

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Catherine Bradshaw describes a schoolwide framework for reducing problem behavior using positive behavior support

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

and Supports (PBIS), created by Horner and Sugai, is a schoolwide application of behavioral systems and interventions to achieve behavior change in schools. PBIS has a strong foundation in behavior analysis and is a non-curricular framework that strives for a flexible fit with a school's culture and context. It can be implemented in any school level, type, or setting. A three-tiered, system-wide framework is applied that guides the development and implementation of a continuum of behavioral and academic programs and services:

- Universal (primary, schoolwide “green-zone”);
- Selective (secondary, “yellow-zone”); and
- Indicated (tertiary, “red-zone”) (see Figure 1).

The universal elements of the model, typically referred to as schoolwide PBIS, are the most commonly implemented aspect of the three-tiered model.

The PBIS framework

The tiered PBIS framework focuses on the academic, behavioral, and environmental contexts in which behavior problems are observed. In applying PBIS, schools establish a set of positively stated, schoolwide expectations for student behavior (e.g., “Be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn”), which are developed by the school's PBIS team and taught to all students and staff across all school settings (e.g., in the classroom, at break times, during out-of-school activities). A schoolwide system is then developed to formalize how adults and students are

recognized for exhibiting the expected positive behaviors appropriately in a given setting. Although the focus is on increasing the frequency of positive interaction between staff and students and between students themselves, tangible reinforcers, such as tickets, parties, prizes, or special privileges, are sometimes used to formalize and prompt acknowledgements.

The PBIS framework emphasizes

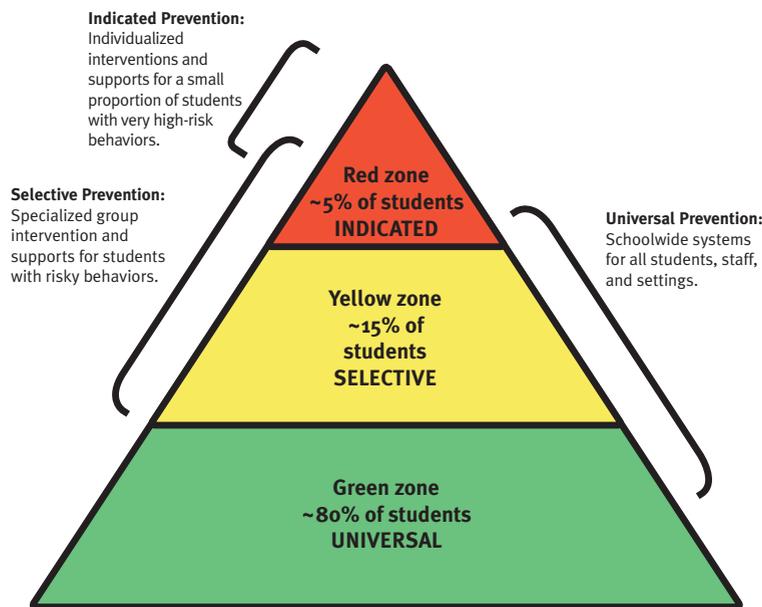


Figure 1. Three-Tiered Framework of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

teaching, prompting, and acknowledging student use of developmentally and contextually appropriate expected behaviors so that:

- Prosocial behaviors are more likely instead of rule-violating behavior;
- Staff attention is directed toward fostering safer and respectful school environments or cultures;
- Chaotic learning environments

become more preventive, positive, and predictable; and

- More strategic supports can be enlisted for students who present more resistant problem behavior.

The PBIS framework also clarifies disciplinary consequences with respect to minor (classroom-managed) and major (administrator-involved) rule violations. The school discipline system is re-conceptualized as an inhibitor for students who have relatively good social behaviors and as a screening tool for students who require more intensive behavior supports and interventions.

Because student and adult behavior are so inextricably intertwined, the PBIS framework provides structures and routines to support adults so that consistency, predictability, and positive relations are promoted across school contexts. Schoolwide implementation is emphasized in order to establish staff buy-in and is facilitated through a team-based process. Each PBIS school forms a leadership or implementation team, which is comprised of a teacher from each grade level, at least one administrator, and student support staff. Parent and student membership and participation are strongly encouraged.

