Florence One School District

Interview with: Kelvin Wymbs, PhD, Assistant Superintendent, Florence One School District, Florence, South Carolina

ScholarChip recently interviewed five administrators from the southeast that have tackled behavior issues by implementing ABE®, a Behavior Management System that offers practitioners evidence-based behavioral interventions. This is the second of the series.

Florence Public School District One is a 284-square-mile area located in Florence County, South Carolina. It encompasses all or part of several communities, serving approximately 75,000 people. It is the 11th largest school district in South Carolina and the second-largest employer in Florence County.

Like all school districts, the district experiences its share of student discipline issues.

Kelvin Wymbs, PhD, Assistant Superintendent, said, “We have 16,000 students in our district; we recognized that we had a major problem because of the number of them that were suspended, expelled, or sent to alternative school. And too often, teachers would just throw kids out of class. That needed to change.”

Scholastic Magazine writes, “Behavior issues that interfere with teaching and learning have notably worsened, according to...results reported in Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on the Teaching Profession.”

School boards and administrators are faced with the complex task of finding the best answer to this ever-increasing problem, and to resolve it with maximum benefit to students and teachers, as well as parents.

If the district wanted new outcomes for their students, Florence One realized they had to approach discipline in a new way. “We set up a committee that included our board members, principals, and district office staff to look for answers outside the box. ABE kept coming up as a tool that could help,” said Dr. Wymbs.

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- Dr. Kelvin Wymbs

ABE is a student behavior system designed for the 21st century. It helps teach better conduct and monitors progress throughout a student’s career, while giving administrators and teachers data-driven reports that quickly flag at-risk students, help monitor and chronicle progress, and support decision-making tasks.

Along with ABE, Florence One changed its rule book and created a system that puts flexibility and more autonomy in principal’s hands. Dr. Wymbs said, “We want teachers and staff to create relationships with kids and parents, delve in and be proactive with better behavior. We now have the tools to accomplish that, and we can track progress, too.”
An Integrated Behavioral Process System

While some companies make one or two parts of a behavioral process system, ABE incorporates the complete spectrum of behavior and integrates student rewards, interventions, and tracking with popular Student Identification Systems (SIS) like PowerSchool. And because some students need long-term behavior support, it is vital for administrators to collect and analyze data over time, with tools that are easy to use.

ABE is cloud-based and modular in style; it fulfills an immediate need and can scale up when circumstances and budgets change. It also focuses on each part of the corrective process as well as integrates with the whole, over a student’s entire school career.

“We were looking for a way to be more proactive; we wanted to make our kids more successful,” said Dr. Wymbs. “With ABE we’re all paying more attention to behavior. In December 2015 we had 379 administrative hearings; in 2016 we had 141. That’s a significant decrease—62 percent—which is attributable to our work with ABE.

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ABE makes it simple to mark good and bad behaviors, as well as record how a teacher managed that behavior, in that moment. At Florence One, it’s integrated with PowerSchool, for more efficient record keeping. It offers parents, teachers, and administrators an information portal, is icon-driven, and works with a simple click, along with a place to write online notes when necessary.

The first step is to record all behaviors, good and bad, electronically and in the moment. For most kids, they will be anecdotes in his or her file, but for some, these notices can become an important base of information for prevention, intervention, and justification for action.

Pointing Toward Good Behavior

Many students may not understand what good behaviors look like; their emotional development may be compromised by their home life, external stressors, or a medical condition, so it is imperative to create a baseline by testing for knowledge and understanding.

ABE’s video- and software-based testing makes the process easy and straightforward. During interventions, students can be given a staff-viewable Behavioral Assessment Test that uses weighted questions to reveal behavioral patterns and influential variables outside of school. When a student tests at 100%, then staff can assess if the behavior competency has been achieved or if another behavioral intervention is appropriate.
ABE uses a point system that allows teachers or schools to create and assign customized values to behaviors and classroom triggers that let teachers transfer, add, or take away points. Using a school-wide reward system puts good behavior in students’ hands, which can lead to easier and more efficient behavior management.

“Our teachers are focusing on positive rather than punitive behavior modification,” said Dr. Wymbs. “They’re using ABE not just as a way to record information, but as an opportunity for redirecting the behavior, letting the kids see the error of their ways on their own. We’re really excited about the potential that we’re seeing.”

ABE also automatically alerts parents, teachers, administrators, social workers, guidance counselors, special education staff and/or nurses when specific students reach a particular threshold, like when an account has dropped below a set amount. These alerts are particularly helpful in middle and high school, when students are in many different classrooms.

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**A Trip to the Office**

If a student continues to struggle with behavior in class, then it’s time to escalate with a trip to the Principal’s or Vice Principal’s office; once a student arrives at the school office, it’s important to keep a record of the event. With a simple click, ABE can automatically send a letter or email home to a parent, and a particular staff member such as a school psychologist, can receive immediate notification of the incident.

**In Class or In School Suspension**

ABE’s age-appropriate interventions are interesting, fun and educational, presented in a personalized module that is automatically assigned based on over 50 targeted behaviors, such as bossiness, arguing, dishonesty, and others. Modules are also modifiable based on individual student maturity.

