBRC worked equally well for primary and middle school students and students with and without disabilities. Second, findings were effective across different types of target behaviors, including task completion and disruptive behavior. Third, studies that compared level of homeschool collaboration indicated that higher levels of communication using DBRC resulted in the most positive outcomes. Finally, studies that used the report card throughout multiple class periods during the day had stronger results than those that used cards during single class periods. Overall, Vannest et al. concluded that the DBRC is a research-based technique for improving academic and prosocial behavior.

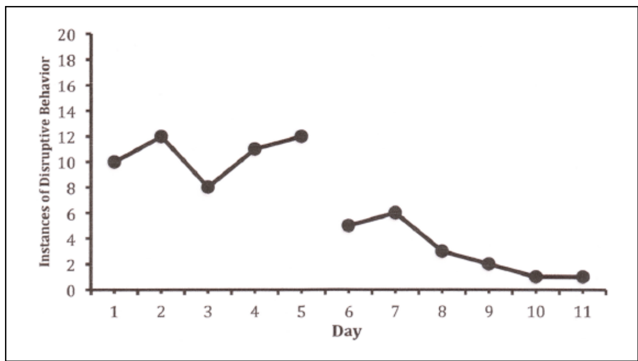

Figure 1. Baseline and DBRC intervention for Calvin Jones.
Note. DBRC = daily behavior report card.

Putting DBRCs Into Practice

DBRCs are a practical and inexpensive behavior management tool that requires no special training or additional school personnel to complete. The DBRC is easy to implement, while remaining effective, making it important as a behavior change agent. Witt, Hannafin, and Martens (1983) reported that the simplicity of the DBRC is paramount. The DBRC requires virtually no changes in the regular teaching and classroom activities. The intervention can be adapted for use across grades and settings (public, private, special education, or general education). For example, in kindergarten, student behavior during circle time can be rated using smiley faces or stickers. Pictures can also be used when parents have difficulty reading English, or when alternative means of communication are necessary. Elementary school applied DBRCs, as our example shows below, can include brief, summative ratings of behavioral goals during reading groups. In middle school and high school settings, individual teachers can rate behavior (e.g., socializing with friends) or academics (e.g., homework completion) using a Likert-type rating scale (1–5). What follows are nine steps that teachers can use to implement this user-friendly intervention.

Objectively Define Target Behavior(s)

As a first step, a teacher needs to pinpoint the behavior of concern. The key to identifying and recording the exact behavior is that it must be an action that is specifically described so it can be observed. In other words, what is the student doing? And what does the student need to be doing? Specific behaviors help make expectations very clear for students, teachers, and parents. For example, stating that a student will remain on task can be ambiguous. However, stating that the student will complete a given assignment (the action the teacher would like to increase) leads to enhanced clarity.

After a pool of potential target behaviors have been identified, teachers must work to narrow the list to only include those behaviors that are frequent, disrupt the learning environment, and prohibit development of independent functioning (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). We recommend selecting just a few behaviors, such as calling out or turning in homework, for inclusion in the DBRC to keep the intervention manageable.

Collect Baseline Data and Determine Whether Intervention Is Needed

There are several ways to collect data. One approach is to count the number of times the pinpointed behavior occurs each day (see Figure 1). A chart is a helpful tool to document these data. If the behavior occurs frequently and/or consistently disrupts the learning environment, the DBRC may be needed. Sometimes though, inappropriate behaviors happen only occasionally. In these situations, a formal plan may not be necessary. Baseline data will help make this determination.

Use the Fair-Pair Method to Identify Positive Student Goals

In the fair-pair method, we look for appropriate behaviors that serve the same function as inappropriate behaviors to replace student behaviors that are deemed problematic (Kaplan & Drainville, 1991). For example, if the student fails to turn in homework, the goal would focus on the positive behavior of turning in homework instead of punishing the student for failing to turn in homework. Similarly, if the student yells out in class, the positive goal may focus on raising his hand before speaking. Stating goals in the positive provides teachers and parents with behaviors to reinforce (see Table 1, for examples).

Construct the DBRC

Here is where a teacher can be creative with his or her targeted student (see Figure 2, for example). Place the student goals on the left-hand side of the page, with room for the

Table 1. Fair Pairs for Behaviors to be Reduced.