The PBIS team leader is often an administrator or experienced teacher. A coaching process is used at the school level and above to serve as a bridge between professional development and planning activities and the team's actual implementation efforts in the school. Coaching is also used to promote high-fidelity implementation through on-going progress monitoring. Individuals who provide coaching supports can be internal to the school or externally provided by the district; coaches are typically school psychologists,

guidance counselors, social workers, or other staff who have expertise in behavior management, data-based decision making, PBIS, and functional behavioral assessment. A district and state-level support team is also formed to provide training, coaching, evaluation, policy, and funding guidance and technical assistance.

A critical element of the PBIS framework is the use of data to inform

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Positive behavior support

and guide decisions about planning and implementation. The emphasis is on the collection of multiple data elements on both desired and problem behaviors to monitor implementation quality and program outcomes. The school's PBIS team:

- Specifies the most important questions that must be examined on a routine basis (e.g., rate of suspension events each day, by location, by event type);
- Determines the best data source (e.g., office discipline referrals);
- Acquires a data system that enables easy input and output displays (e.g., Schoolwide Information System or SWIS www.swis.org);
- Follows a regular schedule for the review and analysis of data; and
- Develops a routine for disseminating and acting on the decisions (e.g., whole school, groups of students, and/or individual students).

Within a PBIS framework, data are used to answer four main questions:

- How are students doing – *what's going on?*
- Is the intervention or practice having the desired effect – *is it working?*
- Is the intervention being implemented as developed and recommended – *are we using it correctly?*
- What changes are needed to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and durability of the intervention and its effects – *what next?*

What we know

- Applying PBIS helps schools to establish a set of positively stated, schoolwide expectations for student behavior.
- Randomized controlled studies have shown that high-quality implementation of PBIS is associated with significant reductions in disruptive behaviors and improved social skills.
- The PBIS model can be integrated with other programs, such as social-emotional learning, to further enhance the impact of the tiered framework on a broader set of internalizing, externalizing, prosocial, and academic outcomes.
- The improvements in the schools' organizational context achieved through PBIS may enhance the implementation quality of other more intensive preventive interventions and reduce the need for more intensive school-based services.

Does it work?

Increasing evidence suggests that successful implementation of the schoolwide or universal PBIS system is associated with sustainable changes in disciplinary practices and improved systems to promote positive behavior among students. Quality implementation of schoolwide PBIS has been linked with significant reductions in disruptive behaviors and improved social skills. Specifically, several studies, including two randomized controlled studies of schoolwide PBIS in elementary schools, have shown that high-quality implementation of the model is associated with significant reductions in office discipline referrals and suspensions and other problem behavior, such as teacher ratings of classroom behavior problems, concentration problems, emotion regulation problems, and bullying.

Significant improvements have also been observed in student reports of school climate, staff reports of the school's organizational health (e.g., principal leadership, teacher affiliation, and academic emphasis), teacher self-efficacy, and academic achievement. The improvements in the school's organizational context achieved through PBIS may in turn enhance the implementation quality of other more intensive preventive interventions and reduce the need for more intensive school-based services.

Consistent with the three-tiered logic, evidence indicates that the impact of PBIS may vary as a function of the child's risk profile or the age at which they are first introduced to a PBIS environment. In a recent randomized controlled trial of PBIS, in which the universal, schoolwide PBIS model was contrasted with the integration of selective preventive interventions and schoolwide PBIS, significant impacts were demonstrated on teacher efficacy, academic performance, and the use of special education services. The PBIS model can be integrated with other programs, such as social-emotional learning curricula, to further enhance the impact of the tiered framework on a broader set of internalizing, externalizing, prosocial, and academic outcomes.

Dissemination of PBIS

Currently, more than 16,000 schools have participated in the implementation of the universal schoolwide elements of PBIS (www.pbis.org). More than 40 states are working to scale up PBIS. For example, Maryland has created an extensive network of training, professional development, implementation, and evaluation supports.

Recent findings from Maryland's scale-up effort indicate that high-fidelity implementation of the universal PBIS model is associated with significant effects on suspensions, academic performance, and truancy. Several state policies and some proposed federal legislation encourage the use of the three-tiered PBIS framework for addressing behavior problems and promoting conditions for learning.

More information on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support can be found at www.pbis.org

About the author

Catherine Bradshaw is an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the deputy director of the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, and the co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention and Early Intervention. She conducts research on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and collaborates on the scale up of PBIS in Maryland.

Further reading

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