How Does Utah's LRBI Policy Compare With State Department Behavioral Intervention Standards Across The United States?

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Behavioral Standards and Practices

Behavioral standards varied widely in their descriptions and expectations of behavioral intervention procedures, and LRBI was clearly one of the least detailed and succinct.

Monitoring Activities for Behavioral Intervention

Monitoring activities were evaluated based on whether prior approval was required from parents/guardians, the IEP team, and human rights committees. Fourteen of the 18 standards that identified specific requirements for prior approval (78%) required prior approval of some interventions by parents/guardians. Thirteen (72%) required prior approval from an IEP team. Seven of 17 (59%) required prior approval by a human rights committee. Utah requires prior approval of Levels I and II interventions (level III interventions excepting those involving IEP teams) and prior approval of Levels III and IV interventions from human rights committees. For example, food refusal (level II intervention) required prior approval of the IEP team, but not a human rights committee. However, for food refusal (level III intervention) required approval from all of the IEP team, LRBI review board, and state human rights audit for all levels of intervention.

Specific Information in Selected Standards

Other noteworthy information was identified with respect to LRBI standards, including the following:

1. The Arizona guidelines for implementing state standards included tips on classroom management, work sheets for detecting functions of behaviors, data sheets for recording behaviors, a form for identifying positive reinforcing and specific guidelines for nonbehavioral procedures. 

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Results and Discussion

Forty-one of 50 states sent information (return rate equal 82%). Fourteen comments sent letters indicating that they had no standards on this topic or that responsibility for standards had been delegated to local districts. Records from 27 state departments identifying behavioral intervention procedures (66% of total standards received) were examined.

LRBI identified 18 "preliminary" strategies for avoiding challenging behaviors and proactively planning student's behaviors. These strategies ranged from general essential (e.g., staff training) to assessment procedures (e.g., functional analysis). The LRBI document listed 57 different behavioral intervention procedures arranged into four levels. The level, "positive interventions" (Level I and II interventions) were differentiated according to whether prior approval was required from a human rights committee and an IEP team. The LRBI document provided a definition of each (such a negative practiceoverscomposition) example, cautions of potential problems, and possible side effect. LRBI further cautioned to interventions in Levels III and IV (moderately and highly intrusive ones, respectively may be considered as "abusive" by an uninformed observer, or may evoke other problem behaviors such as aggression or withdrawal. Two other state departments sent intervention hand book for level I and level II interventions, respectively. The authors are aware that four nonresident states (Connecticut, Michigan, North Dakota, and Vermont) also have level systems.

Behavioral Procedures Identified

Eighteen of 27 standards (67%) from Utah's state department identified specific behavioral intervention procedures, and 27 (41%) identified procedures based on positive reinforcement. LRBI identified more behavioral intervention procedures than the other standards.

Behavioral procedures identified included positive reinforcement, contingent observation of activities, exclusion time-out in a non-enclosed area, and sensory extinction) standards differed regarding prior approval requirements. For particular interventions, including some of those listed above (e.g., food refusal, application of aversive stimuli, mechanical restraint, sensory extinction, isolation time-out, over correction), some standards required prior approval while others prohibited their use. The most common excluded procedures were isolation time-out and application of aversive stimuli, such as water or spray, applied to the face for self-injurious behavior.

Staff Training

Staff training was addressed in 10 of 27 standards (37%) that identified behavioral intervention procedures. Most standards recommended that training be conducted before carrying out behavioral interventions, particularly in those considered aversive. Currently under development, Utah's statewide LRBI training is based on videotapes and implementation checklists. The checklist include step by step implementation procedures and the complimentary video tape guide additional guidance and clarification related to the use of each procedure. Inservice training is conducted by the Utah Learning Resource Center (ULRC), geared for staff who work with students of different age groups as well as parents, administrators and members of human rights committees. Other state department published guidelines for staff training (e.g., Arizona, Georgia, Iowa), but none appeared as extensive as training materials being developed in Utah.

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