Behavior	Fair pair goal
Fails to return homework	Returns completed homework assignments
Forgets pencil and book	Brings needed materials to class
Trouble staying on task	Works on assignments with two or fewer reminders
Does not finish work	Completes assignments in appropriate amount of time
Does not follow directions	Follows directions with two or fewer reminders
Leaves seat constantly	Stays in his seat with two or fewer reminders
Disrespectful toward peers	Two or fewer instances of negative behavior toward peers

summative rating next to them. Then make a line for the parent's signature and comments at the bottom. To engage the student, the teacher can involve him or her in the design of the document as well as the goal or goals for the intervention. If the student is less than enthusiastic about participating in the DBRC development, the teacher might consider identifying what incentives the student can work for and then determine what goal the student is willing to work on to achieve the incentives.

Include Parents as Partners in Development and Implementation of DBRC

Teaching parents to be active participants in the DBRC intervention is a key step toward success. Training can consist of a quick conversation either in person or via the phone. We suggest covering the following topics when training parents:

Discuss the purpose of the DBRC. The purpose of the DBRC is to change student behavior and increase positive parent and teacher communication. Emphasize that the DBRC process involves signing and returning the card to school daily.

Ask parents for ideas for goals. Work with parents to develop a personalized and individualized list of four to five behavioral and/or academic goals. Prioritize the goals, so the behavior that is most impacting social or academic functioning is targeted.

Use the DBRC to maintain communication. It is important to emphasize that teachers and parents need to work together for the DBRC to work properly. Stakeholder understanding that communication is key to success is important to the process.

Develop a list of appropriate positive consequences for goal completion. A teacher might suggest options for a positive consequence "menu." The student and parents can work together to form a list of rewards that the student is willing to work toward achieving.

Stress the importance of sticking to the plan. Behavior change strategies may not work if they are not implemented consistently over time. The teacher might focus on the importance of all parties understanding the time investment likely needed to successfully implement the system. In working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families, teachers might consider adapting the DBRC to meet the needs of families (e.g., translating into the language spoken at home). Taking this extra step may prove beneficial in establishing lines of communication with CLD families.

Complete the DBRC Daily and Send it Home

The teacher must write the rating next to the completed goals each day, then sign the card and send it home at night. A "Return to School" section of a "Home Folder" is usually a good place to put the DBRC. It is very helpful to show the DBRC to the student before putting it in his backpack. It serves as a motivator and has been shown to increase student willingness to improve targeted behavior (Fabiano et al., 2010).

Collect the DBRC Each Morning From Student

The teacher needs to ensure that each student's DBRC contains a parent's signature. Teachers do not need to get discouraged if the DBRC does not come back consistently. It may take time to develop a routine with the parents. In such cases, a teacher's quick phone call or email to a parent may help increase adult compliance with the process.

Collect Data

The teacher needs to continue collecting data on the targeted behavior and adjust the intervention as needed. Be consistent in the data-collection process by choosing the same class or time every day so that the data collected for visual graphing is reliable. Use the graphic display to help with decision making. If the graph indicates progress, the teacher can know and report that the intervention is working. The graph can be shared with parents. (For more information on constructing and interpreting graphs, see Dixon et al., 2009, and Hagopian et al., 1997.)

Fade the Intervention

After the behavior improves and is consistently appropriate, use of the DBRC can be faded. To fade the DBRC, a teacher

Daily Behavior Report Card

Name Calvin Jones	Date 10/20	Teachers Initials CMB
	Rating Good/Improving/Poor	
Returns completed homework assignments	Good	
Brings pencil and book to class	Improving	
Completes in-class assignments in given amount of time	Good	
Stays in seat as appropriate with less than two reminders	Improving	
Good Note/Poor Note	Good Note	

Teacher Comments Calvin had a great day!

Parent Comments **We are very happy Calvin is improving! Thank you!**

Parent Signature **Sally Ruiz**

Date **10/21**

Figure 2. Daily behavior report card sample.

might consider implementing the intervention for fewer days or in fewer settings across the week. The teacher needs to be careful to not fade the intervention too quickly. If at any time the behavior returns, then the DBRC can again be utilized.

Case Study: Calvin

Calvin is in third grade and is a student with EBD who is fully included in the general education setting. Calvin is often unprepared for class and fails to turn in his homework assignments. These behaviors are addressed in his individualized education program; however, when his teacher, Mrs. Baker, reminds him to follow directions he often responds in a negative manner. Mrs. Baker, a veteran general education teacher, often feels as though Calvin is taking her attention away from the other students. Calvin also regularly gets up from his seat and walks around the classroom. Mrs. Baker used the aforementioned steps in developing a DBRC for Calvin.

