

Observations of Middle School Environment: Common Areas Field Procedures for PBS Project

Observations are to take place when students enter and exit the school, during transitions between classes, break times, and lunch time in common areas of the middle school.

HEADER CODES FOR COMMON AREAS

<i>Setting</i>	<i>Activity</i>
01 Hallway/breezeway/stairwell	01 Arrival
02 Lunch room/cafeteria	02 Transition break
03 Bus area/entry and exit area	03 Lunch break
04 Outdoor areas	04 Free time
05 Gym/game room	05 Exit
06 Library/computer room	06 Other
07 Other	

Prior to each observation:

- Make sure to have equipment needed to conduct assessments.
 - Stopwatch
 - Clipboard
 - Pencils
 - Adequate supply of observation forms
 - Lunch
 - Locking bag or briefcase
 - Map of school's location
 - Schedule for the day
- Arrive to school at least 10 minutes before the first observation.
- Report to office, sign in and obtain visitor badge. Follow rules which generally apply to visitors at school. Check with the secretary at that time about possible substitute teachers, special events that day, where kids will be after lunch, etc. Find staff lounge or meeting place for observers.
- Leave ample time to fill out header information on observation form: School ID #, Observer initials, Co-observer initials, Obs #, Date, Time start, and Grade(s).
- Fill in OBS bubble at end of form, *only* if conducting a solo observation (not a reliability).
- Specify Setting(s): Hallway, Lunch room, Outdoor areas, or Gym, etc., using above codes.
- Specify Activity: Arrival, Transition break, Lunch break or Free time, etc., using above codes.
- Observers go to assigned area 5 minutes before observation time.

Choosing target observation area:

- Select area where most students are located for the observation. Code adult in that area or who is monitoring that area.
- During coding, the observers focus on a staff member and students within an area of about 20 X 15 feet. Use physical boundaries to define area, such as in the hallway between 2 classroom doors, 4 picnic tables, 2 lunch tables, the basketball court, etc.

- Choose an advantageous location for conducting your observations. In the common areas, make sure you are in a position to hear and see what the adult and students in the targeted area are doing.
- During reliability check, 1 person will be scheduled as “lead” observer who will decide which area to watch and where to stand.

During each observation:

- Adjust Time start in header information if need be (military time).
- Follow protocol for filling out teleforms:
 - Use #2 pencil or ink pen
 - Frequency counts of each behavior are tallied within 1 minute blocks
 - Make notes in between rows or in margins, but not in scannable fields (total boxes)
- Code behaviors in the common area for 20 minutes or until the end of the break or transition period. Often students are not given that much break time. 3 minutes or more need to be observed in a common area to be counted as real data.
- Do not stare at any person in the area you are observing. Scan or observe out of the corner of your eye so your attention does not influence the target’s behavior.
- No more than two observers should be in any common area at a time.
- Conversations between observers should be kept to a minimum.
- Conversations with students, teachers, and other school personnel also should be kept to a minimum. If students or adults want to chat, politely let them know you are busy working and can’t talk to them. Nod and smile, then move away if they persist.
- During a reliability observation, make sure both observers begin their stopwatches at the same time by quietly signaling each other. Do not look at each other’s form or discuss observation as we need independent data from each observer.

Coding procedures:

- Determining whether to code school staff/teacher behavior:
 - If the staff/teacher is **outside** of the observation area and says something to a student **inside** the area, code this. (out/in/yes)
 - If the staff/teacher is **inside** the observation area is talking to a student **outside** the area, code this. (in/out/yes)
 - If you hear a staff/teacher outside the observation area say something to a student outside of the area, do not code it. (out/out/no)
- Code middle school student in the observation area even if they are “involved” with students outside of age range (younger or older students). Code middle school students’ behavior only – regardless of whether s/he is the victim or the perpetrator. **Example:** 12th grader picks on 6th grader – code 6th grader only. 6th grader picks on 4th grader – code 6th grader only. Include all grades involved in these interactions on observation & ratings form headers.
- If the students leave the observation area selected, then switch focus to another area within that common area that has a lot of students. If it is a reliability check, the lead observer confers with partner by saying “switch” and chooses new area to focus on.
- Choose a time that to count students and adults to record on the ratings form that represents an estimate or average of the number present “most of the time” and note it on observation form. During a reliability, the lead observer quietly signals the moment to count kids and adults to record on ratings form.

- If there are no adults in the common area, log 0 adults on the rating form and just code the students' behavior.