**Our principals were bogged down with referrals. Now that we have ABE, their free to do other tasks.**

- Dr. Wymbs

Dr. Wymbs said, “We know that one size doesn’t fit all when it comes to behavior, so it’s important that we can customize our program.”

**Elementary School**

Using a software-based method, ABE introduces behavioral correction through interactive quizzes, games, and videos featuring students acting through real situations, with all module material read aloud for easier comprehension. Animated narrators help teach effective problem solving tactics to prevent infraction recurrence, too.

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ABE’s learning videos gives these young students the opportunity to understand what they did wrong and determine how they can change their behavior on their own, without a parent or administrator correcting them. This self-directed technique is more effective in reinforcing good behavior.
Middle and High School

Adolescence brings a host of behavioral challenges, and each student can have a very different experience based on his or her age, education, home life, and maturity level. It’s especially important for administrators to adapt intervention style for these grades.

Now administrators assign ABE modules during ISS. For higher grades, alongside vocabulary and interactive quizzes, ABE's program features students sharing real life experiences, including consequences and rewards of past decisions. Questions are written with a wide range of answers that help define what kids are really thinking.

A popular feature for both students and administrators is ABE's “Shout Back Lab” that gives students a voice while giving teachers and administration insight on student motives, remorse, and behavior.

The Shout Back Lab provides an inside view of a student; administrators receive nuanced information, which allows them to be more proactive. They can give extra follow-up when needed without being too obvious or heavy-handed. This feedback shows students that someone is listening to them and that they care.

Finding Trends

There are some students who will have a bad day or act out a specific stressor; generally those incidents are occasional. But if a teacher isn't tracking every infraction, it can be hard to determine if a behavior is persisting over the course of a few weeks or months. It's especially difficult if notes are recorded at the end of the day, instead of the time of the occurrence. With ABE, teachers add data quickly and easily, and the resultant real-time reports show trends that include a wide range of topic categories.

Florence School District One has a discipline committee that meets once per month. Dr. Wymbs said, “We meet and look at the data, see what’s going on, and make decisions based on quantifiable information. We continue to compare monthly activity and can see the positive impact that ABE is having on our students.”

“By pinpointing prevalent factors and graphing supporting data, administrators can document crucial behavioral patterns and target influential variables. For example, is one student or one teacher having more difficulties than any other? Is there a specific time of day that shows an increase in incidents? Is something happening at a particular school entrance every morning? With answers to these questions, administrators can see from day-to-day to year-at-a-glance information and make comparisons from previous time periods. They can set goals and see how they improve in real time.

Personalized Behavior Progress

Icon driven programs like ABE let observers complete an individualized, detailed Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) in minutes on a laptop, desktop, or iPad. Recorded information, including notes and interviews, can be presented in a compact observation history or a detailed assessment summary. And with the option to have more than one observer, data can be captured and shared quickly by Behavior Improvement Plan (BIP) teams and administration.
Because a successful FBA is built around details, ABE is designed to target maladaptive behaviors by documenting environmental variables too, such as instructors, antecedents, and contexts.

In the classroom, teachers can monitor behaviors with a very simple point and click menu in ABE, and administrators can set up a reminder each day during a monitoring period to remind teachers that data must be collected and a BIP must be followed. Staff can then continue or modify a behavior plan to be sure the desired improvements are happening.

Daily progress monitoring also allows staff and teachers to track student behavior patterns online, and by including interactive reminder emails, behavior modification and progress monitoring becomes simple, straightforward, and complete.

ABE’s detailed ininfraction records and reward tracking also makes parent-teacher conferences more substantive and offers up-to-the-minute, accurate information.

“We talk about building community schools and being transparent with all stakeholders; ABE lets us be transparent. We’re being proactive in trying to solve problems, and we have the data to back it up,” said Dr. Wymbs.

Data Driven Decisions

Most importantly, ABE provides actionable, quantifiable data that takes guesswork out of modifying and tracking behavior. When this data is analyzed from different perspectives, it may emphasize root problems that wouldn’t otherwise have been noticed.

With ABE’s wide range of real-time reports available at a few clicks of a button, results can help administrators show areas that need improvement. And when new decisions are put into place, the data helps to track success or failure quickly, with teachers, parents, administrators and even school boards.

ABE’s real-time data tracking shows granular detail as well as big-picture trends. Administrators can use this vital information to see what specific school areas or staff members need extra help.

Accountability

It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes the combined efforts of parents, teachers, and administrators to support students that have consistent behavioral issues. ABE provides information portals that allow parents and guardians to actively participate in the process and offer support to their children as they make improvements. This immediacy keeps a student’s progress and success at the forefront.

Focus on Behavior

A fully-integrated automated system like ABE saves teachers’ classroom time as well as gives administrators and parents a detailed view of what happens to a particular student throughout the day, week, month, and year.

Students will occasionally goof off, but it’s important to know when a student’s minor infractions start to repeat and/or escalate, and it’s imperative to have a plan of action with specific behavior modification protocols in place, as well as accurate documentation available to parents, administrator, and auditors. Many schools are using 21st century tools like ABE, and are seeing excellent results.

“ABE has helped us get a better handle on behavior, and we’re seeing a consistent decrease in issues. Now we can focus on academics, which is our main job,” said Dr. Wymbs.

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Learn more, contact: info@scholarchip.com

Stay tuned for Part Three of the series.