As stated in this hypothetical scenario, Calvin was often unprepared for class and constantly out of his seat, wandering around the room. "Unprepared for class" and "wandering around room" were both ambiguous phrases, so Mrs. Baker further defined these constructs in objective and measurable terms. First, Calvin was unprepared for class when he failed to bring needed homework or a pencil to class. Second, Calvin was wandering around the room when his body was out of his seat.

Mrs. Baker recorded every time Calvin forgot his materials and left his seat inappropriately for a week. She then added her student teacher's data and made a simple line graph to figure out the extent of the problem. Calvin's behavior occurred regularly on the graph of his baseline data which indicated a need for intervention (see Figure 1).

Mrs. Baker developed fair pairs for each problem behavior displayed by Calvin, focusing her program on decreasing behaviors such as not forgetting materials or getting out of his seat. However, that approach would not result in the development of more appropriate behaviors. So she listed the inappropriate behavior that was slated for reduction on the left side of a paper and then wrote down a series of positive replacement behaviors on the right side (see Table 1, for examples). Mrs. Baker next used the information from her fair pairs to develop a DBRC for Calvin. The fair pairs, partnered with criteria (i.e., with less than two reminders) that would set high expectations yet be obtainable for Calvin, became the goals listed on the DBRC (see Figure 2).

After completing the DBRC, Mrs. Baker arranged to meet with Calvin's parents. She explained that she would like to try a new intervention to help improve Calvin's classroom academic behavior. She stated that the intervention was called the Daily Behavior Report Card and the goal of it was to help Calvin engage in more appropriate behaviors. Mrs. Baker then showed Calvin's parents the DBRC and solicited their input on actions that might be most beneficial. Finally she explained what would become the communication process. "Each night, I am going to put Calvin's Daily Behavior Report Card into his home folder in the 'Return to School' section," Mrs. Baker told the parents. "I will have it completed to let you know each day how Calvin is making progress on his goals. All you need to do is read and sign the DBRC and return it to school in the morning." She then engaged the parents in reinforcement strategies. "Let's talk about some positive things we can do for and with Calvin if he begins to meet his goals. How about going over to a friend's house to play or having a friend come over to play?" Calvin's father suggested getting an allowance or a video game, and Calvin said he would like bike riding and skateboarding in the neighborhood for daily rewards, with longer trips with family or at the bike trail or skate park for weekly rewards. Calvin's mother suggested he could earn a day off from chores or Calvin could choose a game at night to play with his family.

Each day, Mrs. Baker placed her initials in the box next to each goal and wrote a short summative statement about how Calvin met his goal each day. This process took approximately 2 minutes at the end of the day.

When Calvin arrived at school each day, Mrs. Baker collected his DBRC. She graphed the data on Calvin's targeted behavior (see Figure 1). As shown on the graph, Calvin's problematic behavior decreased, indicating that the DBRC intervention was effective. If the graph had showed no change for more than 5 days, however, Mrs. Baker was ready to adjust the intervention by identifying more powerful reinforcers, working to better define Calvin's goals, or checking to see that Calvin's parents were signing the form each day.

After a month of use, Calvin's behavior dramatically improved. He remembered his pencils, was respectful to teachers, and was working to stay in his seat. Because he had not quite reached that goal yet, Mrs. Baker continued the DBRC with him until he did. She then reduced DBRC usage from every day to 3 days to 1 day a week over the next 5 weeks with data demonstrating continued academic engagement by Calvin.

Summary

Positive homeschool collaborations can be elusive. The DBRC is a positive intervention that helps promote effective homeschool communication by increasing teacher feedback to students and caregivers about progress toward students' daily goals and enhancing classroom behavior. Research demonstrates that DBRCs can be used by general and special educators and with students of varied disabilities and age groups. It is user friendly in that it can be adapted for paper and nonpaper (e.g., Google Docs) uses. Communication can be facilitated through use of students or email/text technologies. Although adaptable, users need to understand that there may be incidences in which the intervention may not serve its purpose. In cases where parents are dealing with other important issues, health problems, or substance abuse, DBRCs may not be effective. It is important that parental support be forthcoming, as parent effort is an integral part of the DBRC behavioral intervention.

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