After the observation(s):

- As soon as possible complete observation form:
 - Fill in "Time stop" (military time)
 - Make sure header in complete and accurate
 - Add up totals for each observed behavior (please double check your math!)
 - Carefully write numbers in totals boxes so they are read by scanner correctly
 - Flag any questions or important notes.
- Please fill out Observer Ratings form *as soon as the observation is complete* whenever possible, ensuring production of valid information.
- Report to next assigned observation area when scheduled. During lag times between observations, wait in staff lounge or designated meeting place.
- Keep all completed data with you during the day and store data in locked briefcase or bag for transportation back to office.
- After last observation of the day, sign out and return visitor's badge. Thank the secretary and let her/him know if observers will return at a later date.

Procedures specific to setting and activity (will be scheduled before observation):

- **Entry observation** – Collected when students arrive to school at bus area, parent drop off and/or school entry way. Start coding students waiting at entry area 15 minutes before school, then capture the 5 minutes as they transition to class.
- **Hallway/breezeway/stairwell observation (transitions between classes)** – Collected when students are transitioning between classes. Most hallway transitions are very quick (5 minutes or less). Adults tend to move in and out of the area chosen to observe.
- **Lunch time observations** – Collected in cafeteria when students eat lunch. If lunches are staggered, we will try to schedule observations of each grade's lunch time. Students tend to eat quickly (around 10 minutes) and then leave the cafeteria. Choose different areas of cafeteria to observe depending on where the students are located.
- **Free time or break observations** – Collected during break after lunch. Collected in game rooms, outdoor areas, gym, etc. If there are only a few students in the area scheduled, go ahead and stick to that area, but let Supervisor know that few students were there. If assigned to the gym and nobody is there because it is a sunny day, switch to the outdoor location where students are. It is okay to interchange setting areas if need be, but avoid doing hallway or cafeteria observations for an assigned free time observation. If students are still transitioning in the hallway when the assigned free time observations is to begin, you can code in the hallway for 3 or more minutes then go to the area where kids are. In this case use another observation form for the new area and try to get a full 20 minutes. We can still use the hallway observation as a separate observation.
- **Exit Observation** – Complete observation of students leaving school if Entry is not scheduled. Observe students as they leave school in hallways, bus pick up area or parent pick up area. The bus area *may* be separate from where parents pick up students in cars or where kids leave to walk home.

Observations of Middle School Environment: Common Areas

CODE DEFINITIONS

STAFF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN COMMON AREAS

ACS Actively Connecting with Students

The teacher/staff person “checks in” or directly connects with a student or group of students. Code a tally whenever the staff person connects with a different student or group of students (e.g. a continuous conversation with the same student(s) would only be coded with one tally). This connection can be a greeting, a statement, a question, physical contact or non-verbal gesture that is neutral or positive in nature, but does not include “Approval” or “Criticism” content or that is not a directive or command for a behavior change. Rhetorical questions are not coded ACS (see below under non-examples). If the teacher is smiling or has a neutral affect and is chatting with a student, even if you cannot hear the conversation, this can be coded as an ACS.

Examples:

“Hey, how is it going? I haven’t seen you for awhile.”

“Is your mother feeling better?”

“What did you bring for lunch today?”

“I like your new sweater.” (Not an approval of behavior so not coded as Approval)

“Are you coming to soccer practice today?”

Staff member waves “hello” to student.

Staff member touches student on shoulder as s/he enters the room

Teacher standing at door greeting each kid with “Hellos”, “high fives” etc. – each student greeted is an ACS.

Teacher walks up to group of students and says “hi guys” – code as one ACS.

Non-Examples:

“Please throw your garbage in the trash” (command)

“You are talking too loudly” (criticism)

“Thank you for waiting so patiently” (approval).

“You better hurry up, class starts in five minutes.” (command).

Thumbs up to student helping another. (approval).

“I hope you did the assignment over the weekend for once in your life” (criticism)

High five after student helped hold the door open. (approval)

“Where is my clipboard?” – don’t code global questions as ACS.

General announcements to all students in common area, such as “Lunch is done in 5 minutes” – do not code as ACS.

“Get going or you will be late for lunch.” (command)

Reactive rhetorical questions in response to silly or negative behavior: –these typically are not neutral or positive and are often meant as a command. They could also be considered passive behavior management.

These would be non-examples of ACS.

“Where do you think you are going?”

“What exactly are you doing now?”

“Why are you kicking at John?”

“What part of “walk” don’t you understand?”

“What were you thinking?”

“Did you do what I asked you?” following a command that the student did not comply to.

Examples of Special Situations for ACS coding

- “We are going to load the bus in 5 minutes” said to a small group of students (teacher is checking in with them) is coded ACS. If it is said as a general announcement to all students in the common area, then do not code an ACS.
- If at the start of the observation or a change of focus to a new observation area, the staff person is already talking to a group of students, do not code ACS because you don’t know if the staff member initiated the conversation.
- If adult is talking to a group of students and another student joins the group and the adult continues to talk to the group, do not code another ACS unless the adult individually greets (connects with) the joining student.
- If a conversation between a staff and student carries into the next minute, do not tally another ACS for the new minute.

APP Approval

Verbal praise or recognition of student(s) **behavior**. Also includes approving gestures or physical contact.

Examples:

“Good job.” “Thank you for getting ready for class.”

Pat on back. Thumbs up.

“Excellent!” “I see that Joe is waiting patiently.”

The teacher says encouragingly, “I know you can do it.”

Non-examples:

The teacher says, “Uh huh,” as student answers a question correctly.

The teacher smiles at student (facial expressions are too vague to include).

The teacher nods head at student (too vague).

Okay. (too vague).

Adult makes a positive statement about a student who is not present (no code).

CRIT Criticism

Verbal criticism and gesture or physical contact demonstrating disapproval of a student’s **behavior**.

Also code criticism when the teacher/staff person threatens to give a punishment for misbehavior.

Do not code criticism if teacher labels the student’s emotions, even if they are negative emotions

Examples:

“You aren’t paying attention.”

“Shh!”

“You are talking too loud”.

Thumbs down.

“You are not trying hard enough.”

“You know better than that.”

“If you don’t quiet down, you’ll owe me break time.”

“I don’t like your tone.” (Disapproval of behavior.)

“I don’t like your attitude.”

“Don’t be so over-reactive” (Disapproval of way student is expressing anger.)

“Don’t be such a drama queen.”

Non-Examples:

“You seem angry.”

“Don’t go out.”(command)

“Do you need to go back to your class?”

Teacher frowns at student.

Teacher shakes head, “No.”

“I got my eye on you, Mister.” (Not a specific threat of punishment and not specific about behavior.)

Staff member makes a critical statement about a student who is not present (no code).

T+ *Tangible Reinforcer*

Teacher/staff member gives student or students tangible reinforcers for their behavior.

Examples: Giving points, objects, positive referrals, or privileges (such getting to go to lunch first).

Examples of Special Situations for coding Tangible Reinforcer

- If in a common area and an adult gets the attention of the entire room or area (e.g. lunchroom) and then gives a T+ to a student or group of students even if they are not in the selected observation area, still code the T+ (e.g. privilege to be released from lunch first, reward ticket for cleaning up, etc.).
- If a staff member gives a student a folded piece of paper, do not code it as a T+, unless the adult verbally describes it as a reward.
- Teacher excuses the lunch room one table at a time (based on their behavior). Consider the first two table groups excused as a privilege (to be first and second excused) and code each a T+.

T- *Tangible Punitive Consequences*

Teacher/staff member gives student or students tangible punitive consequences for their behavior.

Examples:

Removal of points or privileges, removal of student from activity, or making a discipline referral.

Taking objects or materials away from the student.

Moving student to another part of the room.

Examples of Special Situations for coding Tangible Punitive Consequences:

- If students appear in an “off limits” area of the school and the adult blows a whistle and motions them to come back into the acceptable area, do not code T-. (Since that area was off limits, it wasn’t a privilege to be there, thus calling them back in is not a removal of a privilege).

OVERALL STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN COMMON AREAS

NC *Non-comply* to school staff directive (Tally)

Student does not follow a teacher or school staff directive for a behavior change (to either start doing something or stop doing something) within 5 seconds. This does not include answering an academic question incorrectly. Code one tally per non-compliance by a student or group of students per command.

Examples:

The staff person says, "Don't leave the lunch room yet," and the student goes out the door.
The teacher says, "Throw your garbage in the trash" and student leaves lunch garbage on table.
Staff person says, "Please walk in the hallway," and the student continues to run.

Non-Examples:

The teacher says, "Tomorrow I want you to bring in your permission slip," and student says, "I can't go on the field trip."
Staff person says, "Remember the rule for the hallway," and student says, "I don't remember."
The teacher asks, "What time is it?" and student answers incorrectly.

Examples of Special Situations for coding Non-Comply:

- If staff gives a two part command "Be quiet, walk in the hall", code NC if all students in observation area aren't doing both (being quite AND walking).

PDB *Potentially Dangerous Behavior*

Student is engaged in behavior that is potentially physically dangerous to him/herself or others; behavior that is not safe. PDB includes misuse of school equipment or destruction of school property, or property of a student who is not present.

Examples:

Rough and tumble play (play wrestling, overly rough slap and tickle).
Student grabs someone by the jacket or shirt.
Student tips the chair that someone is sitting on.
Student gives another student a piggy back ride through the hallway.
Student slams room door when someone is walking through it or locker door that someone is using.
Student runs in hallway and pushes through the crowd of students as s/he goes.
Mis-use of playground or school equipment.
Swings fist toward another students face.
Destroying the property of a student who is not present
Slamming fist near kids head against the locker

Non-examples:

Student pushes another student hard (Physical aggression)
Student runs fast on playground or in gym.
Student trips someone (physical aggression).
Student throws something at another (physical aggression).
Student destroys property of student who is next to him/her (physical aggression).

PA *Physical aggression* to peer

Student engages in aversive physical contact with another person. Include the destruction of another student's property as physical aggression if that student is present (bullying actions).

Examples:

Hits, kicks, bites, pinches, or spits on another student.
 Pushes a student hard enough to move them.
 Trips someone (even if it seems accidental - intent cannot be inferred).
 Physically restrains or throws something at another person.
 Forcefully grabs something away from someone.
 Smashes student's sandwich.
 Rips student's shirt.
 Stomps on student's homework.

Non-Examples:

Wrestling with a peer and both are laughing.
 Accidentally bumping into someone.
 Accidentally knocking someone down during a game (e.g., soccer, basketball).
 Giving a "high five".
 Taps someone to get their attention.
 Puts arm up to block peer who is leaning into his space.

VA *Verbal Aggression* to peer

Personalized disapproval or verbal expressions that contain specific critical judgment of a peer that is present. This includes derogatory name calling, swearing at a person, threats of physical or emotional harm, "put downs", specific humiliation, and mean spirited teasing. Also includes, blatant and direct threats of exclusion from social activity. If a threatening gesture accompanies a verbal statement, code it as verbal aggression. Verbal aggression also includes a display of negative emotion towards a peer that is present, such as yelling at the person in a loud and angry voice.

Examples:

"I'm going to kill you."	"Hey, stupid."
"You suck."	"I hate you."
Any racial slur.	"You girl," said to a boy.
"Watch it," and shakes fist at peer.	"You never get the right answer."
"You never listen."	"You never share."
"I'm not your friend."	"I won't invite you to the party."
"I don't want you to sit with us."	
"If you don't do it, I won't be your friend any more."	
"You're going to break the mirror with a face like that."	

Flipping another student off. (This is the only non-verbal verbal aggression that we will code).

Non-examples:

"I'm going to tell the principal that you did it."
 "Hey dude."
 "Your sister is fat" (sister is not present)
 "I'm pissed off." (not personalized criticism—not swearing at another student, expression of emotion.)

Examples of Special Situations for coding Verbal Aggression:

- If a student says a negative verbal outside the area, and it is loud and obvious so that students in the observation area can hear it, code VA (this is the only time we code students out of our area).

CODE HIERARCHY-- Behavior Management Strategies

We want to minimize tallying one behavior with more than one code category. To do this, we will not “double code” a behavior with another that is of lesser importance. The coding hierarchy also helps when behaviors are occurring too rapidly to capture everything. In this instance, try to capture the behaviors of the highest priority. For example, if there is an Approval and T+, just code T+.

1st priority = T + and T-

2nd priority = APP and CRIT

3rd priority = ACS

Examples:

2. Staff member says, “I’m giving you a point for working so well.” Code T+, do not double code with App.
3. Teacher says, “You owe me time after school because you are being so noisy.” Code T-, do not double code with Crit.
4. Student is entering the hallway. Teacher walks over and says, “Hey there, you are being way too noisy.” Code Crit, but not ACS.

CODE HIERARCHY—Student behavior in common areas

1st priority = Physical Aggression and Verbal Aggression

2nd priority = Non-Comply and Potentially Dangerous Behavior

For example, if a student hits a peer and swears at them you will code both Verbal Aggression and Physical Aggression. In this instance, the student has also engaged in Potentially Dangerous Behavior, but you would not code Potentially Dangerous Behavior because of its lower priority.

Teacher tells student to stop being mean to another student. Student says “You suck” to the peer and walks away. Code Verbal Aggression and not the Non-Comply because of the priority.